

Guidelines for the NHS Bursary Scheme Maternity Award

1. This guidance is for NHS Bursary students and universities to help them understand and put into practice the maternity award within the NHS Bursary Scheme. It has been jointly prepared with the Department of Health, trade unions and university representatives. It explains the financial and personal support available as at 1st January 2007 from the NHS Bursary Scheme, universities and others during pregnancy and the time a student is on an “authorised period of maternity absence¹”. This maternity award policy will be monitored and, if appropriate, further advice will be provided to ensure it continues to effectively support NHS Bursary students during an authorised period of maternity absence.

Eligibility

2. Students who have started on NHS pre-registration courses and who are in receipt of the maintenance grant element of the NHS Bursary may apply to receive payments under the maternity award for up to 45 weeks whilst she takes an authorised break from her studies for maternity purposes.
3. Seconded or assisted students and EU nationals in receipt of a ‘fees only’ award are not eligible to apply.
4. Due to the early selection of students for courses, some students may become pregnant before the start of their course. At the earliest stage, she should contact the university and discuss the suitability of starting her studies or deferring them until after the arrival of their child. Advice from occupational health may be appropriate at this stage to enable the student to make an informed decision.

The NHS Bursary Maternity Award

5. The maternity award allows students to take a break from their studies for up to 45 weeks and may continue to receive most of their normal NHS bursary payments and allowances. It cannot exceed 45 weeks other than in exceptional circumstances (see paragraph 12), subject to the discretion of the university.
6. The maternity award may include payment of the Childcare Allowance element of the NHS Bursary.

¹ “authorised period of maternity absence” – as authorised by the student’s university.

What to do when a student finds out she is pregnant

7. As soon as possible a student should let her tutor know that she is pregnant and the expected date of arrival of her baby. This is important, as the university will need to undertake a risk assessment and discuss with the student arrangements relating to antenatal activity, continuing her course and forthcoming placements.
8. The student should provide the university with some form of confirmation of her pregnancy before she commences her maternity absence e.g. form MAT B1, which is available from her GP, or midwife usually after she is 20 weeks pregnant.

When should the period of authorised maternity absence begin?

9. It is for the student and the university to discuss and agree when the period of authorised absence should begin taking into account:
 - the mother to be and baby's health and well being;
 - the point in the course when it would be the best time to begin the break;
 - the student's ability to undertake and any potential risks relating to clinical placements until the expected date of arrival (e.g. high risk placements in a regional secure unit).

Payment of the Maternity Award

10. The tutor and student will need to complete Form BUR101W(Mat) which gives student information including course name, her course start date, the baby's expected date of arrival, the date the student is expected to begin her break for maternity and the date it is anticipated that the student will return to her course. The form must be completed by both the university and the student and the student given a copy of the completed form. The university will forward the form to SGU. The return date is required to ensure that bursary payments will continue during the maternity absence. However, at this stage the return date is only an indication and will be dependent on the point at which both the student and her tutor believe the student can effectively and safely return to her studies, this may include when the next course will run and when the student could rejoin it successfully.
11. As soon as possible following the birth of her baby the student should contact the Student Grants Unit informing them of the birth as she may be entitled to additional allowances. Application forms can be downloaded from the SGU website².

² Go to the NHS Bursaries website www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk from the Home page, select the link 'FORMS AND BOOKLETS' at the head of the page...everything you need is in there.

Extending the maternity award beyond 45 weeks

12. The maternity award does not normally exceed 45 weeks other than in exceptional circumstances. It is for the university to decide if the maternity award should be extended. We have tried to identify some examples of circumstances that may be considered as exceptional. However, the examples are not exhaustive and do not necessarily mean that the award will be extended. The university needs to consider each case individually. The examples are:-
- Post natal depression or other pregnancy related illness (medical certificate/evidence required).
 - Serious illness or loss of baby (medical certificate/evidence required).
 - If the agreed date that the student should return to her course is after 45 weeks.
 - Resume at a point comparable to when the student started their maternity absence (i.e. next suitable/available cohort).

What to do when returning to training

13. It is the student's responsibility to maintain contact with the university following the birth of her child. The student will need to contact her university confirming her return date. If there is no change from the original return date indicated on Form BUR101W(Mat) the student will receive a letter from the university confirming the date. If the student does not notify her university of her intention to return to the course in advance of the date as indicated on Form BUR101W(Mat), the bursary administrators will stop making bursary payments on that day.
14. If, however, the student's circumstances have changed and she needs to extend the period of time away from her course, the student must contact the university and arrange to meet her tutor in order to complete Appendix 2 of Form BUR101W(Mat). This can be arranged by a meeting with a member of staff at the university or perhaps in difficult circumstances at the student's home. The student will need to explain the reason for the requested extension. The university is the final arbitrator in the decision to extend the maternity award beyond 45 weeks.
15. We encourage students to take a minimum of 12 weeks paid maternity absence³. Since the interim measures were introduced, we are aware that some students wanted to return to their course at a very early stage following the birth of their child. Whilst a student can return before the recommended 12 week period, we are mindful of the health and well-being of the mother and baby. Therefore, the university should ensure that the mother is fit and well and may ask for supporting evidence from the GP, Health Visitor and/or occupational health service before she recommences her studies.

³ The Royal College of Midwives recommends a minimum of 12 weeks maternity absence for NHS Bursary Scheme students.

16. Examples of circumstances where a student might return to studies at an early date could be:-

- No other course available for the student to come back to until the following year.
- There is only a short period remaining before the course ends.

Completion of training within a set timescale required by Professional Bodies

17. Students should be aware that there may be a timescale set by professional bodies within which time your training must be completed. You should check with your university/professional body to see if this applies.

Background

18. The Department of Health working with trade unions including UNISON, Royal College of Nurses, Royal College of Midwives, Allied Health Professionals Federation, British Medical Association and the National Union of Students have considered ways to improve the NHS Bursary Scheme by offering financial support if a student became pregnant. The financial difficulties experienced by such students were highlighted in the Fletcher, Parks & Wilkinson case. In June 2005, the Department of Health (DH) introduced interim maternity arrangements where NHS funded students, in receipt of a NHS bursary, could continue to receive her payments throughout an authorised period of maternity absence. Following a joint review, which considered issues by The Department of Health, universities, the NHS Student Grants Unit and trade unions undertook a joint review that considered issues that had arisen during the interim arrangements. The interim arrangements have now been formalised.

Footnote:

Students and prospective students should not rely on the current NHS bursary rules and allowances when planning for subsequent academic years these may be subject to review in the future and as a result may be liable to change. Further information about the NHS bursary will be posted on the Student Grant Unit website (www.nhsstudentsgrant.co.uk) as and when it is made available. Students are advised to check the website on a regular basis. The Department of Health and NHS Student Grants Unit will accept no responsibility for loss of any type however suffered by students who have relied on current rules and allowances in altering their circumstances (including but not limited to financial circumstances) whether for the current academic year, academic year to begin or indeed for subsequent academic years.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

1. Who is eligible to apply for continuation of their bursary payments whilst on a break from her studies for maternity purposes?

Students who have started on NHS pre-registration courses, in receipt of the maintenance grant element of the NHS bursary. Seconded or assisted students and EU nationals in receipt of a 'fees only' award are not eligible to apply.

2. How do you apply?

As soon as possible a student should let their tutor know of the pregnancy. The period of authorised absence must then be agreed between the student and her tutor, prior to the start of her maternity absence. Once agreed, the university must inform the NHS Student Bursaries using the relevant BUR101W(Mat) providing an expected date of arrival of the student's baby, the start date of the authorised maternity absence and expected return to training date. As long as an appropriate BUR101W(Mat) is provided, NHS Student Bursaries will ensure that the student's bursary payments continue uninterrupted.

3. How much bursary can be paid during a period of maternity absence?

Students may continue to receive their normal monthly bursary payments, including any dependant's allowances (see Q13).

4. How soon can maternity absence commence?

This will have to be discussed and agreed between the student and the university, following a risk assessment by the university and consideration given to forthcoming placements. The final decision rests with the university.

5. How long is a period of authorised maternity absence?

Students can continue to receive their bursary for up to 45 weeks continuous absence. This can be extended if there are certain exceptional circumstances (see Q15).

6. What about clinical placements during pregnancy?

Normally, there will be no reason why a student cannot continue or undertake a clinical placements throughout their pregnancy, however the university will need to undertake risk assessments. Some placements may be considered too high risk e.g. working in a mental health secure unit. Where necessary suitable alternative placement or postponements should be identified.

7. Will ante-natal appointments taken whilst still in training affect the bursary payments?

No, ante-natal appointments will not affect bursary payments. Students will need to agree with their university time off for ante-natal appointments.

8. What happens in the event of a miscarriage⁴?

Where a student has a miscarriage before the 24th week of pregnancy, normal sick absence provisions will be applied i.e. up to 60 days paid bursary entitlement.

⁴ Miscarriage is the loss of pregnancy before 24 weeks (NHS Direct)

9. What if a student is ill prior to her pregnancy?

If a student is absent due to a pregnancy related illness before the expected week of childbirth or before the agreed date that she is due to take maternity absence, and it is within 4 weeks of this date, this should be regarded as the start of the maternity absence. The bursary will therefore continue to be paid, from this date.

Absence prior to the last four weeks should be treated as sickness absence and can be covered by the normal 60 day rule sickness rule.

10. What do students need tell their universities?

Students need to contact their university after the child is born to confirm the date of birth of their baby. Students will also need to liaise with their university to confirm if the date provisionally agreed to return to training is still acceptable. If events are changing at the university, the university will also have a responsibility to keep the student informed.

11. What happens in the event of a premature birth?

Where a student's baby is born prematurely before the start date of the agreed maternity absence, and the student is still in attendance, the maternity absence will commence the day after the day of birth and continue for up to 45 weeks.

Where a student's baby is born prematurely before the start date of the agreed maternity absence, and the student is on a period of certified sickness, the maternity absence will commence the day after the day of birth, and continue for up to 45 weeks.

12. What happens in the event of a stillbirth?

Where a student's baby is stillborn after the 24th week of pregnancy, the student will be entitled to receive a continuous bursary for up to 45 weeks from the day after the date of the birth.

13. Will I still get my Childcare Allowance?

The maternity award may include payment of the Childcare Allowance element of the NHS Bursary.

14. How soon can a student resume training following maternity absence?

Some students wish to resume their studies quite quickly following maternity absence. However, students would normally be encouraged to take a minimum of 12 weeks paid maternity absence⁵. Any earlier return would have to be cleared through the student's GP, Health Visitor and/or university occupational health department. On resumption of training the university must notify the NHS Student Bursaries by sending a BUR101R(Mat) form.

⁵ A minimum 12 weeks maternity absence for NHS Bursary Scheme students is recommended by the Royal College of Midwives.

15. What happens if a student is unable to return to training within 45 weeks of taking authorised maternity absence?

In exceptional circumstances, the period of authorised maternity absence may be extended beyond 45 weeks. Exceptional circumstances covers such things as post-natal depression, serious illness or loss of baby, no available childcare or the university cannot facilitate a return due as there no available training cohorts.

Any extension beyond the normal 45 weeks is subject to the agreement and approval of the university, who must notify the Student Grants Unit of reasons why an extension is necessary.

16. What happens if a student decides not to return to training following a period of maternity absence?

The student must contact her university immediately. The university will inform the NHS Student Bursaries using the relevant form BUR101W. The student must also contact the NHS Student Bursaries, **in writing**, informing them that she does not intend to resume training. The student will not currently be required to repay any monies legitimately received throughout the period of authorised maternity absence.

17. Where can I get more information, help and support?

Your university's occupational health department should be able to help and support you. You can also obtain information from the following:-

NHS Students Grant Unit

www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk/

UNISON

www.unison.org.uk/healthcare

Gail Adams Head of Nursing UNISON email gail.adams@unison.co.uk

Kevin Russell Assistant National Officer UNISON email r.russell@unison.co.uk

British Medical Association

<http://www.bma.org.uk/students>

National Union of Students

Students go to www.nusonline.co.uk

Union Student Officers go to www.officeronline.co.uk