

A scenic view of the University of Bath campus. In the foreground, there is a pond with lily pads and a swan. The middle ground shows a large green lawn with people sitting on it. In the background, there are several university buildings under a blue sky with some clouds. The scene is framed by green leaves in the top corners.

UKCGE Parental Leave Discussion

Dr Rachel Arnold (Academic Director, Doctoral)

Doctoral Parental Leave Policy

- 52 weeks suspension available for maternity and adoption leave (no fees)



Sponsored doctoral students (under Student Visa route) maximum period of absence without suspending = 60 days

- UKRI/University funded doctoral students get 39 weeks paid maternity (adoption) leave
- Two weeks of ordinary paternity leave (full stipend if funded student)
- Bereavement provisions (e.g., miscarriage, stillbirth)
- Students can return on a part time basis
- Shared parental leave?

A red ribbon icon with the text "NEW UPDATE" written in white, slanted upwards to the right.

NEW UPDATE

Other Support

Active doctoral
parents' group at
Bath

On-site nursery

Breastfeeding and
baby changing
spaces/room on
campus

Discounted Team
Bath holiday
academies and
camps for student
parents

Timetable requests

Student immigration
advisors

Student Parents
(bath.ac.uk)



The Issues?

Length of leave period

- Sponsored (visa) doctoral students maximum period of absence without suspending = 60* days
- Append annual leave allowance (~30 days) = 90 days maximum
- Suspend for up to 52 weeks – visa gets revoked and they have to leave the UK

Should we be asking doctoral students to make the decision between returning to their doctoral programmes 90 days* after childbirth OR leaving the country?

Returning after leave

- If sponsored (visa) doctoral students wish to go part-time on return, their dependents have to leave the UK as per visa requirements?

Should we be asking doctoral students to make the decision between having their dependents in the same country as them OR part time working post parental leave?



1. Do the sector experience similar issues to those outlined?
2. If so, should we as a sector be lobbying to consider the experiences of (and better support for) doctoral students taking parental leave?

Case Study 1: Haritha

Haritha moved from Turkey with her husband to commence a full-time PhD at the University of Bath. In the third year of her PhD (December 2022) she had a child. She experienced difficulties with pregnancy in the final three months so her workload was significantly reduced. She had to return to her PhD 90 days after childbirth. Suspending her studies (or going part-time) were not options for her as would have to move (or move her dependents) back to Turkey and her “whole life was here now”.

“At the time I was due to return to my PhD, I was still breastfeeding my baby every 1.5 hours. My mother moved back from Turkey to help with the baby but we lived in a small flat and as I needed to breastfeed so frequently, I worked in the room next door to them. It was so difficult as I could hear the baby crying but I knew I only had about 1 hour to do some work on my PhD. I was constantly emotional at this time and that whole first six months was extremely challenging. I couldn’t suspend and I didn’t know if I was going to be able to get an extension at the end of my PhD from the Home Office so, I knew I had to keep making progress, but I wasn’t actually able to do as much as I needed to at that time”

Case Study 2: Anaka

Anaka moved from Nigeria to commence a full-time PhD at the University in 2017. Early in the final year of her PhD she had a child. She was required to return to her full-time PhD 60 days* post the birth of the child. Due to the nature of her PhD, she spent three days on campus (in the lab) and two days working from home. She juggled the childcare of her newborn baby between herself, her husband, and at times a relative who came to stay. Suspending her studies (or going part time on return) was not an option as she would need to move (or move her baby) back to Nigeria. There was the added complication of COVID at the time where she heard that anyone coming to Nigeria from the UK, due to fears of the virus, was excluded from community and relatives would run away from them to distance themselves.

“It was a really difficult, really hard time. There were no options other than to return full-time 60 days after having my baby. As I had to be on campus ~3 days a week due to the nature and stage of my PhD, I experienced a lot of painful engorgement with my milk. I did not feel ready to return to my PhD so soon after childbirth and would have preferred to have taken much longer with my baby but had no other options available”.

“One of the most difficult times of my life”

Eliana Maria Osorio Saez

(PhD Student Sept 2017-2021)

- PhD in Digital Technologies in Education

(October 2017 - May 2021) Approximately 3.5 years

- Partially funded by the Department of Education / Self-funded
- Origin: Colombia
- Originally scheduled for the end of October, my child arrived prematurely at the end of September, accompanied by complications.
- Due to a secondment, at that time I was entitled to less authorised absence for maternity leave.
- Suspending my studies was not feasible due to the substantial financial implications:
 - £4,000 for flights
 - £15,000 for a new visa application
 - £30,000 for six months of childcare, accommodation, and other expenses