THE DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER ACADEMIES TRUST
unlocking potential

Fertility and Assisted Conception Policy

Our vision is to enable all to flourish

Status and review cycle: Every two years

Responsible group: CEO

Implemented: October 2025

Next Review Date: October 2027

Contents

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Trust recognises that undergoing fertility treatment and/or assisted conception can be physically and emotionally stressful. As an organisation with a Christian foundation, the Trust through this policy, aims to support employees undergoing fertility investigations and treatment. This policy sets out to help individuals and line managers understand the situation, and provides information on the support that is available.

1.2 This policy applies to all employees within the Trust.

2.0 Aims of this policy

2.1 The aims of this policy are to

- raise awareness of how assisted conception can affect a range of people,
- educate and inform employees about how it may affect their team and how they can support individuals in the workplace,
- create an inclusive environment where employees feel confident to discuss their experiences and ask for help,
- outline support and reasonable adjustments that are available,
- reduce assisted conception-related sickness, enabling employees to stay in work rather than taking sick leave or resigning, and
- keep valuable skills and experience within the Trust workforce.

3.0 Context

3.1 Fertility Network UK states that infertility affects 3.5 million people in the UK, which is on average one in seven couples. Therefore, many employees are likely to be experiencing infertility struggles and may be undergoing assisted conception.

3.2 Assisted conception is not only needed for individuals experiencing infertility. It may also be needed by

- a person pursuing solo parenthood,
- a person in a same-sex couple that may require a donor or surrogate. This also applies to individuals pursuing solo parenthood.

3.3 Throughout the policy, gender-neutral terms are used to describe employees who may experience infertility or go through assisted conception. It is recognised that infertility can affect someone of any gender.

3.4 This policy therefore applies to anyone experiencing fertility treatment or going through assisted conception, regardless of their gender expression.

4.0 General principles

4.1 The following general principles apply:

- All Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave requests will be treated in the strictest confidence.
- The Trust and its schools will act sympathetically in situations envisaged by this policy and recognises the benefits to both the Trust and employees in applying this policy in a fair and reasonable manner.
- Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave will not count towards sickness absence.
- In cases where the line manager or headteacher require assistance with the interpretation of this policy, advice should be sought from the Trust's HR provider via the HR Advice Line.

4.2 The policy does not form part of a contract of employment, and the Trust reserves the right to amend it at any time.

5.0 Definitions

5.1 Under this policy, assisted conception includes:

- Any form of assisted reproduction carried out by a registered medical practitioner or registered nurse (for example in vitro fertilisation (IVF), intrauterine insemination (IUI), and intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)),
- Any treatment carried out by a registered medical practitioner or registered nurse for the purpose of preserving fertility (for example freezing eggs, sperm, embryos, or reproductive tissue), and
- Any medical examination or treatment in connection with the treatment mentioned above (for example blood tests, ultrasound scans, egg collection, sperm collection, embryo transfer).

6.0 How infertility may affect employees

6.1 Getting expert help

6.1.1 The NHS advises individuals trying to conceive to see their GP if they have not become pregnant after 12 months of trying, or after 6 months if a woman is 36 years old or over.

6.1.2 The Trust will facilitate employees by allowing time off to attend appointments. Line managers/headteachers are encouraged to support their team by encouraging open communication, and facilitating, where possible, flexible working arrangements. Individuals should not feel that they need to delay treatment due to work.

6.2 Fertility investigations

6.2.1 There are multiple pathways that individuals may take when starting fertility investigations and this may be due to their existing medical conditions, their location, or local service provision.

6.1.2 Everyone has different experiences and there is no single route to diagnosis. Investigating fertility struggles through a GP and referrals to fertility clinics may involve

- semen analysis,
- blood tests,
- scans, and/or
- internal investigations to obtain a diagnosis and work out what action individuals want to take.

6.3 Types of treatments

6.3.1 The type of assisted conception an individual will receive is dependent on the fertility investigation results, an individual's specific medical history, and personal circumstances. Treatments can include

- medicines (such as ovulation stimulation medication),
- surgical procedures (for example, correcting an epididymal blockage or removing cysts/ fibroids),
- assisted conception (such as intrauterine insemination (IUI) or in vitro fertilisations (IVF)).

6.4 How colleagues can support each other

6.4.1 Despite infertility affecting many people, individuals still feel as though they are the only ones going through it, which can become isolating. This may increase the chances of people navigating the process alone as they may find it difficult to speak about.

6.4.2 Colleagues can support each other by being sensitive to those experiencing infertility or going through assisted conception through using considerate language around topics such as conception, pregnancy announcements, or children.

6.4.2 It is not appropriate to ask anyone if they intend on having children, nor is it appropriate to comment on whether someone 'looks' pregnant. Individuals are free to disclose the information that they want to.

6.5 Fertility Network UK have a support page for people looking to support friends and colleagues that are trying to conceive, see here: Families, Parents, Friends & Colleagues | Fertility Network

7.0 Assisted conception and leave

7.1 Leave for employees receiving treatment

6.1.1 To qualify for paid Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave, employees must have successfully completed one years' service with the Trust.

6.1.2 Employees undergoing assisted conception will be entitled to up to five days paid leave per cycle, for a maximum of three cycles. The three cycles are permitted to be taken at any time during their employment with the Trust.

6.1.3 If employees have not yet completed their one years' service with the Trust, they will still qualify for unpaid leave depending on their conditions of service.

7.2 Green Book (Support Staff) and central team staff

6.2.1 If an employee has less than one years' service, unpaid leave will be available after they have passed probation.

7.3 Burgundy Book (Teaching Staff)

7.3.1 If an employee has less than one years' service with the Trust, unpaid leave will be available after six months of service.

7.4 Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave will be granted for the purpose of receiving and recovering from assisted conception and to attend appointments specifically associated with the process. For example, pre-booked consultant appointments, collection of eggs, transfer, monitoring tests, etc.

7.5 Leave for employees wishing to support their partner

7.5.1 For the purposes of this policy, 'partner' refers to the partner of the person undergoing treatment and includes same-sex partners. This leave also applies to an employee whose surrogate is undergoing assisted conception.

7.5.2 To qualify for paid leave, employees must have successfully completed one years' service with the Trust.

7.5.3 Where an employee is not undergoing assisted conception themselves but has a partner who is receiving assisted conception, the Trust will grant the employee up to three days paid leave per cycle of treatment so that they can attend appointments with their partner. Leave will be limited to a maximum of three cycles in total.

7.5.4 If employees have not yet completed their one years' service with the Trust, they will still qualify for unpaid leave depending on their conditions of service.

7.6 Green Book (Support Staff and central team staff)

7.6.1 If an employee has less than one years' service, unpaid leave will be available after they have passed probation.

7.6.2 Burgundy Book (Teaching Staff)

If an employee has less than one years' service with the Trust, unpaid leave will be available after six months of service.

7.7 Taking time off work

7.7.1 Where possible, appointments for the investigation of and testing for assisted conception should be arranged outside of normal working hours and will be treated in the same way as all other medical appointments.

7.8 The Trust recognises that appointments and subsequent time off during assisted conception may be required at short notice. Line managers/headteachers are asked to be considerate of this and allow flexibility wherever possible.

7.9 Line managers/headteachers may require evidence to confirm medical appointments where necessary.

7.10 Agreed Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave will be pro-rata for part-time employees.

7.11 Line managers/headteachers and employees should have conversations about whether there are any temporary adjustments that might be beneficial to the employee, for example a temporary reduction in hours, start/finish times, working flexibly, so they can be considered within the employee's working environment.

7.12 In the event that an employee exhausts the time off allowed under this policy, a discussion with the employee will help to establish whether any other type of leave or flexible working arrangements would be the most applicable. The operational needs of the organisation will be considered.

8.0 Assisted conception and sickness

8.1 Should an employee require time off work because of the side effects of their assisted conception, this will be subject to the Trust's normal Sickness Absence Procedure, including the requirement to certify absences.

8.2 If an employee feels they are unfit for work, they must speak to their line manager and follow the Trust's absence reporting procedures.

8.3 Employees do not have to disclose that their absence is connected with fertility or assisted conception if they wish to keep this private. However, the Trust wants employees to feel that they can be open about the reason for their leave.

8.4 Where absences during the 'protected period' are a result of the effects of IVF treatment, these absences will not count towards the sickness trigger points for absence management purposes.

9.0 Workplace adjustments and referral to Occupational Health

9.1 If an employee receives medical advice informing them that adjustments are needed to their work duties or pattern whilst they are undergoing treatment, their line manager should make those changes where operationally available.

9.2 These adjustments could be from the fertility specialist or GP listing reasonable adjustments, or from conversations with the employee. Additional advice can be sought from Occupational Health with consent from the employee.

10.0 Notification of Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave

10.1 Initial notification

10.1.1 Employees are encouraged to speak to their line manager or headteacher as soon as they find out that their treatment, or their partner's treatment, has been approved.

10.1.2 Fertility related appointments will be treated in the same way as other medical appointments. This means employees are to inform their line manager or headteacher of the need to take time off, giving as much notice as possible.

10.1.3 Where possible, employees should book their appointments as close to the start or end of the working day as possible, in order to minimise the impact of their absence.

10.1.4 Line managers are expected to handle fertility notifications with sensitivity and to treat the information as confidential.

10.1.5 Employees should submit their request for Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave to their line manager/headteacher via e-mail for consideration and provide as much notice as possible, ideally no later than one week before the start of treatment. However, the Trust understands that treatment can be at short notice and line managers/headteachers should be flexible where possible to accommodate the leave.

10.2 Formal notification

10.2.1 The employee will also need to:

- provide written confirmation from a qualified medical practitioner that assisted conception has been recommended and approved; and
- at the request of their line manager or headteacher, produce written confirmation from the fertility clinic for each occasion on which time off is requested.

10.2.2 It is important that all Fertility and Assisted Conception Leave requests are submitted in a timely manner prior to an employee's leave beginning so that Payroll can process the leave accordingly.

11.0 Working flexibly on a temporary basis

11.1 The Trust recognises that for individuals receiving assisted conception, the option to work flexibly on a temporary (rather than permanent) basis may be appropriate. For example, this could include working from home, hybrid working, or changing start and finish times. This is not a definitive list.

11.2 If an employee feels that a temporary change to their working arrangement would be beneficial on an ad hoc basis because they are undergoing assisted conception, they should discuss and agree these with their line manager or headteacher.

11.3 The Trust will try to facilitate temporary flexible working arrangements wherever this is possible and will continue to review these to ensure that they meet employee's needs.

12.0 Privacy

12.1 The Trust acknowledges that there may be a need for an employee to take phone calls regarding their fertility journey during working hours.

12.2 It is encouraged for line managers/headteachers and employees to discuss if any adjustments are needed to enable this to happen in privacy and to ensure that any safeguarding procedures around the use of mobile phones in school are adhered to.

13.0 Sickness

13.1 The Trust understand that there may be times while undergoing assisted conception when an employee may be unwell. There is no expectation on employees to work if they are unwell because of side effects related to their treatment. Employees should follow the procedure set out in our Sickness and Absence procedure.

13.2 Employees do not have to disclose that their absence is connected with fertility or assisted conception if they wish to keep this private. However, the Trust wants employees to feel that they can be open about the reason for their leave. Sickness related to Fertility and Assisted Conception treatment will not count towards sickness absence triggers.

14.0 Implantation

14.1 Pregnancy rights

14.1.1 It is important to remember that if undergoing fertility treatment, employees have pregnancy rights immediately after embryo transfer (when the embryo is implanted in the uterus). At this stage, employees do not have to tell their line manager or headteacher, but if they decide to, then they are protected by pregnancy laws from this point onwards.

14.1.2 This means entitlement to paid time off for antenatal appointments, and any relevant sick leave will be logged as pregnancy sickness (and this type of absence does not count towards any sickness absence triggers which are part of the Trust's Sickness Absence Policy). For further information, please refer to the appropriate Trust's Maternity Leave Policy relevant to the employee's role.

14.1.3 If the transfer/treatment is successful, then pregnancy rights continue. Employees should not be made to feel under any pressure to disclose whether the treatment has or has not been successful until they are ready, and sickness records may be amended retrospectively. The Trust will endeavour to do whatever it can to support employees, whatever the circumstances

14.1.4 Sadly, fertility treatments are not always successful, and it can be difficult for someone to find out that they are not pregnant. If an employee is having fertility treatment, and in the unfortunate event that they are told that the treatment is unsuccessful, they are entitled to take a day of paid leave.

15.0 Other useful resources

15.1 Assistance Programme (EAP) service: The Trust provides the Employee Assistance Programme for all employees. This is a free, 24-hour confidential service. Information can be found in your workplace or from your line manager.

16.00 External sources of help

There are various organisations that provide help and support to those who are undergoing assisted conception, including:

- Fertility Network UK, which provides a wide range of resources for those affected by infertility,
- British Infertility Counselling Association, which provides information about specialist fertility counsellors, and
- Fertility Friends Support Forum, which is a forum community dedicated to infertility and fertility support.