

Women Aged 30-39: why are they the largest demographic to leave teaching every year?

A 2018-21 study by The MTPT Project

The names of the participants in these interviews have been changed.

07. Experiences of Maternity Leave

All but one of the 27 interview participants who had left teaching aged 30-39 were asked to describe their maternity leave experiences, and 25 of these participants' responses are included in this questionnaire. As well as the specific question, *Can you describe your maternity leave experience to me?*, participants commented on maternity leave experiences when asked to expand on the following reasons for leaving teaching:

- Family commitments – children
- Maternity leave or paternity leave
- Lack of progression opportunities in teaching
- Lifestyle choice i.e. wanting to work fewer hours, seeking a better work life balance or to pursue other interests
- Mental health or wellbeing
- Job satisfaction

One participant who is still included amongst the mother-teachers in the study, was not asked the question as she was currently undergoing fertility treatment, and was not yet a mother, however the intention to become a mother was the leading push factor in her decision to leave teaching. The second participant not included in this report responded to the question, *Can you describe your maternity leave experience to me?* by explaining that she had taken her maternity leave after leaving teaching. When prompted to speak further about her leave, her comments focused on the perceived work-life balance of teaching, rather than maternity leave specifically.

21 of the participants in this report were secondary school teachers, 2 were primary teachers, and 2 were teachers in all through, or all through special schools. As we have seen in all of our reports thus far, the majority of participants were middle leaders or TLR holders (13), with 4 SLT members and 8 class teachers included in this report.

The MTPT Project has acquired, or is responsible for collecting some of the key statistics about teachers on maternity leave. We now know that 3.4% of the teacher workforce are on maternity leave at any given time each year, approximately 11,500 teachers, or an average of two per school¹. Just over half begin their maternity leave when they are 37-38 weeks pregnant², and take an average of 8.5 months³ of maternity leave. In itself, the fact that none of this information was available before The MTPT Project's 2018 Freedom of Information

¹ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/percentage_of_teachers_on_matern#incoming-1115502

² <https://twitter.com/madamwait/status/1564605791604281347?s=20&t=1N63qXqpnslJx9exMJFerg>

³ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/percentage_of_teachers_on_matern#incoming-1115502

requests, or original research, is telling: what value do we place on the demographic of teacher-mothers, and to what extent do we see their experiences of maternity leave as important?

This period of maternity leave is a time where female employees are particularly vulnerable to attrition – not just in education, but across all industries. Indeed, 17% of women leave the workforce when they become mothers, choosing not to return following their maternity leave. In the education sector, our retention rates are slightly higher, with 13% of teachers choosing not to return after maternity leave. However, the maternity pay and conditions for teachers stipulate that we must return to work for at least 13 weeks to avoid paying back our enhanced maternity pay (12 weeks at 50% of our salary). Many teachers may therefore officially return for these 13 weeks, or slightly longer to see out the academic year, before also resigning. A Freedom of Information request to seven of England’s largest MATs revealed that anywhere between 2-13% of teachers returning from maternity leave resign once they have worked the two terms required to pay back their maternity pay. When combined, this data could indicate that in the worst case scenario, the education sector might be losing up to a quarter of their female teachers following their return from maternity leave.

There are a number of overlapping reasons that women working in all sectors choose to leave their jobs when becoming mothers: childcare costs in the UK are amongst the highest in the OECD; parenting is a full time job in itself with mother on maternity leave averaging 60 hours of domestic work and childcare per week, and women continuing to take on 60% more unpaid labour at home than men⁴; women are more likely to be the lower wage earners even before becoming mothers, and motherhood can limit women’s earning potential, so the father’s job (and wage) is prioritised⁵. Many parents also want to spend as much time as they can with their children whilst they are young, and some mothers are in the privileged position to stop working in order to do so.

The pregnancy and maternity discrimination that also contributes to women’s decision to leave is well documented. A 2005 report completed by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) found that ‘almost half of the 444,000 pregnant women in Britain... experience some form of disadvantage at work, simply for being pregnant or taking maternity leave’, with ‘3,000 women... forced out of their jobs’⁶. In a follow-up report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2015, 77% of mothers said they had ‘experienced a negative or possibly discriminatory experience during pregnancy, maternity leave, and / or on return from maternity leave’, with one in nine mothers reporting that they ‘felt forced to leave their jobs’, either because they were dismissed, were made compulsorily redundant or because they were treated ‘so poorly they felt they had to leave their job’.

The pregnancy and maternity discrimination identified by participants in the EHRC’s report included:

⁴<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

⁵ <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/2019/10/22/how-womens-employment-changes-after-having-a-child>

⁶ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/pregnancy-and-maternity-discrimination-research-findings>

- ‘Harassment or negative comments related to pregnancy or flexible working from their employer / colleagues’
- ‘Risks not being tackled’
- Being ‘discouraged from attending antenatal appointments’
- Having flexible working requests denied
- Experiencing negative consequences to working flexibly

The report also revealed ongoing frustrations and negative attitudes from some employers regarding the laws that protect women falling under the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity. Such dissatisfaction included:

- Employers finding statutory rights including the protection from redundancy ‘unreasonable or difficult to manage’ (28%)
- The belief that ‘women should declare upfront during recruitment if they are pregnant’ (70%)
- The belief that employers are entitled to ‘ask women about their plans to have children’ during the recruitment process (25%)
- Employers finding that pregnancy ‘put an unreasonable cost burden on the workplace’ (27%)
- The belief that ‘pregnant women and mothers were less interested in career progression and promotion than other employees’ (17%) and less committed than other team members (7%)⁷

Whilst not wholly negative, some of the comments in this report reflect the discrimination reported on by the EOC and the EHRC.

KIT and SPLIT days, and other forms of communication during maternity leave, will be discussed in more detail later in the report, but despite data from The MTPT Project showing that 71% of teachers used KIT or SPLIT days during one or more period of maternity, adoption or shared parental leave⁸, the CIPD found that ‘the majority of employers do not encourage the use of KIT days during maternity, adoption or additional paternity leave’⁹. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills reiterates that ‘overall, the use of Keeping in Touch (KIT) days was not common’ adding that, ‘For professional employees, this tended to be employee-led and largely for work-related activities (e.g. for client meetings, training and events).’¹⁰

Comments from the 25 teachers included in this report regarding the experience of maternity leave fell into nine different categories:

⁷ file:///Users/Emma/Downloads/summary_of_key_findings_-_bis-16-145-pregnancy-and-maternity-related-discrimination-and-disadvantage-summary.pdf

⁸ <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1tz8iLJjXrrPoX80gnLoznqwgKNDd967NCS8fBwyp8/edit#responses>

⁹ https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/labour-market-outlook-focus-on-working-parents_tcm18-17048.pdf

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284559/BIS_employment_regulation_Part_B_V3.pdf

Experiences in Late Pregnancy

“In the build-up to going on maternity leave, I wasn’t involved in as many conversations – my opinion wasn’t sought on things I had the experience of. It was quite a shocking thing, how blanked I felt.” – *Jenny*

Positive Experiences of Maternity Leave

“My maternity leave experience has been, I don’t know, completely changing, I suppose life changing. She’s all consuming, she’s highly entertaining and fascinating and exhausting all in one.” – *June*

Maternity Discrimination

“The second time I wanted to apply for something it wasn’t advertised, while I was on maternity leave, publicly so I missed the application deadline. It was just word of mouth in the department – no one informed me. So I complained about that to my union rep.” – *Hanna*

Identity and Mental Health

“And then as the months go on, I was literally just so focused on her wellbeing that anything outside of that was secondary or meaningless, to be honest. But I do think a lot of that was much of the illness that I had at the time.” – *Seren*

Pay

“I ended up paying my maternity leave back rather than going back from maternity because I just didn’t want to get back into that stressful environment while I was with my children.” – *Kallie*

Length and Timing of Maternity Leave

“I ended up paying my maternity leave back rather than going back from maternity because I just didn’t want to get back into that stressful environment while I was with my children.” – *Kallie*

Communication with School

“A colleague quite often liked to text me and I think she thought she was being helpful by trying to keep me in the loop but actually I didn’t really want to think about it because I just wanted to focus on the baby.” – *Marie-Ann*

KIT days

“I wasn’t really offered KIT days. I didn’t really know what a KIT day was.” – *Catherine*

**Impact on the
Return to Work**

“The second maternity leave I went on was a lot more enjoyable because I made the decision I wasn’t going to go back.” – *Laura*

A number of participants’ comments also alluded to feelings of self-worth: their understanding of how they were valued by their school, leadership team and colleagues both as a human being and as an employee and was impacted by the way they were treated during the late stages of their pregnancy; the amount and type of communication they received whilst on maternity leave; and the way in which their time was remunerated when completing work-related tasks during maternity leave.

Experiences in late pregnancy

When asked about their maternity leave, participants often blurred the period of late pregnancy into the start of their maternity leave, indicating that the last few weeks of their time at school were a ‘build-up’ integral to, rather than separate from, a period of maternity leave. Positive experiences of this time involve participants feeling ‘supported’, and being involved with handover activities. Negative experiences involve complications with pregnancies, and a sense of being ignored or excluded in the run up to the start of maternity leave.

For Rebecca, the period that she was absent from school was extended because of complications related to her disability:

“I was signed off after a couple of months of becoming pregnant, it was an unplanned pregnancy and because of my cerebral palsy I was sent to a specialist who basically said you need to be as still as possible. And so because of that my maternity leave was triggered early. Because I can only get so many weeks off sick before your maternity gets triggered. So my maternity leave itself was fine.” – *Rebecca*

The passive tense in ‘my maternity leave was triggered’ suggests that it was not necessarily Rebecca’s choice to begin her maternity leave early, but that she was forced into this because of the ‘need to be as still as possible’ due to her ‘cerebral palsy’. The fact that she was ‘signed off after a couple of months of becoming pregnant’, however, also means that she would have been physically absent from school for a significant period of time on top of her maternity leave. Whilst she doesn’t give much indication of her school’s involvement in this experience other than the implication of school sickness and absence policies in ‘signed off’ and ‘I can only get so many weeks off sick before your maternity leave gets triggered’, her later comments about her return to work refer to a lack of ‘consideration given to the fact that [she] was disabled’.

The pregnancy period, particular the build-up to maternity leave is revealed to be the start of a value statement perceived by participants. Where they were treated well during this time,

they felt valued by their school. Where they perceived their treatment to be poor, they felt unvalued as a team member and professional.

This was the case for Jenny, who found the way she was treated on maternity leave ‘incredibly challenging’:

“In the build-up to going on maternity leave, I wasn’t involved in as many conversations – my opinion wasn’t sought on things I had the experience of. It was quite a shocking thing, how blanked I felt. And again, I think that was the senior leadership team that I was working with: they had a job to do, and I all of a sudden wasn’t the person to do that job anymore, even though I still felt I had a lot to contribute, so the build-up was incredibly challenging. – *Jenny*

The language in Jenny’s comment – ‘I wasn’t involved, ‘my opinion wasn’t sought’, ‘blanked’, ‘I wasn’t the person to do that job’ – indicates that she felt excluded and erased even before being physically absent on leave. The emotional impact of this is evident in, ‘It was quite shocking’ and ‘incredibly challenging’.

Jenny’s comments imply that either her ability to work, or her value to the team, was called into question because of her pregnancy and impending departure: ‘I all of a sudden wasn’t the person to do that job anymore’. Her own perception of her abilities contradict the messages she is receiving from her senior leadership team, as she ‘still felt [she] had a lot to contribute’, on ‘things [she] had the experience of’. What’s more, as well as feeling that what she had to offer the school had not changed, Jenny’s emotional response to this treatment suggests that she *needed* to contribute, and be included in order to feel valued and have a sense of self-worth in the build-up to her leave.

Comments from three participants – Sophie, Mylie and Jenny (describing her new employer having left teaching) – have positive stories of this pre-maternity leave experience:

“I was supported well. I didn’t have any pressure. I could have left the role whenever I needed to. What was great was that I was able to be part of the interviewing process, so I felt comfortable that I was leaving my department with someone, I was part of that selection process which was really good.” – *Sophie*

“The maternity leave itself was great. And when I took my first maternity leave, I was working really closely with a colleague just before I left, who was really supportive.” – *Mylie*

“This time round is very different. Work’s been incredibly supportive this time and just incredibly respectful in the build-up in saying, ‘you’re probably going to start needing this now’; ‘you’re getting to this point – you’re probably going to be a bit tired so we can do this, we can think about this.’ It’s been a breath of fresh air not exerting that pressure on myself to be this perfect professional or role model for people, and acknowledging that I’m going through a pretty life-changing event and that is going to change how I work, but it not being a big deal for work. They’re wanting to work

flexibly with me and acknowledging that stuff is changing, but that's okay – that doesn't mean we value you less as a person. It's quite nice having that contrast within quite a short amount of time, within two years. It's really nice because I think I felt it was some reflection on me previously and now I know that it wasn't a reflection on me, it was the setting. And it's nice, having had this experience that's been entirely positive and entirely supportive and I really couldn't fault them and what they've done. It's actually made me more motivated and I feel they've had more from me because I've been so – I've felt so valued. That's the way people work. You feel valued, your morale increases, you do your job better. It seems really obvious to me." – *Jenny*

All three comments refer to feeling supported during the late stages of pregnancy – 'I was supported well', 'a colleague... who was really supportive', 'work's been incredibly supportive'. There are four aspects that define the concept of support over these three comments:

- Support for the physical demands of pregnancy
- Being included as a professional
- Having autonomy over the maternity leave start date
- A feeling of freedom from professional pressures

Jenny describes an understanding from her new employer, of the physical impact of pregnancy. For her, one aspect of feeling supported was the care and respect she felt at this time – 'Work's been... just incredibly respectful in the build-up in saying, 'you're probably going to start needing this now'; 'you're getting to this point – you're probably going to be a bit tired so we can do this, we can think about this.' In comparison to her previous role, Jenny feels recognised as a human being, one undergoing a 'pretty life-changing event', but unlike Rebecca who felt that little 'consideration' was given to her physical needs as a disabled pregnant woman or new mother, Jenny feels her new employer has been 'entirely supportive'.

Mylie and Sophie refer to key concrete acts of inclusion creating this support: for Sophie, this included being part of the 'selection process' for her maternity cover, and for Mylie, this meant 'working really closely with a colleague'. In contrast to Jenny's first comments, both Sophie and Mylie's expertise and experience were valued and requested even when they were shortly due to begin their maternity leaves. With her new employer, Jenny also feels this sense of inclusion, with her colleagues 'wanting to work flexibly with' her to ensure that she has what she needs, with the 'with' indicating a two-way process where Jenny feels seen and heard.

Sophie's comments also indicate that this support also meant the confidence to know that she 'could have left the role whenever' she needed to, feeling that she 'didn't have any pressure' from her school about what to do, and what not to do late into her pregnancy. Unlike Rebecca, whose maternity leave start date was decided by the needs of her cerebral palsy, Sophie describes a sense of autonomy – *she* was in charge of when her leave started, fully supported by her school.

This pressure – commented on also by Jenny when describing her new employer – comes from both external and internal sources. In her first comment, Jenny describes the tension between wanting to contribute and the challenge of not being invited to do so. The pressure she put on herself at her previous school may well have come from the effort to prove herself. Indeed, in **06. We're On a Road to Nowhere** we cited her comments about being 'ambitious' and articulating her desire for 'variety and change', 'a different position of responsibility'. However, in her second comment she says, 'It's been a breath of fresh air not exerting that pressure on myself to be this perfect professional or role model for people'. When the support of her employer makes it evident to Jenny that she is 'so valued', she no longer needs to work so hard to fulfil the expectations of the 'perfect professional' or 'role model' that she admits she has set for herself. Instead, there is a mutual understanding that her pregnancy and the growth of her family 'is going to change how [she] works' but the reassurance that this is not 'a big deal for work', nor does it mean that she is 'value[d]... less as a person'. With her new employer, Jenny, like Sophie, finds herself in a much more comfortable, secure place, professionally.

The impact of this support is clear in Jenny's comments: she refers to this 'entirely positive', 'entirely supportive' experience as 'nice' or 'really nice' three times, and explains that it has made her feel 'so valued', 'more motivated' and impacted her work in that her employers have had 'more' from her, because their support has increased her 'morale' and encouraged her to do her 'job better'. The professional confidence and self-esteem captured in these semantics is a huge contrast to the emotional impact and sense of rejection conveyed in Jenny's first comments.

In these five comments, three participants refer to key people who provided – or failed to provide – this support. Jenny refers to 'the senior leadership team', and 'work'; Mylie refers to 'a colleague', and Sophie implies a decision maker at departmental or senior leadership level who enabled her to be part of the interview process for her maternity cover. The attitudes and behaviour of these colleagues had a significant impact on the way that the participants felt ahead of their maternity leave. This is most clearly seen in Jenny's contrasting comments: her first 'senior leadership team' 'had a job to do' and when they felt that Jenny 'wasn't the person to do that job anymore' their focus on the 'job' meant that they potentially lost sight of the human components of their team. In comparison, Jenny 'really couldn't fault' her new employer because of the value they have placed on her 'as a person'.

Positive Experiences of Maternity Leave

12 of the 25 participants in this report describe their maternity leave as a positive experience. The words 'wonderful', 'fantastic', 'loved every minute', 'blissful', 'brilliant', 'love it', 'freedom', 'fascinating', 'life-changing', 'amazing', 'so nice', 'really positive', 'lucky', 'enjoyable', 'enjoyed', 'lovely', 'good time' and 'great' were used to describe periods of maternity leave. Responses to the question, *Could you just describe your maternity leave experience(s) to me?* ranged from the simplicity of "My maternity leave was great" (Harriet), "Being on maternity leave was amazing" (Mylie), to much more complex comments.

Perhaps as we might expect, 5 participants identified that their leave was positive because of the time it enabled them to spend with their new babies:

“My maternity leave experience has been, I don’t know, completely changing, I suppose life changing. She’s all consuming, she’s highly entertaining and fascinating and exhausting all in one. But it’s kind of like those moments that you have in the classroom where I always used to say to people that one of the reasons I enjoyed teaching was that you never quite know what’s going to happen next. And the scenery always changes. And I think that’s the case with little ones as well every day, something different changes. And that’s just fascinating. I didn’t want to miss anything.” – *June*

“It’s brilliant. I love it. I love being able to spend all day, every day with my daughter. I love the freedom of being able to go and do lots of different activities throughout the day. And I love knowing that she’s got that stability of it being me that’s a primary caregiver.” – *Nicki*

“Once the baby had come, I didn’t really think about work an awful lot, to be honest, and work didn’t really contact me. And I really enjoyed not having the stress and the pressure that I’d had previously. And it was so nice just to be able to focus my attention on my family.” – *Josephine*

“I really enjoyed being away from school and being with my children. And school were particularly good when I was going to go on maternity leave, because I had a heart issue that was causing me problems.” – *Sharon*

“I enjoyed my maternity leave with my daughter and just being able to switch off from work which I hadn’t really done whilst I was full-time.” – *Monica*

However, as we can see in Josephine, Sharon and Monica’s comments, a large part of why their maternity leave was enjoyable was because it allowed them a period of physical and mental absence from work: ‘I didn’t really think about work an awful lot’, ‘I really enjoyed not having the stress and the pressure that I’d had previously’, ‘I really enjoyed being away from school’, ‘just being able to switch off from work’.

We see similar sentiments from Kallie and Laura, where their physical absence from school contributes significantly to their sense of enjoyment in regards to their maternity leave:

“I was having a good time on maternity leave and I didn’t want to go back and that was the sort of big, big life changer for me.” – *Kallie*

“When I was off work, it was lovely. It was like stepping off the conveyor belt of constant. But you can’t really get it out of your head, obviously I was still in touch with colleagues, especially when I knew I was going back after the first one.” – *Laura*

“The second maternity leave I went on was a lot more enjoyable because I made the decision I wasn’t going to go back.” – *Laura*

In her first comment, Laura refers to the pace of life, and the practical workload of teaching, and how a period of maternity leave enabled her to partially escape this – ‘like stepping off the conveyor belt of constant’. However, for Laura, the fact that she was ‘still in touch with colleagues’ acted as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it enabled her to stay in the loop when she knew she would return to work after her first child, but on the other hand, it prevented her from switching off, fully, from work – ‘you can’t really get it out of your head’ – in a way that her second comment suggests she would have liked to. This preoccupation disappears on her second maternity leave because she ‘made the decision [she] wasn’t going back’, allowing her to step off the ‘conveyor belt’ completely.

Interestingly, only one (Sharon) of the five participants who stated that they enjoyed being away from school chose ‘school culture’ as a reason for leaving teaching in their initial survey responses. Despite her positive comments about her school being ‘particularly good’ when she was going on maternity leave, Sharon says that her school was ‘not a very happy place to work’, and during their interviews, Laura, Josephine and Monica also described school cultures that were far from positive. Their comments included reference to school cultures of monitoring and ‘finding fault’ (Laura), ‘environment[s] of stress and hassle and pressure’ (Josephine), and feeling undervalued following their return to work (Monica).

All five of these participants, however, chose ‘lifestyle choice’ as a reason for leaving teaching on their initial survey. Rather than the unhappy workplaces and pace of life that they have described, maternity leave gave them the chance to slow down and switch off from their workload (Laura, Kallie, Josephine, Monica), prioritise their families (Kallie, Josephine), or focus on their own physical and mental health (Sharon). In some cases, having experienced this different lifestyle, participants returned to work and saw it taken away from them again. The first-hand experience of this different, enjoyable way of living – one that involved ‘less stress and pressure’, and time to focus on their children – is therefore seen to contribute significantly to mother-teachers’ decision to leave.

Like, Kallie, Laura, and Sharon, we see that school can have a positive or negative impact on a teachers’ experience of maternity leave, whether this is through explicit and deliberate actions, or simply because participants felt they were still tied to their workplace despite being on leave. We have already seen in Josephine and Sharon’s comments that having communication preferences respected, and feeling taken care of by school have a positive impact on their maternity leave. Gauri shares further ways that her (international) school helped to make her experience positive:

“I had both my maternity leaves when I wasn’t in the state school and I know that’s not strictly part of the focus. So I was very lucky, as I said in the school that I was in, in the international school that I was in, in the type of support that I got.” – *Gauri*

“I didn’t feel that anybody held me accountable in the school that I was in at the time. My experience of maternity leave have been really positive in that sense.” – *Gauri*

“I was sent on CPD during maternity leave because I asked to go and I took my children with me. And I was the only person at the conference with children.” – *Gauri*

“Being empowered like that has really shaped my perception of maternity leave – how leaders can really encourage female teachers to stay within the profession and also to make them feel appreciated that the work that they do, regardless of whether they’re in the classroom or on leave.” – *Gauri*

Here, Gauri identifies the key ways that her school positively impacted her maternity leave: like Sharon, she felt she was supported – in both a general sense, and in terms of the practicalities of being empowered to attend a conference with her children, instead of feeling isolated as ‘the only person at the conference with children’. She was listened to when she expressed this desire to complete CPD, and as a result, felt ‘empowered’ as a professional and as a woman. Gauri points directly to the ‘leaders’ within her school who made her feel ‘appreciated’ without holding her ‘accountable’ at a time when she is not obliged to work or engage with her professional life unless she so chooses, and therefore positively impacted her experience of maternity leave.

Like Laura, however, Jenny and Kinga share how their school made an otherwise ‘brilliant’, ‘wonderful’, ‘fantastic’ experience of maternity leave less enjoyable either because of explicit actions from the school, or simply because of their ongoing sense of connection or conflict between their school and home identity:

“It was wonderful. It was fantastic. I loved every minute of it until the point... I returned to work at the very end of June. And in February, I was being contacted to ask what my plans were, could I go in for meetings? So up until that point, it was absolutely blissful.” – *Kinga*

“The actual maternity leave was brilliant, obviously, first child. But at the same time, this sense of ‘ah, what am I missing?’. That’s an uncomfortable thing to admit to, I think. I was really keen to get back to work.” – *Jenny*

In Kinga’s comments, we see a sense of uninvited and untimely interruption: despite not returning until ‘the very end of June’, Kinga was contacted about her ‘plans’ in February – the implication here that this was far too early for her to be considering these plans. The phrase ‘until the point’ and ‘up until that point’ in particular suggest that the request for ‘plans’ and ‘meetings’ were an unwelcome invasion of her ‘blissful’ maternity leave.

Jenny’s comments are slightly more complex: the source of the conflict between her maternity and school identity is internal, rather than an external influence from school or colleagues, as in Kinga’s case. She says she finds it ‘uncomfortable... to admit’ that despite enjoying her leave, she felt as if she was missing out professionally, and ‘was really keen to get back to work’. This internal pull towards school, ‘to get back to work’, negatively impacts Jenny’s experience of leave with the implication that she feels it is somehow not right, or strange to be ‘keen’ to bring about the end of this ‘brilliant’ maternity leave. Like Laura, who

remained ‘in touch with colleagues’ despite the fact that this denied her the freedom she felt on her second maternity leave when she cut ties by resigning, the mere presence of school, and inability to resolve this internal conflict, negatively impacts Jenny’s maternity leave.

Maternity Discrimination

Three participants included in this report spoke about experiences that would constitute as maternity discrimination. The first we have already explored in detail in the section *Experiences of Late Pregnancy*, where Jenny describes feeling shocked at the level of exclusion that accompanied the build up to her maternity leave. The fact that she was ‘blanked’, ‘wasn’t involved in as many conversations’ and that her ‘opinion wasn’t sought on things [she] had the experience of’ could constitute as negative treatment related to her pregnancy, as documented in the EHRC’s report.

More obviously, although Stephanie uses the word ‘agreement’, what she describes in her comments is discriminatory behaviour on behalf of her employer:

“It wasn’t the best because I had my little boy in December. And part of my, trying to think of the wording... like part of the agreement for me going part-time was that I had to start in September, even though that was only nine months of my maternity leave, and actually, rightfully I should have had a year.” – *Stephanie*

Specifically, the EHRC remind us that whilst an “employer can ask you if you would be willing to return earlier” than after the 52 weeks to which an employee is entitled, they cannot “put pressure on you to return earlier than you want”, or “threaten you with being disadvantaged if you do not return earlier”¹¹. Arguably, by using her request for part-time working as a way to push Stephanie into returning to work after nine months ‘even though... rightfully [she] should have had the year’, her school are threatening her with being disadvantaged – i.e. not giving her the part-time working she requested – in order to put pressure on her to return for the start of the school year.

Hanna provides more detail about her experience, demonstrating an explicit awareness that she was treated in a discriminatory manner by her employer:

“The second time I wanted to apply for something it wasn’t advertised, while I was on maternity leave, publicly so I missed the application deadline. It was just word of mouth in the department – no one informed me. So I complained about that to my union rep. It’s kind of an opportunity missed because I could have applied for it and then taken up the job when I came back from maternity leave.” – *Hanna*

“It just so happened that when I was on maternity leave, lots of things came up. But I missed the chance to get a position.” – *Hanna*

¹¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/faqs-employees/during-maternity-leave-contact-employer>

“It was all going very well until towards the end in June when I was just about to come back and head that someone had got this job that I was thinking of going for. So that was disappointing. I was very angry.” – *Hanna*

“In general I enjoyed being on maternity leave and was looking forward to going back to work but I did then take that up as a complaint with my union rep and had a meeting with the Principal, Head of HR, the school manager and my union rep when I got back. I don’t think their behaviour towards people on maternity leave has been very good actually. I think they’ve not made it very easy for people who want to come back to responsibilities. I’m not talking about my experience now but other peoples’” – *Hanna*

An employee on leave has to be contacted if ‘any promotion or other job opportunities’ occur, with an explanation of ‘what she needs to do to apply’.¹² For this reason, Hanna was right to pursue these ‘missed opportunit[ies]’ with her union: the ‘job opportunities’ that she wanted to apply for were not advertised publicly, no contact was made with her explaining how to apply, leading to her missing ‘the application deadline’, and as a result, someone else secured the job she ‘was thinking of going for’. The school’s failure to contact Hanna and inform her of this vacancy is an example of maternity discrimination.

In both Stephanie and Hanna’s comments, we see once again how occurrences at school, or the behaviour of colleagues and senior members of staff, had a negative impact on participants’ experiences of maternity leave. For Stephanie, this meant cutting her maternity leave short as a compromise to secure the part-time working hours she wanted, and for Hanna, this means that some of her maternity leave was spent in ‘meeting[s] with the Principal, Head of HR, the school manager and ... union rep’ rather than enjoying time with her baby, or completing personal and professional development activities. Like Jenny, Hanna was keen not to miss out on career opportunities, demonstrating an ongoing ambition that we have already seen in **06. We’re on a Road to Nowhere** as challenging our stereotyped ideas about women’s commitments to their careers when they become mothers. That her school denied her the chance to pursue these ambitions interrupts her maternity leave with feelings of disappointment and anger.

Identity and Mental Health

In the section, *Positive Experiences of Maternity Leave*, June referred to her maternity leave as ‘life-changing’, a comment we hear commonly used when referring to the experience of becoming a parent. Whilst this ‘life-changing’ experience was positive for June, responses from other participants indicate that the transition in identity involved in becoming a mother is not always as comfortable:

¹² <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/faqs-employers/managing-maternity-leave-contact>

“When I first went on maternity leave, I did feel a bit strange to begin with. I think, having worked in an environment that was so intense and so unforgiving for quite a long time and then to suddenly not be going to work. I did find it quite unusual. It was a challenge to adjust to being a parent, really, I guess. Particularly when I was first waiting for my eldest daughter to be born. And there was a period of time when I finished work and I was overdue. And for a couple of months, I wasn’t expecting that time, and I did find that quite a strange transition.” – *Josephine*

Both teaching and parenting can be all-consuming roles, as Josephine alludes to when she describes the ‘intense’ and ‘unforgiving’ working environment that had contributed to her sense of identity for ‘quite a long time’. Although she does not paint her school in the most positive light, here, Josephine describes the experience of being removed from this environment as ‘strange’ and ‘unusual’. Similarly, Jenny describes the conflict of leaving her teacher identity behind to become a new mother:

“I found it really difficult, first time round, and I think that was the setting because I really felt that I was missing out, and I was going to miss out on opportunities.” – *Jenny*

“The actual maternity leave was brilliant, obviously, first child. But at the same time, this sense of ‘ah, what am I missing?’. That’s an uncomfortable thing to admit to, I think.” – *Jenny*

Josephine describes a sensation of being in limbo, as far as her identity is concerned as, for a period of time, she is neither teacher, nor mother. Rather than just one shift, she identifies two periods of identity transition: firstly, a transition *from* teaching but not yet to motherhood, and then the transition *to* motherhood when her daughter arrived. The suddenness of the first transition feels like something that Josephine had little preparation for. Her teacher identity is not replaced immediately with her mother identity, but instead succeeded by an unexpected period of ‘waiting’, leaving Josephine without a clear identity at all for a short period of time, something she found ‘strange’, ‘unusual’, and ‘a challenge’. The second transition, from no clear identity to motherhood, Josephine describes as something that was ‘a challenge to adjust to’. We see again, here, a sense of newness, or unexpectedness; a ‘strange’ and ‘unusual’ learning experience that does not seem fully comfortable to Josephine.

For Jenny, however, the difficulty of transitioning into her new mother identity seems to come from a feeling of conflict: in becoming a mother, she suggests that she is having to give up her old identity as a teacher. This results in the feeling that she is ‘missing out’, specifically on professional opportunities, and is therefore sacrificing the career progression that was important to her. Her comment, ‘that’s an uncomfortable thing to admit to’, suggests that this conflict is exacerbated by the feeling that – as a new mother – she is not *allowed* to worry about ‘missing out’, and must be satisfied by the ‘obvious’ brilliance of a maternity leave with her first child. Jenny’s inability to feel this satisfaction fully because her career is still important to her seems to give rise to feelings of guilt as she battles with the sometimes limiting social narratives surrounding new mothers that suggest that both professional and

personal identities cannot co-exist, and that that the choice to find a balance and passion for both is somehow wrong.

Comments from four further participants demonstrate just how much of a ‘challenge’ becoming a mother can be. Stacey, Mylie and Marie-Ann all refer to suffering from post-natal depression following the birth of their children, and Seren refers to ‘anxiety’ and poor mental health following a traumatic labour. In the UK, between 10-15% of mothers experience post-natal depression or anxiety following the birth of their baby,¹³ a figure reflected amongst participants in this report.

“I had a really difficult time with him after he was born, with my post-natal depression.” – *Stacey*

“I suffered from postnatal depression after having both of my children.” – *Marie-Ann*

“I was also diagnosed with postnatal depression after the birth of my third child and had very little to no support from the school.” – *Mylie*

“For me, my maternity leave was quite fraught because of the anxiety that I had, the traumatic birth injury. My daughter suffered and when she was born, it meant there was certainly a lot of stress for the first couple of months while she had hospital treatment. And in that time, I didn’t want to think about any sort of work. I think that’s fair enough. And then as the months go on, I was literally just so focused on her wellbeing that anything outside of that was secondary or meaningless, to be honest. But I do think a lot of that was much of the illness that I had at the time. And my own mental health not being able to cope with anything apart from her wellbeing and maintaining being a mother to her while she was still an infant.” – *Seren*

Both Mylie and Seren refer to their employers when commenting on their post-natal depression and mental health, and for Mylie, this was the disappointment that she ‘had very little to no support from school’. As well as having an awareness of the frequency, symptoms and impact of post-natal depression, childcare charities and legal advisors suggest that employers can support employees by making ‘reasonable adjustments’ to working hours, or job roles.¹⁴ Communication between employer and employee – particularly verbal, rather than written communication – is emphasised as helpful in deciding the best way to support, as is the use of sick leave and pay, where necessary.¹⁵ However, like the participants in the previous section who found that their enjoyment of maternity leave was dependent on the ability to completely ‘switch off’ from school, Seren says that she ‘didn’t want to think about any sort of work, needing instead to focus on her daughter’s wellbeing, and her own ‘mental health’.

¹³ <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/post-natal-depression>

¹⁴ <https://www.gorvins.com/news-media/blog/postnatal-depression-returning-work/>

¹⁵ <https://www.nct.org.uk/life-parent/work-and-childcare/returning-work/returning-work-after-postnatal-depression>

Like Josephine, Seren describes a challenging transition to her new identity as a mother with the overwhelming experience of her 'traumatic birth injury' and her daughter's hospitalisation having a long-term impact on her experience of maternity leave. The opportunity to focus entirely on her daughter is not what makes Seren's maternity leave enjoyable, in the way we see in June and Nicki's comments in the previous section. Rather, Seren's maternity leave was 'fraught' with 'anxiety', filled with 'a lot of stress' and worries about her ability to 'cope'. She even goes so far as to describe the exclusion of anything apart from her daughter, and 'maintaining being a mother', as part of her 'illness'.

Pay

Maternity pay was raised frequently in response to questions about participants' maternity leave experiences with 8 of the 25 participants included in this report commenting explicitly on teachers' maternity pay.

For some, teachers' enhanced maternity pay of an additional 12 weeks at 50% of their normal salary, was an attractive package:

"I'd spoken to friends they'd all obviously been on maternity leave and suggested that because the front obviously the money goes down and down and down, that you work out how much money you're going to have, and you divide it over the period of time you've got so it didn't seem so bad." – *Olivia*

"The pay that you get, you know, was suitable, above, you know what many other people might get out there." – *Sophie*

"I was already doing supply, so I know if you're full time in a state school, you get really good maternity leave or paternity pay package, which obviously means you do have to go back at the end of it otherwise you have to pay back. But because I was only, I am only getting the state maternity pay, I didn't really have that financial tie. So I just thought no, you know, to go on maternity leave, and don't go back." – *Nicki*

However, for others, teachers' maternity pay was not considered enough:

"One thing I learned going to NCT classes and certainly as teachers is that our maternity package is not actually that great. And I was in groups with GPs and doctors and people who work for universities or private companies and they were leaving for them, they were starting their maternity certainly a lot earlier than I was. And the after that, they were possibly sometimes having up to, what – 14 months off? And once they'd added their holiday pay on and stuff." – *Seren*

Interestingly, both Seren and Sophie compare their pay to peers in other industries, and yet come to entirely different conclusions about how well teachers are paid on maternity leave. Sophie refers vaguely to 'what many other people might get', whereas Seren talks specifically

about the ‘GPs and doctors and people who work for universities or private companies’ who she found had better maternity packages than she did, particularly when they were able to use their statutory holiday entitlement to extend their leave. In fact, according to Pregnant then Screwed, ‘Enhanced Maternity Pay is offered by almost two thirds of UK organisations’ with the majority of these organisations offering full pay for 12-13 weeks¹⁶ – more than the 4 weeks of full pay, 2 weeks at 90%, and 12 weeks of half pay available to teachers.

Here, Seren comments on the impact of maternity pay, and the fact that increased pay influences an employee’s experience of leave, both enabling expectant mothers to take more time off in the later stages of pregnancy – ‘they were starting their maternity certainly a lot earlier than I was’ – and taking longer periods of leave once baby arrived – ‘after that, they were possible sometimes having up to, what – 14 months off?’ Marie-Ann’s comments also refer to the way that maternity pay restricted her choices around leave:

“I didn’t take long enough. I finished at Christmas, and then I was back in July for the last few weeks of term to do that cheeky thing where you get paid for the summer holidays.” – *Marie-Ann*

Whilst not an example of discrimination, Marie-Ann’s belief that she had to do ‘that cheeky thing’ of returning to work ahead of the summer holidays in order to get her six weeks of holiday pay, is a myth that complicates teachers’ return to work decisions. Unlike other industries, teachers have set holiday periods, but there is nothing that stipulates a condition to return to work a day, a week, or any period of time before the school holiday in order to receive full pay. Teachers can put the first day of the summer holidays as their return to work day without the obligation to physically return to school at all before September¹⁷.

For teachers, maternity pay and conditions *do* dictate that a mother must commit to returning to work for a period of 13 weeks in order to receive, or avoid paying back, their enhanced maternity pay (12 weeks at half pay). In resigning from their positions when pregnant or at the start of their maternity leave, Rochelle, Harriet and Nicki consciously chose to forgo this enhanced pay:

“When I found out I was pregnant with my daughter I handed my notice in at the end of that year so I was only able to have the statutory government maternity pay rather than the school maternity pay.” – *Rochelle*

“It meant that I had half of the benefits – or maybe a third because I was on statutory maternity pay – it wasn’t the full benefit package that I would have had if I’d been at my previous school.” – *Harriet*

“I was already doing supply, so ... because I was only, I am only getting the state maternity pay, I didn’t really have that financial tie. So I just thought no, you know, to go on maternity leave, and don’t go back.” – *Nicki*

¹⁶ <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/enhanced-maternity-pay/>

¹⁷ Unless the expectation of holiday work – e.g. results day – is included or implicit in their role, and is also required of other colleagues with the same role who are not on maternity or shared parental leave during the same period

For Kallie, the decision to sacrifice her enhanced pay came whilst she was on leave, and she was therefore required to pay back the 12 weeks of pay that she had received:

“I ended up paying my maternity leave back rather than going back from maternity because I just didn’t want to get back into that stressful environment while I was with my children.” – *Kallie*

“From a work point of view, it was like they were non-existent – contact from work and me during maternity leave – and I paid all my maternity pay back.” – *Kallie*

For all four participants, the culture of the school they were working at played a large part in their decision to resign. Nicki is a slightly different case in that she chose to become a supply teacher before becoming a mother, however conflicting values with her school, high levels of workload and what she felt was an overemphasis on the requirements of external monitoring bodies contributed to her decision to move to supply work. In other parts of their interview responses, however, Rochelle and Harriet describe their schools as places where staff were ‘punished’; where the needs of working parents were considered a ‘major imposition’ (Rochelle); where their values were ‘disconnected’ with that of the school; part-time working was denied, and where workload was ‘unsustainable’ (Harriet). Kallie explicitly refers to the ‘stressful environment’ of her school, describing the lack of contact from her colleagues as a negative thing, which contributed to her realisation that she did not want to return.

Despite ‘Financial’ being chosen in our initial survey as the top reason that women aged 30-39 remain in the profession, Rochelle, Harriet, Nicki and Kallie suggest that teachers’ enhanced maternity pay is not sufficient to retain teachers when they are unhappy in their working environments. Indeed, forgoing this ‘financial tie’ by resigning before starting maternity leave, or paying it back is implied to be a worthy sacrifice to escape toxic school cultures.

Length and Timing of Maternity Leave

Female teachers take an average of 8.5 months of maternity leave¹⁸, but amongst the 8 maternity leaves discussed by the 6 participants who shared the specific lengths of their leave, the most common time taken was between 9-11 months: 2 participants took the full 12 month entitlement for one or both of their maternity leaves, and 4 took between 9-11 months.

Comments from these 6 participants regarding the length or timing of their leave focused on three themes: whether the time they took was sufficient or too short, how work had influenced the amount of time taken, and how the physical condition of pregnancy or labour influenced the timing or length of their leave.

¹⁸ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/percentage_of_teachers_on_matern#incoming-1115502

Hanna and Mylie felt that their maternity leave was a suitable length

“I took 10 months maternity leave from September to the beginning of July. So had quite a long period away with one summer holiday on one side. I thought it went very well, the actual maternity leave.” – *Hanna*

“I felt that having the time off that you get in the UK is really beneficial in the fact that you can take up to a year.” – *Mylie*

Hanna attributes the timing of a September start to maternity leave as part of the reason that she was able to take ‘quite a long period away’. This timing would have allowed her to benefit from 12 additional weeks away from school because of the summer holidays before and following her leave. Mylie, however, contextualises the leave entitlement of women living in the UK, reminding us that – at 39 weeks – the UK has one of the longest periods of paid *maternity* leave of all OECD countries. Whilst this may seem like a privilege in comparison to countries like the US where women are entitled to no paid maternity leave, it is slightly deceptive in that, when combined with what the OECD terms ‘Paid parental and home care leave available to mothers’ the UK’s 39 weeks falls quickly into the worst 10 OECD countries. The Slovak Republic, for example, offer 164 weeks of total leave to mothers, and Norway offer 86.¹⁹

Marie-Ann, Olivia and Stephanie felt that they did not take a sufficient amount of maternity leave:

“I didn’t take long enough. I finished at Christmas, and then I was back in July for the last few weeks of term to do that cheeky thing where you get paid for the summer holidays.” – *Marie-Ann*

“I think I took nine months off and that didn’t really feel like long enough.” – *Marie-Ann*

“Then I went on maternity leave for a second time with my second daughter. I went a bit earlier with her. So, I had to go back a little bit earlier. And just because of the timings of school holidays and just remembering how exhausted I was.” – *Olivia*

“It wasn’t the best because I had my little boy in December. And part of my, trying to think of the wording... like part of the agreement for me going part-time was that I had to start in September, even though that was only nine months of my maternity leave, and actually, rightfully I should have had a year.” – *Stephanie*

As with Hanna, we see the summer holidays raised as a factor that impacts teachers’ decisions around the timing and length of their leave. Although the summer holidays extended Hanna’s leave, for both Marie-Ann and Olivia, there is the sense that the arrival of the summer holidays signalled a logical return to work date, part of the natural ebb and flow of the academic year. However, these set holidays meant that Marie-Ann felt that she had to

¹⁹ https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf

interrupt her nine months of leave with a brief return to work, and Olivia had to ‘go back a little bit earlier’. Indeed, even though she refers to the holidays dictating the timing of her maternity leave, Olivia describes returning to work mid-academic year, rather than in September, as ‘quite bizarre’:

“I worked full time up to my first daughter, and then I took maternity leave from 36 weeks. They were both born in February. So, I’m just trying to think what it was. So I took nearly a year and then I went back and it was quite bizarre because I went back at Christmas.” – *Olivia*

Olivia also refers to how ‘exhausted’ she was in the later stages of pregnancy, which influenced her decision to begin her leave ‘a bit earlier’ second time round than with her first baby. The physical implications of pregnancy and labour also impacted the timing of the start of Rebecca and Seren’s maternity leave:

“I was signed off after a couple of months of becoming pregnant, it was an unplanned pregnancy and because of my cerebral palsy I was sent to a specialist who basically said you need to be as still as possible. And so because of that my maternity leave was triggered early. Because I can only get so many weeks off sick before your maternity gets triggered.” – *Rebecca*

“So I didn’t actually start my maternity leave until 38 weeks, but I actually planned to start it at 39 but because of the C-section I had to bring it forward a week. And... by the time I got to that point, and I wanted to literally just ignore the idea of work for certainly quite some time.” – *Seren*

Like their enjoyment of leave, explored in previous sections, the length of four participants’ leave was impacted by their school or professional considerations:

“With my first child, I didn’t know how long I was going to take off because I was concerned at first that it might harm my professional development, because at that time I was an advanced skills teacher who was just on the cusp of leadership at my school. So initially, I didn’t know how long I’d take off, but eventually once I started maternity leave, I did actually take a year off.” – *Esther*

“Both times I had a full year off, and originally I was not going to go back to school at all because I really didn’t want to be that many hours but they convinced me that somehow that would be a good idea and I thought well, okay.” – *Sharon*

“Part of the agreement for me going part-time was that I had to start in September, even though that was only nine months of my maternity leave, and actually, rightfully I should have had a year.” – *Stephanie*

“I didn’t take long enough. I finished at Christmas, and then I was back in July for the last few weeks of term to do that cheeky thing where you get paid for the summer holidays.” – *Marie-Ann*

We have already explored Marie-Ann’s misunderstanding around her obligation to return to work ahead of the summer holidays to get paid, and Stephanie’s experience of discrimination in previous sections. Unlike Sharon, whose reluctant return to the classroom – earlier than she would have liked considering she originally had no intention of returning at all – was a direct result of her school’s persuasion, Esther’s anxieties that a longer leave would ‘harm’ her ‘professional development’ are an internal pressure created, potentially, by examples she has seen within her own setting, or in wider society. Indeed, Esther explains that she did not fully decide on the length of time she would take until her maternity leave had started.

Unfortunately, her concern that a full year out of work would act as a barrier to stepping into her first leadership position is not entirely unfounded. The MTPT Project’s annual membership survey indicates that mothers suffer from a middle leadership ceiling, particularly if the individual does not secure their first senior leadership position ahead of the birth of their first child²⁰. The IFS also tell us that ‘hourly wages for those who subsequently return are, on average, about 2% lower for each year that they have taken out of employment in the interim’ with this relationship being stronger ‘at 4% per year, for women with at least A-level qualifications’²¹ – which includes the vast majority of teachers. Finally, we know that women’s occupational mobility is also impacted when they return from maternity leave, with mothers more likely than fathers to work part-time, less likely to move employers for a promoted position, and at greater risk of downward occupational mobility when remaining with the same employer.²²

Conversely, Gauri – who took both her maternity leaves as a teacher in an international school – said that leaving the state sector enabled her to ‘take extra maternity leave’ without wondering about ‘all sorts of things’ ahead of, or during her leave:

“I’m not sure if I would have felt confident in the state sector here to have taken that route. I certainly would have felt apologetic for having to take extra maternity leave, I would have wondered about, I would have wondered about all sorts of things I didn’t feel that anybody held me accountable for in the school that I was in at the time.” –
Gauri

As we heard earlier from Sophie, Mylie and Jenny (commenting on her new employer), Gauri’s comments demonstrate that schools are more than capable of supporting and empowering teachers’ decisions around the start and length of their maternity leave, as well as their experiences at key transition points.

Communication with School

Employers are legally obliged to contact employees on maternity leave in three instances:

²⁰ www.mtpt.org.uk/light-research

²¹ <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/gender-wage-gap>

²² <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/2019/10/22/how-womens-employment-changes-after-having-a-child>

- If a new or promoted position becomes available, with information of how and when to apply for the role
- If possible or planned redundancies occur
- To inform the employee of any restructure that affects her job

The EHRC outline that employers can make ‘reasonable contact’ with employees during maternity leave, which could include such things as invitations to social events, to inform employees of any changes or developments at work, even if these do not directly impact them, or to make arrangements for KIT / SPLIT days or the return to work. However, the EHRC do caution employers against ‘repeated and persistent contact’ which could be considered ‘harassment’.²³

Comments from 6 of the interview participants included in this report fall into three categories: they felt they had sufficient contact from their school or colleagues, not enough contact, or too much contact.

Kallie and Hanna comment on the impact of insufficient contact from school and former colleagues:

“I didn’t have any contact from the school whatsoever when I went on maternity leave. My friends had contacted me. I’d really worked my bat out before I left and then I had a baby and literally – I got asked by a friend what my baby’s name was and how much he weighed but then was never contacted by the school to say congratulations or anything like that; so I just felt really... like, what did I do all that for? And then I didn’t get – there was nobody in contact with me for KIT days.” – *Kallie*

“From a work point of view, it was like they were non-existent – contact from work and me during maternity leave – and I paid all my maternity pay back.” – *Kallie*

“The second time I wanted to apply for something it wasn’t advertised, while I was on maternity leave, publicly so I missed the application deadline. It was just word of mouth in the department – no one informed me.” – *Hanna*

In Kallie’s comments we hear an echo of the perception of value we saw in the earlier section, *Experiences of Late Pregnancy*. There is a sense of injustice at having given her all to her school – ‘worked my bat out before I left’ – and then feeling as if she has been forgotten about – ‘I didn’t have any contact from the school whatsoever’, ‘it was like they were non-existent’. Kallie’s sense of confusion and almost betrayal is seen when she says, ‘I just felt really... like, what did I do all that for?’

As well as feeling forgotten about herself, Kallie’s comments demonstrate the importance of the identity transition and shift in priorities of becoming a mother, which she previously described as a ‘life changer’. She expresses disappointment that her school and colleagues

²³ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/faqs-employees/during-maternity-leave-contact-employer>

did not recognise her new priorities by showing more interest in her baby: she ‘was never contacted by the school to say congratulations or anything like that’ and even her friends only asked about fairly basic details concerning her child, ‘I got asked by a friend what my baby’s name was and how much he weighed’.

Like Jenny, who found that she ‘wasn’t the person to do that job anymore’ once she became pregnant, from Kallie’s perspective, there is an implication that her identity as a worker capable of working ‘her bat out’ is valued, but that she is not valued as a human being. Indeed, she feels that the significant personal event of becoming a parent is a ‘non-existent’ occurrence as far as her school is concerned, leading her to question whether she wants to return to an environment that does not recognise her worth as a person.

In both Kallie and Hanna’s comments, we also see the professional impact of insufficient contact from schools. The discriminatory nature of Hanna’s comments have already been discussed earlier in this report but the failure by her school to adhere to the legal requirements to contact her to inform her of the job vacancy she references, and how to apply, results in her potentially missing out on an opportunity for progression. As Kallie was not offered KIT days, she did not have the opportunity to return to school to better understand their silence, or to remind her of both the positives and negatives of this working environment. As a result of this total lack of contact, Kallie chose to pay back her enhanced maternity pay and resign. In both instances, we see mother-teachers struggling to progress, or remain in the workforce.

Conversely, Marie-Ann, Laura and Rosie describe what too much contact from an employer during maternity leave can look like:

“The actual maternity leave itself I think was okay but a colleague quite often liked to text me and I think she thought she was being helpful by trying to keep me in the loop but actually I didn’t really want to think about it because I just wanted to focus on the baby.” – *Marie-Ann*

“You can’t really get it out of your head, obviously I was still in touch with colleagues, especially when I knew I was going back after the first one.” – *Laura*

“I also stayed in contact with the school by email quite intensively during my maternity leave, because there were several areas that, whilst they had provided cover in a manner, they needed my input or advice on moving those areas forward. So I did several projects in the evening and things whilst on maternity leave. I stayed very, very in contact with the school during that time.” – *Rosie*

Marie-Ann and Rosie’s comments illustrate the importance of agreeing on regularity and forms of communication with an employee ahead of their leave. Although Marie-Ann admits that her colleague ‘thought she was being helpful’, text (as oppose to email or pre-arranged telephone or video calls) is a fairly personal and intrusive means of communication, difficult to ignore. Whilst Marie-Ann’s acceptance that her colleague’s intention was to ‘keep [her] in the loop’ and be ‘helpful’, the lack of communication *about* preferred communication means

that Marie-Ann felt that there was too much contact from school at a time when she 'didn't really want to think about' work, because she wanted to 'focus on the baby'.

Equally, although Rosie states that she did 'several projects' for her school because there 'were several areas that... they needed my input or advice on', there is a sense that she has been coerced into this, and feels a sense of obligation towards the school, rather than fully embracing this contact. This seems to be in part because the school did not think through her maternity cover effectively, leaving them with essential gaps whilst Rosie was on leave, which could only be filled by her knowledge and expertise. The use of the phrases 'quite intensively', and 'very, very in contact' do not feel wholly positive, and there is the sense here that Rosie felt victim to poor planning from her school, leading to this unwanted communication.

In comparison, Laura's comment reveals that she agreed to retain contact with colleagues to maintain a sense of continuity when she knew she was returning to work. However, despite consenting to this contact, Laura reveals that it was actually unwelcome because it meant that she could not stop thinking about work at a time when she actually wanted to step off 'the conveyor belt of constant' and – as shown by her eventual resignation – needed a break from teaching entirely.

Comments from Hanna and Josephine demonstrate that what constitutes as sufficient contact can vary from individual to individual:

"Once the baby had come, I didn't really think about work an awful lot, to be honest, and work didn't really contact me. And I really enjoyed not having the stress and the pressure that I'd had previously. And it was so nice just to be able to focus my attention on my family." – *Josephine*

"I stayed in contact with people at work and went in for my keeping in touch days. It was all going very well." – *Hanna*

Like Marie-Ann, Josephine's preference was to 'focus [her] attention on [her] family', and although she doesn't seem to be the one in control of this contact – 'work didn't really contact me' – this lack of contact is perceived to be positive because she associates work with 'stress' and 'pressure'. In comparison, Hanna's comment, 'I stayed in contact' possibly suggests that she felt she had autonomy over this contact and in fact, it is only when she realised that this communication had not been fully transparent – that she lacked control – that she felt disappointed and 'very angry'. Interestingly, the situation that Josephine describes as enjoyable, are the exact conditions that damaged Kallie's sense of self-worth, and a similar sense of betrayal and exclusion in Hanna's earlier comments lead both participants to question the extent to which they are valued by their schools, and eventually resign.

KIT days

KIT days (or SPLIT days for employees taking periods of shared parental leave) are days that employees can complete work without curtailing their maternity, adoption or shared parental leave. Employees on maternity or adoption leave are entitled to 10 KIT days, and if they have taken a period of shared parental leave, a further 20 SPLIT days, all of which have to be mutually agreed by both employee and employer. KIT days do not have to be paid, but SPLIT days *do*; however, the EHRC and many other HR organisations and parenting charities encourage KIT days to be paid at a fair day rate. Any work completed by an employee during maternity leave on these KIT or SPLIT days is entirely voluntary, and must be mutually agreed by employer and employee. Although an employer can ask for work to be completed, they cannot expect it or treat an employee unfavourably if she refuses to work whilst on maternity leave.²⁴

The purpose of KIT and SPLIT days are to keep an employee up to date during an extended period of leave, and to ease them back in to their workplace so that this transition is smooth and positive for both employee and the organisation. However, MTPT Project data suggests that only 76% of teachers are aware of their entitlement to KIT or SPLIT days, and 29% did not take any KIT or SPLIT days during one or more periods of maternity, adoption or shared parental leave. Positively, however, 96% of those who did take either KIT or SPLIT days were paid for them, or took days off in lieu.²⁵

Five participants referred explicitly to KIT days in their comments, and we have already from Hanna who ‘went in for [her] KIT days’ and Kallie who was disappointed that ‘nobody [was] in contact with [her] for KIT days’. Sentiments similar to Kallie’s are expressed by Catherine, Rosie and Kinga, with these four participants representing the 24% of respondents to The MTPT Project’s KIT days survey who lacked awareness, or were otherwise unclear about this entitlement:

“When I was on maternity leave when I was teaching, basically they just left me to it on my maternity leave. I wasn’t really offered KIT days. I didn’t really know what a KIT day was. I went into the school a couple of times. One time it was kind of formal and I sat down with the head and talked about coming back on part-time. But it was an offer of, ‘do you want to come in and do a day’s work if you’re coming back into the classroom?’” – *Catherine*

“I was quite grateful and relieved to finally go on maternity leave. I didn’t take any formal keeping in touch days during maternity. However, I did work several days voluntarily because I was the only person in the school qualified to assess and moderate a particular qualification that was going through and there was one student taking a qualification we needed to certify that year so I went and worked one to one with him. To be honest, the school hadn’t explained, sorry the LEA’s maternity documentation hadn’t explained that keeping in touch days would be paid days. If I

²⁴ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/faqs-employers/managing-maternity-leave-contact>

²⁵ <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1tz8iLJjXrrPoX80gnLoznqwgKNDd967NCS8fBwyp8/edit#responses>

had been aware of that, I would have actually requested those days that I went into work with the student on the level three qualification and had actually been paid because I was working. And I was keeping something running for the school, essentially, during that time, but I didn't know and it wasn't in the documentation, and I only found out afterwards through actually something was commented on on the internet. I also stayed in contact with the school by email quite intensively during my maternity leave, because there were several areas that, whilst they had provided cover in a manner, they needed my input or advice on moving those areas forward. So I did several projects in the evening and things whilst on maternity leave. I stayed very, very in contact with the school during that time." – *Rosie*

"In February, I was being contacted to ask what my plans were, could I go in for meetings? So up until that point, it was absolutely blissful. Following that point, it wasn't. I'd made arrangements with my head teacher for what I was going to do in terms of KIT days and some work that I was going to do with that. And then they decided that that wasn't going to happen. You know, admittedly, I know how all school budgets are really tight and really difficult, but I was pretty much discouraged from doing any KIT days or anything in addition, to ease my coming back. And so it ended up that I just had a few meetings, which were really traumatic, with many mixed messages." – *Kinga*

Both Catherine and Rosie describe their lack of understanding of KIT days. Catherine says that she 'didn't really know what a KIT day was', and Rosie states that 'the school hadn't explained, sorry the LEA's maternity documentation hadn't explained that keeping in touch days would be paid.' In both cases, there is a sense that the school have taken advantage of these participants' lack of awareness as – although KIT days do not *have* to be paid – payment arrangements have to be mutually agreed by employer and employee. Rosie's comments in particular reveal this sense of indignation over discovering too late – through the internet rather than her school – that she could have requested payment for her time and the work completed. Her annoyance is emphasised by the fact that she stresses that she 'stayed very, very in contact with the school' during her maternity leave, completing 'several projects' and working 'in the evening'. Although she says that she did this 'voluntarily', it is because she did not know that the option of payment existed. There is the sense from all three participants that they simply did as they were told by their school, uninformed about their maternity entitlements.

We cannot assume, however, from Kinga, Kallie and Rosie's comments, that KIT days or payment was withheld by the school out of malice or with the intention of deliberately taking advantage of these participants. Rosie explicitly states that details around KIT day payments were not included 'in the documentation' from her LEA, and KIT days are not mentioned in the Burgundy Book's Maternity Scheme. It is therefore possible that Kallie and Catherine's head teachers were also unaware of KIT days and how they worked. In Kinga's case, however, KIT day arrangements were initially made, but then she was 'pretty much discouraged from doing any KIT days or anything in addition, to ease [her] coming back'.

Whilst Kinga assumes this was because of ‘budget’, the CIPD believe that KIT days support organisations with staff retention, and should be ‘a core element of an employer’s strategy to build an inclusive working environment for working parents and encourage their return to work’.²⁶ KIT day may have an immediate impact on school budgets, but as we see in this report, poor communication during maternity leave – including the denial, or misuse of KIT or SPLIT days – contributes to teacher attrition. In the long-term, recruiting and inducting new staff members into a school can be far more costly than offering 10-20 paid KIT or SPLIT days to help retain an experienced and familiar colleague.

The activities completed by Catherine, Rosie and Kinga are all typical KIT days tasks: easing the return to work with meetings and updates, email communication, reorientating themselves in the school environment, supporting with qualifications, teaching and administration where their expertise was needed, meetings to negotiate their return to work conditions. However, because these are not recognised as formal KIT days, all three participants are left expressing resentment (Rosie), distress (Kinga – ‘really traumatic, with many mixed messages’) and confusion (Catherine).

Echoing Kallie, who wonders why she why she ‘worked [her] bat out’ before starting her leave, Rosie’s use of phrases such as ‘the school hadn’t explained’, ‘I only found out afterwards’, ‘I would have actually requested those days... had actually been paid’, ‘I didn’t know’, demonstrate that she feels unappreciated and undervalued by her school despite the fact that she was very much needed as the sole expert in her particular subject area. Similarly, the change in plans for Kinga, without her input – ‘they decided that that wasn’t going to happen’ – was destabilising at a time when mothers need reassurance and a sense of security. Again, there is the sense here that Kinga feels cheated and unvalued by her school – a theme that raised consistently during this report.

None of these experiences deliver the supportive transition for which KIT days are intended, and only Rosie’s account provides the school with significant benefits. However, this benefit is not mutual. The ‘several projects’, ‘evening’ work and intense communication with her school suggest that Rosie’s maternity leave, which began with gratitude and relief, turned into a busy and tiring period, even without mentioning the demands of a new baby.

Impact on the Return to Work

The culmination of these experiences of maternity leave directly impacted participants’ decisions and feelings around the return to work. 7 participants (27%) did not return to teaching at all following their maternity leave, a higher percentage than the 13% attrition rate of returners in the education sector²⁷, and even the 17% of mothers who leave the workforce following maternity leave across all industries.²⁸

²⁶ https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/labour-market-outlook-focus-on-working-parents_tcm18-17048.pdf

²⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214367/rrep777.pdf

²⁸ <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/2019/10/22/how-womens-employment-changes-after-having-a-child>

“I ended up paying my maternity leave back rather than going back from maternity because I just didn’t want to get back into that stressful environment while I was with my children.” – *Kallie*

“It meant that I had half of the benefits – or maybe a third because I was on statutory maternity pay – it wasn’t the full benefit package that I would have had if I’d been at my previous school but if I’d taken that then I would have been locked into returning to that school and I just didn’t feel like that would have been a healthy place for me to be.” – *Harriet*

“Well, in my first job, I was working at a school in London for seven years and I actually didn’t really have maternity leave because I left when I was pregnant with my daughter. And then I’m on maternity leave now but it’s not from teaching.” – *Abigail*

“The second maternity leave I went on was a lot more enjoyable because I made the decision I wasn’t going to go back.” – *Laura*

“With my son, my second one, I worked whilst I was pregnant part-time in two different schools which was fine. But then I didn’t go back to teaching after him, because I knew I wanted a third and didn’t want to let anyone down. And then since having a third, I don’t think I’ll be going back to teaching for quite a while, probably until he’s at school.” – *Monica*

“When I found out I was pregnant with my daughter I handed my notice in at the end of that year so I was only able to have the statutory government maternity pay rather than the school maternity pay.” – *Rochelle*

“I was already doing supply, so I know if you’re full time in a state school, you get really good maternity leave or paternity pay package, which obviously means you do have to go back at the end of it otherwise you have to pay back. But because I was only, I am only getting the state maternity pay, I didn’t really have that financial tie. So I just thought no, you know, to go on maternity leave, and don’t go back.” – *Nicki*

Four of these participants give specific reasons for their decision not to return to teaching following their maternity leave. For Kallie and Harriet, it was because of the ‘stressful’ and unhealthy school environments that they had left. Harriet describes returning as being ‘locked in’ to her school, choosing to escape this sense of entrapment expressed by participants in our previous report, **We’re on a Road to Nowhere**, who *had* returned to work, and Kallie states that working in the ‘stressful environment’ of her school may have had a negative impact on her own children, or the quality of attention she was able to offer to them. This sense of freedom is also seen in Laura and Nicki’s comments, with Nicki’s decision not to return releasing her from the ‘financial tie’ of teachers’ maternity pay conditions, and in Monica’s comments we see the freedom to continue with plans to expand her family without worrying about her professional commitments.

Kallie, Laura and Monica choose to resign as a lifestyle choice, following the ‘big, big life changer’ of maternity leave. Laura states that her maternity leave was ‘more enjoyable’ once she knew she had chosen her family over the ‘conveyor belt’ of her school. Similarly, Monica describes how her family plans, and the decision to have a second and third child, shifts her priorities onto her family, and away from her professional life, which she describes simply as ‘fine’. She also alludes to important values that influence her decision-making when she says she ‘didn’t want to let anyone down’, and states that she probably won’t go back to teaching until her third child is ‘at school’.

Here we see lifestyle choices based on the values of family, stability and being present already commented on by Josephine, Nicki and June in the previous section, *Positive Experiences of Maternity Leave* who wanted to ‘focus all [their] attention on [their] family’, provide ‘stability’ for their children as the ‘primary caregiver’ and who ‘didn’t want to miss anything’ in their children’s lives. There is a sense of an either / or condition in all of these comments, emphasised by Monica’s statement that she ‘didn’t want to let anyone down’: these participants felt they could be *either* teachers *or* mothers, but not both in a manner that aligned with their values.

When participants did return to work following their maternity leave, they expressed feelings of apprehension and reluctance.

“I’ve got to admit, the second time, I didn’t know what job I was going to be coming back to. It’s like my role changed each time. The academy chain by that point was just moving people around.” – *Esther*

“Both times I had a full year off, and originally I was not going to go back to school at all because I really didn’t want to be that many hours but they convinced me that somehow that would be a good idea and I thought well, okay.” – *Sharon*

In Esther’s comments, we see the possibility of another example of discriminatory practice. According to the protections offered to pregnant women and employees on maternity leave, Esther had the right to return to the same, or a similar job on the same or similar terms. We know that Esther took more than 26 weeks of maternity leave, in which case she is legally entitled to return to ‘the same terms’ as before she left. However, if there have been ‘significant changes to the organisation’, employees can be offered ‘a similar job’ with the same pay, benefits, holiday entitlements, seniority and location. Depending on *how* Esther’s ‘role changed each time’ and *how* she was moved around by the academy would have determined whether she was discriminated against, or not.

Regardless of the legal status of Esther’s return, the fact that she ‘didn’t know what job [she] was going to be coming back to’, and experienced change ‘each time’ she returned from maternity leave is destabilising at a time when she is already managing significant change in her personal life. Her lack of understanding of the details of her role suggest poor or insufficient communication on behalf of her school, and a lack of assurance that it will be ‘the same’ or ‘similar’ to her previous job. What’s more, her comment, ‘The academy chain by that point was just moving people around’ implies a functional reorganisation with little

consideration for the human elements of the staff team. As we have already seen from Jenny, Rosie, Kallie and Kinga, such behaviour from schools and leadership teams, impacts teacher-mothers' sense of self-worth and their understanding of how they are valued as employees and human beings.

Conversely, Sharon's school seem to value her so highly that they make an effort to convince her to return to work, despite the fact that she had decided not 'to go back to school at all'. In agreeing to return, even though she didn't want 'that many hours', Sharon compromises on what she really wanted at that point in her life – to stay at home following her maternity leave. Although Sharon was temporarily retained, like Monica, Nicki, Josephine and June, her priority at this point is not her working life, so this compromise is not sustainable. Eventually, she reverts to her original decision and chooses to leave teaching completely.

Suggestions for Schools and Individuals

Maternity leave is a particularly vulnerable time for teacher attrition, with schools suffering from the sometimes-avoidable loss of experienced staff familiar with their setting. The arrival of a baby often adds a new dimension to teachers' sense of perspective, and strengthens their commitment to their core values. A culmination of positive and proactive, rather than neglectful or negative, actions are required by schools as employers to demonstrate the extent to which they value mother-teachers in order to create the conditions that will persuade them to stay in the profession.

In general terms, the responses from the 25 participants in this report have indicated that schools can take the following actions to support mother-teachers aged 30-39 to have a positive late pregnancy and maternity leave experience:

During Late Pregnancy / Expectancy

- Ensure that pregnant and expectant colleagues preparing for a period of parental leave remain included in school life and decision-making, even if the outcomes of these decisions will be delivered whilst they are absent on leave
- Ensure that communication during expectancy remains open and transparent, and teachers have ample opportunity to request physical, professional or emotional support if they need it
- Review relevant policy documents to ensure they include accurate, updated and full information regarding the pregnancy, expectancy, maternity, adoption and shared parental leave, and return to work periods
- Provide pregnant and expectant colleagues with a clear timeline of the entitlements and support they can expect from their school as an employer in the build up to, and during their parental leave
- Wherever possible, provide time for colleagues to hand-over to their maternity cover, either by recruiting so that there is overlap, or by protecting time for handover meetings during the school day

- Plan for a window of time where a pregnant or expectant colleague may decide (or be forced) to begin their parental leave so that they can make personal decisions free from the pressure of professional considerations
- Decide upon the frequency, mode, point and purpose of contact that colleagues want during parental leave *before* their leave begins
- Inform teachers of the legal requirement to contact them when vacancies arise, if there are changes that affect their job role, or if planned / possible redundancies are to occur
- Provide training to middle leaders, line managers, senior leaders and HR leads to avoid instances of pregnancy or maternity discrimination
- Ensure a relevant contact in your school (e.g. line manager, senior leader, HR lead or mental health / wellbeing champions) have undertaken training in how to support colleagues suffering with peri- or post-natal depression or anxiety if this is raised as a concern
- Provide clear and accessible information about maternity pay, and signpost colleagues to organisations such as Maternity Money and Shared Parental Leave for Teachers
- Highlight school- and Trust-specific benefits such as being paid for bank holidays falling during the parental leave period, or health and benefits packages that may be included in employee assistance programmes
- Change financially punitive policies around maternity and shared parental leave pay and entitlements at school / Trust level by abolishing the need to be employed by a school for a set period to qualify for enhanced maternity pay, or shared parental leave and pay

During Maternity / Shared Parental Leave

- Celebrate the arrival of a colleague's baby with cards, gifts, an email or an in-person celebration, as appropriate to your school context
- Understand that becoming a parent affects teachers' priorities and values in different ways – avoid assumptions around how this transition in identity may have impacted an individual
- Ensure access to professional development, training and networking events for colleagues on parental leave
- Fund coaching for colleagues over the parental leave period as part of their CPD entitlement

Preparing to Return

- Offer flexible working and reasonable adjustments to support colleagues with the physical and emotional impacts of pregnancy and the post-natal period, particularly when colleagues are returning to work having taken less than 12 months' leave
- Emphasise to colleagues that they can return to work on the first day of a holiday period, and do not need to return for any form of "buffer" time to get paid in full over the holidays
- Change financially punitive policies around maternity and shared parental leave pay and entitlements at school / Trust level by waiving the requirement to return to work for a period of 13 weeks in order to pay back enhanced maternity pay

- When recruiting a teacher currently on a period of maternity or shared parental leave, negotiate terms to free them from restrictions surrounding their enhanced maternity pay with their current school
- Leave colleagues to decide on a return to work date that suits them – assume they will take the full 12 month entitlement, and make contingency plans in case they decide on an earlier return
- Offer, and pay KIT and SPLIT days at a fair day rate
- Agree on mutually beneficial tasks by asking teachers to submit a list of activities that they would like to include, which can be completed both on site, remotely, or through different CPD providers
- Welcome babies onto site for KIT and SPLIT days wherever possible
- Offer flexible working to support teachers to define a lifestyle that aligns with their values when they become parents
- Offer sabbaticals (i.e. protect teachers' roles for an increased period of time) for colleagues who want to spend longer than 12 months at home with their children
- Fund Return to Work coaching as standard for colleagues returning from maternity, adoption or shared parental leave

For individuals who have read this report feeling that they are in the same or a similar position to our 25 contributing participants, but are not yet ready to leave teaching forever, there are some ways that you can gain autonomy over your late pregnancy or maternity leave experience:

During Late Pregnancy / Expectancy

- Request the following policy documents during your pregnancy / expectancy and set aside time to read them properly, and ask relevant questions to your line manager / HR lead / external networks:
 - Pregnancy, Maternity and Adoption Policy
 - Paternity and Shared Parental Leave Policy
 - Flexible Working Policy
- Communicate (in writing) how you would like to be contacted during your parental leave, if at all, by whom, and with what frequency *before* you begin your leave
- Seek support from your union, Pregnant then Screwed, Maternity Action or CitizensUK if you feel you are being discriminated against on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity
- Connect with organisations such as Shared Parental Leave for Teachers and Maternity Money to accurately understand your entitlements around maternity and shared parental leave pay

During Maternity / Shared Parental Leave

- Acknowledge that a period of maternity or parental leave may give you time to reflect upon your priorities, values and intentions for your personal and professional life going forwards
- Take advantage of coaching during parental leave to articulate what you want from your personal and professional life once you become a parent

- Identify and commit to strengthening your boundaries, so that you feel confident saying 'no' to the things you don't want, and 'yes' to those you do
- Use online and in-person networks to retain a sense of your identity beyond motherhood, if this is important to you
- Consider using your parental leave to explore new schools with more positive cultures if you are not ready to resign fully from teaching
- Remember that parental leave can be a time of professional opportunity, if you would like it to be

Preparing to Return

- Share a list of KIT / SPLIT day tasks that you would like to complete with your line manager and identify which could be completed remotely, which you would like to come into school to complete, and where you will need to attend with your baby
- Remember that KIT / SPLIT days can be used for your own professional development, or to complete activities that will ease your return to work
- Explore how flexible working could give you the right balance of time with your children, and time at work

Want to find out more?

If you have any further questions about this report or our findings about teachers' experiences of late pregnancy and maternity leave, and how these contribute to their decision to leave, aged 30-39, please get in touch. We love engaging with professional and academic dialogue around things we might have missed, questions we haven't answered or ideas we might not have thought of.

More information about The MTPT Project's training workshops and consultancy for school leaders, line managers, and HR leads can be found at www.mtpt.org.uk/cpd-workshops

More information about the MTPT Project's own coaching programmes for teachers on parental leave, returning to work, or balancing teaching / leadership with young families can be found at www.mtpt.org.uk/coaching

If you are an academic or a student and our work is helping with your area of study, we're more than happy to chat informally, or organise more formal events or presentations to share this work with a wider audience.

Just email Emma Sheppard on mtptproject@gmail.com or find her spending too much time on Twitter [@maternityCPD](https://twitter.com/maternityCPD)