

# 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.*

## **09. Take Good Care of My Baby**

*January 2023*

In both our initial survey, 'compatible childcare logistics' ('stayers' survey) and 'childcare logistics' ('leavers' survey) were provided as options that respondents could select as a reason that had contributed to their decision to leave, or stay in teaching aged 30-39. In the 'leavers' survey, this was one of three options that indicated that respondents were mothers as, to avoid subconsciously influencing participants' responses, we did not ask explicitly about their parenting identity. Of the 498 survey respondents who had left teaching aged 30-39, 32% chose 'childcare logistics' as a reason that influenced their decision, providing strong evidence of the motherhood penalty impacting retention amongst this demographic.

28 teachers who confirmed that they were mothers (or who had left to focus on fertility treatment in order to become a mother) took part in the follow up qualitative interviews. Of these 28, 15 referred to childcare as a reason for leaving teaching – either because they had chosen this as one of their initial survey options, or when expanding on the following reasons for leaving in the telephone interviews:

- Family commitments – children
- Lifestyle choice – i.e. wanting to work fewer hours, seeking a better work-life balance or to pursue other interests
- Lack of flexible / part-time working arrangements in teaching
- Needed a break – i.e. you intend on returning to the classroom at some point
- Mental health / wellbeing
- School culture
- Logistics / commute / change of location

Childcare was also raised in response to all three follow up questions posed only to the qualitative telephone interview participants:

- Are there any other factors that have influenced your decision to stay in teaching that you would like to talk to me about now?
- What conditions, if any, would tempt you to return to teaching in the future?
- The main area of focus of The MTPT Project is the impact of parental leave on a female teacher's working life. Can you describe your maternity leave experience(s) to me?

The earliest date that one of the 15 teachers included in this report left teaching was 2014 with 9 teachers leaving in 2017 when the average cost of 25 hours' of nursery provision was £117 per week for under twos, and £113 for two year olds. Wraparound care through after-

school clubs or childminders cost between £53-67 per week, on average. Nursery fees remained largely unchanged between 2016 to 2017<sup>1</sup>, but increased by 6% by 2018<sup>2</sup> when a further 5 participants included in this report left teaching.

3- and 4- year olds in England have benefitted from 15 hours of free childcare per week since 2010 (with some 2 year olds receiving the same provision since 2013) and April 2017 saw the introduction of tax-free childcare which enabled eligible parents to claim back £2 for every £8 spent on childcare with a cap of £2,000 per year<sup>3</sup>. In September 2017 the government extended their free childcare offer to 30 hours per week for 3-4 year olds and some 2 year olds, as long as families met criteria regarding working hours and family income<sup>4</sup>.

Whilst these new measures sound positive, the tax-free childcare scheme replaced the previous employee childcare voucher scheme, which closed to new applicants in October 2018. Parents who had signed up to this scheme before October 2018 could continue to use it as long as they met certain employment criteria. The childcare voucher scheme enabled parents in work to contribute up to £234 per month to a childcare account that could be used to pay approved providers. If both parents' employers offered childcare vouchers, this could represent financial support of up to £5,832 per year – significantly more than the £2,000 per child per year offered by the tax-free childcare scheme. For families with up to two children, therefore, the childcare voucher scheme would have been more beneficial.

It is important to note that 7 of the teachers in this report worked full time at the point of leaving teaching which, according to the 2019 Teacher Workload Survey, could have meant that they worked anywhere between 49-54 hours per week<sup>5</sup>. Where partner, or family support was not available for these teachers, the cost of childcare for 2 year olds, and under twos, would have been more than double that cited in the Coram Family and Childcare Trust reports and the 30 hours of free childcare would not have fully covered the childcare needed for a teacher's working week. These seven teachers could therefore have been faced with nursery fees of up to £234 per week – more than £1,000 per month – per child aged two or under.

Government reports also indicate that take up of the new tax-free childcare scheme introduced in 2017 was far lower than expected. Although 1.3 million families are eligible to benefit from this support, only 282,000 – just 22% – were signed up in March 2021. Research by .YONDER on behalf of HM Revenue and Customs found that the top barriers to take up included lack of awareness of the scheme, or the assumption that combined earnings were too high to make families eligible for the scheme (20%), and the continued use of childcare

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<sup>1</sup> Harding, C., Wheaton, B and Butler, A., *Childcare Survey 2017*, for Coram Family and Childcare Trust, available at: <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare-survey-2017>

<sup>2</sup> Harding, C. and Cottell, J., *Childcare Survey 2018*, for Coram Family and Childcare Trust, available at: <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare-survey-2018>

<sup>3</sup> Childcare Choices, *Help Paying for Your Childcare*, available at: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education, *30 hours free childcare, England, Autumn term 2017 (Experimental Statistics)*, 19 December, 2017, available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/668829/SFR78\\_2017\\_Main\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/668829/SFR78_2017_Main_Text.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Walker, M., Worth, J. and Van den Brande, J., *Teacher workload survey 2019*, for Cooper Gibson Research, Department for Education, October 2019, available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/855933/teacher\\_workload\\_survey\\_2019\\_main\\_report\\_amended.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/855933/teacher_workload_survey_2019_main_report_amended.pdf)

vouchers (19%). Single parents and fathers were less likely to know about the scheme than mothers, or parents in couples. A further 13% of research participants felt they had no need for the scheme as they used the 30 hours of free childcare, 12% felt they had no time to apply for the support, and 12% did not understand the scheme<sup>6</sup>.

Despite the support offered through the 15-30 free hours, tax free childcare and – before this – workplace childcare vouchers, childcare costs have continued to rise since 2010. In 2022 at the time of writing, the TUC report that ‘childcare fees have increased by nearly half (44 per cent) for parents with kids aged under 2’<sup>7</sup>. With the Guardian reporting that ‘nursery for under-twos costs parents in England 65% of wage’, and the ‘number of women not working to look after family has risen by 5% in past year’<sup>8</sup>, the barrier presented by childcare described by the teacher-mothers in this report are as pertinent – if not *more* pertinent – five years later.

Indeed, a 2022 report from the IPPR and Save the Children described the current financial support available for childcare as ‘a patchwork of government-funded support’ that leaves ‘parents battling against eye-wateringly high costs’ and providers ‘struggling to keep their doors open’. Unsurprisingly, the report found that access to childcare ‘is a critical gender equality issue in the UK labour market’ and that current ‘constraints continue to disproportionately affect mothers – who are a majority of primary caregivers and second earners in couples with children, and who make up the vast majority of lone parents’<sup>9</sup>.

The rising costs of childcare experienced by the teachers in this study, and those accessing childcare in 2022 at the time of writing, are at the forefront of social discontent and political discourse. In addition to the IPPR and Save the Children report, the autumn of 2022 saw thousands of parents protesting as part of Pregnant then Screwed’s March of the Mummies, calling for more affordable childcare, flexible working as standard and improved parental leave pay<sup>10</sup>; the agreement that childcare should be defined and funded as essential infrastructure in new builds, and regeneration projects<sup>11</sup>; and ongoing debate in parliament, and calls from MPs such as Bridget Phillipson and Stella Creasy for increased investment in childcare<sup>12</sup>.

Unaffordable childcare is a cross-sector issue, and the teaching profession are not immune to the impact that this has on parents’ – particularly mothers’ – ability to participate in the labour market. 8 of the participants included in this report were middle leaders or TLR holders at

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor, S., *Tax-Free Childcare: barriers to sign up*, Yonder Consulting, HMRC Research Report 630, September 2021, available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1062615/HMRC\\_research\\_report\\_630\\_Tax\\_Free\\_Childcare\\_barriers\\_to\\_sign\\_up.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1062615/HMRC_research_report_630_Tax_Free_Childcare_barriers_to_sign_up.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> TUC, *Cost of Childcare has risen by over £2,000 a year since 2010*, 13 June 2022, available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/cost-childcare-has-risen-over-ps2000-year-2010>

<sup>8</sup> Topping, A., *Nursery for under-twos costs parents in England 65% of wage*, Guardian, Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2022, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/oct/07/nursery-under-twos-costs-parents-england-65-percent-wage>

<sup>9</sup> Statham, R., Freedman, S. and Parkes, H., *Delivering a Childcare Guarantee*, Institute of Public Policy Research and Save the Children, December 2022, available at: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-12/delivering-a-childcare-guarantee-dec-22.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Abdul, G., *Underpaid, undervalued: March of the Mummies protests take place across UK*, The Guardian, Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/oct/29/march-of-the-mummies-childcare-protests-uk>

<sup>11</sup> Walker, P., *Ministers back down over childcare infrastructure issue in Commons*, The Guardian, Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/dec/13/ministers-back-down-over-childcare-infrastructure-issue-in-commons>

<sup>12</sup> Zakir-Hussain, M., *Labour wants to expand state nurseries as part of election childcare pledge*, Independent, Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2022, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/childcare-labour-maternity-leave-nursery-b2218390.html>

the time of leaving teaching, potentially earning between £33,000-42,000 pro rata, depending on their location and pay point<sup>13</sup>. With the costs outlined in the 2017 Coram Family and Childcare Trust survey amounting to £12,168 for a full time nursery place for a child under two, childcare fees for just one child could therefore have drained more than a third of their earnings – a percentage that remains similar today<sup>14</sup>. 9 of the participants in this report, however, had two or three more pre-school aged children when they left teaching. Realistic childcare costs could therefore have been between £14,781 to £18,066 per year, depending on the children’s ages, inclusive of the 30 hours of free childcare offered to three- and four-year olds.

It is therefore unsurprising that across all 27 mother-teacher interview participants, 21 left teaching when their youngest child was aged between 0-2 years old, a trend that is reflected by 12 of the 15 participants in this report. The 2022 IPPR and Save the Children report reveals that this is a national trend, with parental employment rates being ‘lowest among parents of children under two’, with ‘mothers’ rates of full-time work increase[ing] as their youngest child grows older’. That the cost of childcare was mentioned as a barrier by half the participants in this report reflects the fact that ‘a lack of access to affordable childcare’ impacts parents’<sup>15</sup> – particularly mother’s – ability to remain in the workforce across all sectors.

Cost is not the only barrier to accessing childcare in the UK: sufficiency of provision has also become an increasing cause for concern. In 2017, only 54% of local authorities had sufficient childcare for under 2s, and only 33% had sufficient wraparound care provision for children aged 5-11<sup>16</sup>. According to Ofsted, the period between April 2021 to 31 March 2022 saw a decrease of around 4,000 childcare providers, ‘representing the largest decline since 2015-16’<sup>17</sup>. What’s more, many nurseries and childminders do not operate according to the hours that teachers need in order to either fulfil the requirements of directed time, or feel that they are prepared to execute their duties. Day nurseries, for example, are ‘usually open from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm all year round’<sup>18</sup> and wraparound provision at primary level follow a similar structure.

Offering breakfast and after school clubs, however, though strongly encouraged by government, is not a legal requirement for schools. Some primaries will choose not to offer them because funding means that they run at a loss, or because demand from their community is too low. An informal poll conducted by The MTPT Project revealed that 79% of teachers are contracted to be on site by 08:01-08:30<sup>19</sup> and, in order to prepare lessons or

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<sup>13</sup> Whittaker, F., *Pay scales for teachers and leaders in England and Wales from September 2017*, Schools Week, 10 August 2017, available at: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/pay-scales-for-teachers-and-leaders-in-england-and-wales-from-september-2017/>

<sup>14</sup> NASUWT, *England Pay Scales, 2022*, available at: <https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/advice/pay-pensions/pay-scales/england-pay-scales.html>

<sup>15</sup> Statham, R., Freedman, S. and Parkes, H., *Delivering a Childcare Guarantee*, Institute of Public Policy Research and Save the Children, December 2022, available at: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-12/delivering-a-childcare-guarantee-dec-22.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Harding, C., Wheaton, B and Butler, A., *Childcare Survey 2017*, for Coram Family and Childcare Trust, available at: <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare-survey-2017>

<sup>17</sup> Ofsted, *Main findings: childcare providers and inspections as at 31 March 2022*, 29 June 2022, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-march-2022/main-findings-childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-march-2022>

<sup>18</sup> Nidirect, *Types of Childcare – Day nurseries*, available at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/day-nurseries>

<sup>19</sup> @mtpproject, January 13<sup>th</sup> 2023, <https://twitter.com/mtpproject/status/1613868799932915713?s=20&t=IW07sjXVWEthY6LiQoCF4w>

complete administrative tasks, it is possible that some may prefer to be in earlier than this. The majority of primary schools however, do not start until between 08:45-08:59<sup>20</sup>. Partner, family or privately organised care through childminders or nannies, is therefore essential for mother-teachers of primary school aged children who hope to arrive at school on time. The same is true for any teacher or leader who has after school meetings or extra-curricular activities, or even a lengthy commute between their workplace and children's school or nursery. Greater flexibility in start and finish times may be offered by childminders, but places can be competitive, and these time restrictions therefore reduce parents' options when choosing childcare that feels right for their family.

Even with childcare providers charging high rates, the 2022 IPPR and Save the Children report raises concerns regarding the quality of provision on offer, particularly for children from low-income households. The report emphasises that working parents are facing constant 'trade offs' in order to participate in the labour market, with unreliability and lack of choice currently characterising the state of childcare in the UK<sup>21</sup>.

Partly because of this unreliability, cost and unguaranteed quality, some working parents rely on grandparents to support with childcare, with anywhere between 40%<sup>22</sup> to 63% of British grandparents providing some form of care over a period of 12 months. This is the second highest rate of grandparent care revealed in the data of the 11 countries included in the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe<sup>23</sup>. According to Age UK, 38% of the UK's 5 million grandparents who provide care look after their grandchildren 2-3 times per week<sup>24</sup>, with grandmothers providing the majority of this care<sup>25</sup>. As well as the emotional benefits of leaving children with trusted family members, grandparents are estimated to represent a saving of £22.5 billion to families across the UK, at least £4,027 per year, per family even when providing 8 hours of care per week<sup>26</sup>.

It is important to note that grandparents and other family members can also benefit financially from providing care. The government's Specified Adult Childcare credits enables family members to claim 'Class 3 National Insurance credits for looking after children under the age of 12, which can be used to top up their income in retirement'. However, this involves working parents transferring their child benefit payments to grandparents or other relatives providing the care<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Teacher Tapp, *Who is going home at 2:45pm? And other things we learned about this week*, June 2021, available at: <https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/going-home-245-williamson-school-extended-day-time/>

<sup>21</sup> Statham, R., Freedman, S. and Parkes, H., *Delivering a Childcare Guarantee*, Institute of Public Policy Research and Save the Children, December 2022, available at: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-12/delivering-a-childcare-guarantee-dec-22.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Age UK, *5 million grandparents take on childcare responsibilities*, 29 September 2017, available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/articles/2017/september/five-million-grandparents-take-on-childcare-responsibilities/>

<sup>23</sup> Glaser, K., Price, D., Ribe Montserrat, E., di Gessa, G., and Tinker, A., *Grandparenting in Europe: family policy and grandparents' role in providing childcare*, Grandparents Plus with Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Kings College London and Beth Johnson Foundation, March 2013, available at: <https://kinship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Grandparenting-in-Europe-0313.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Age UK, *5 million grandparents take on childcare responsibilities*, 29 September 2017, available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/articles/2017/september/five-million-grandparents-take-on-childcare-responsibilities/>

<sup>25</sup> Glaser, K., Price, D., Ribe Montserrat, E., di Gessa, G., and Tinker, A., *Grandparenting in Europe: family policy and grandparents' role in providing childcare*, Grandparents Plus with Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Kings College London and Beth Johnson Foundation, March 2013, available at: <https://kinship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Grandparenting-in-Europe-0313.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Bradley, J., *Four in five grandparents 'usually' provide childcare*, The Scotsman, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, available at: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/people/four-five-grandparents-usually-provide-childcare-2506005?amp>

The reason that participants explained that childcare contributed to their decision to leave teaching, fall into nine categories:

**Cost of Childcare**

“I was just paying for all this childcare, I wasn’t actually making any money because it was all going to childcare.” – *Laura*

**Incompatible Logistics**

“It’s really difficult to find a childminder or childcare provider who’ll start at 6:30 in the morning and finish at 6:30 in the evening.” – *Marie-Ann*

**Length of time spent in childcare**

“I would have dropped off my little son at 7:30 in the morning and not seen him ‘til nearly 7:00pm in the evening.” – *Rosie*

**(Male) Partner involvement**

“My son was in nursery and he could be in nursery from half eight to six o’clock which was not a problem. My husband could do that. But then we had a real risk of my husband was going to have to work in Croydon, which meant he was commuting. We couldn’t both commute ... So, we had to think: how can we do this? My husband wouldn’t have been able to do everything five days a week. I didn’t want my husband to do everything five days a week.” – *Stacey*

**Family support, or lack of it**

“My husband and I live in Yorkshire. My family live in Leicestershire. His family live just south of Newcastle and so we have no help.” - *Kallie*

**One child starting school**

“I’ve got three young children and everyone had said once they start school it gets easier, once the first started school and then it became more difficult [to find] before and after care, trying to get them to school and then myself to school across town.” – *Mylie*

**Flexible and Part-Time Working**

“Your days aren’t secure each year. So, for example: my mum always has a Monday off work, but that could change. And I could be working on Thursday and Friday the following year. So if you could guarantee set days each year, that would help.” – *Monica*



**Attitudes from school**

“It just didn’t feel very supportive when you had childcare issues.” – *Rochelle*

**Desire to be the primary caregiver**

“I wanted to be around to help my son read, I wanted to be able to go on, you know, school trips with him, and go and see his Christmas play and everything, and I wouldn’t have been able to do that in quite the same way.” – *Stacey*

Two further themes are revealed throughout the comments included in this report. The first is the emotional strain associated with childcare and its organisation. Participants used the words and phrases, ‘anxiety’, ‘frustrated’, ‘really difficult’, ‘feel bad’, ‘vicious circle’ and ‘causing a lot of stress’ to describe their own feelings, or the situation in general.

The second is the implication of the ongoing gendered responsibility attached to care: although a few comments from mother-teachers explicitly compare their responsibility with their partners, there is also a relative absence of references to male partners’ contributions or a clear statement that as the mother, they took on the lion’s share of the childcare. What’s more, even when family support is referenced, only one comment refers to ‘parents’ whereas all others refer to participants’ mothers, or mother-in-laws providing this grandparent care. The trend in this report, therefore, is a tacit understanding that childcare is women’s work.

**Cost of Childcare**

The cost of childcare in the UK consistently ranks as the second most expensive in comparison to 36 other OECD countries, beaten only by Switzerland, representing the highest proportion of both a lone parent and couple’s income in both low-earning and median-earning families.<sup>28</sup> Surveys from campaigning group Pregnant then Screwed reveals that 17% of parents leave their jobs because of unaffordable childcare costs, and 84% of parents experience financial anxiety because of nursery, or other childcare fees<sup>29</sup>.

7 of the 15 teachers in this report confirmed that the cost of childcare, particularly in comparison to their teacher salary, acted as a barrier to their ability to either remain in the workforce, or in education, specifically. At the time of interview, only Josephine was a stay at home mother, and Gauri stated that she was completing masters, potentially around childcare commitments. Laura and Sophie were employed in roles outside of education, and Monica was working as a teacher trainer. Only Rosie remained teaching, but had moved to a private school after a period out of work where, in comments included in *04. What’s Love Got*

<sup>28</sup> Browne, J., and Neumann, D., *Childcare costs in 2015: OECD Tax Wedge and Effective Tax Rates on Labour*, June 2017, available at: <https://taxben.oecd.org/tax-ben-resources/Childcare-costs-in-2015.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Pregnant then Screwed, *Nearly a Fifth of Parents Have had to Leave their Jobs Because of the Cost of Childcare*, March 2020, available at: <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/press-release-nearly-a-fifth-of-parents-have-had-to-leave-their-jobs-because-of-the-cost-of-childcare/>

to *Do With It?*, she explained that her husband's new job meant that she 'could afford to leave teaching'.

These employment trends reflect the NFER's findings that those leave teaching face, 'relatively poor longer-term earnings prospects', were 'more likely to move into part-time work' and some had a 'tendency to move into lower-skilled and lower-paying occupations'. The desire to work part-time or flexibly is cited numerous times in various reports from the NFER, opportunities that leavers are not necessarily finding in an education system that is still far behind other industries when it comes to this sort of flexibility. Considering the cost of before and after-school care for primary aged children, roles that offer flexible start and finish times can represent significant household savings, even if former teachers are paid less in their new jobs. Whilst teachers may be paid less when they leave, therefore, families may be better off financially because outgoings on childcare are reduced.

In response to the request to expand on her reasons for choosing 'childcare' as a reason on her initial survey, Sophie simply responded with, "The cost", whereas other participants provided further detail:

"I was just paying for all this childcare, I wasn't actually making any money because it was all going to childcare." – *Laura*

"I went back to work after having my first child and managed the childcare ok. But then when I had two children, you're looking at £100 a day and you're not really making much money." – *Laura*

"When I had my second, I had two under two, and the cost of paying into nursery or childcare at all, basically, was more than what I would be bringing home. So that's another decision as to why I didn't carry on teaching." – *Monica*

"I didn't want to burden myself with the guilt... going home early and then getting paid very little when you take away all the child[care] costs." – *Gauri*

"Another factor was really the cost involved in that in order to be able to send them to nursery, I'd be working just for that purpose and I didn't feel like I really wanted to just go to work in order to fund nursery care. So that was another reason really why I wanted to be involved with my children's childcare and it would have been quite expensive to do that, if I had chosen to go back to work on a more permanent basis." – *Josephine*

"Effectively paying to work and having someone else look after my children was just silly, and we knew that we were going to have more than one and that we wanted them close together, which would mean that I would be paying to work, so there was no way that it made sense for me to work if I couldn't get part time, and I couldn't." – *Kallie*



“We wouldn’t have been able to afford childcare if I was only on a main scale teacher’s wage.” – *Rosie*

“We just found that it cost so much money that our actual take home salary at the end of the month – it was negligible me working, and it was just causing a lot of stress on everybody for not very much financial gain.” – *Rebecca*

It is clear from their comments, that all seven participants consider that they would be financially better off, at least in the short term, if they were to negate childcare costs by providing this service themselves. Comments such as ‘it was negligible me working’, ‘there was no way that it made sense for me to work’, ‘more than what I would be bringing home’ highlights the high costs of childcare in the UK, particularly considering that teachers are amongst England and Wales’ average salary earners<sup>30</sup>. This is particularly true for the six participants who had two children at the time of interview, with Laura and Monica explicitly referring to the unsustainability of ‘the cost of paying into nursery or childcare’ for ‘two children’ or ‘two under two’.

In these comments, we see the gaps in the government’s current and 2017 childcare provision highlighted: whilst 15 free hours may be offered to some two-year olds, and three- to four-year olds, only tax-free childcare or, previously, childcare vouchers provided by employers, are available to support with childcare for under-tuos. This may contribute to decision-making (where couples’ fertility and pregnancies have some degree of control) over their family-planning. Indeed, the average age gap between siblings in the UK is three years and eight months<sup>31</sup>, meaning that the government’s 15 hours of free childcare kick in just as the second baby arrives.

However, finances are not the only consideration to influence the age gap between siblings: parents’ age, satisfaction in a marriage, miscarriage, physical and mental health of family members, the personality and needs of the first child, and fertility<sup>32</sup> are just some factors that couples may consider or contend with when growing their family. Government childcare policies that do not offer a solution for parents who have two or more children within a 24 month period, including parents of multiples, create financial penalties for those who need childcare for both children before the eldest is three years old in order to return to the labour market. Indeed, women are more likely to be ‘economically inactive looking after family / home’ when their youngest child is aged 1-3, with between 22-24% of women remaining out of the workforce at this time<sup>33</sup>.

An interesting trend in six of the eight comments above is the use of the first person pronoun, ‘I’, when discussing the cost of childcare. Laura says, ‘I was just paying’, ‘I wasn’t actually

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<sup>30</sup> Whittaker, F., *Keegan claims teachers are among ‘top 10% of earners’*, Schools Week, 21 December 2022, available at: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/keegan-claims-teachers-are-among-top-10-of-earners/>

<sup>31</sup> Net Mums, *Age Gaps: is there a perfect size?* Wednesday 9 December 2020, available at: <https://www.netmums.com/pregnancy/age-gaps-is-there-a-perfect-size>

<sup>32</sup> Golsteyn, B.H.H. and Magnée, C.A.J., *Does Birth Spacing Affect Personality?* IZA Institute of Labor Economics, IZA DP No. 10563, February 2017, available at: <https://docs.iza.org/dp10563.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Families and the labour market, UK:2021*, 22 July 2022, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021#employment-activity-of-parents-based-by-the-age-of-youngest-dependent-child>

making any money’, ‘I... managed the childcare ok’, and Monica says, ‘I had two under twos’, ‘more than what I would be bringing home’. Josephine says, ‘I’d be working just for that purpose’, ‘I didn’t feel like I really wanted to just go to work in order to fund nursery care’; Gauri uses ‘I’ when commenting on the ‘burden’ associated with childcare and ‘getting paid very little’ and Kallie echoes, ‘I would be paying to work’. Later interview comments from Josephine and Kallie indicate that they are married to, or in relationships with their children’s fathers, and yet the choice of language (subconscious or otherwise) from all five participants suggests that they consider the cost of childcare as *their* responsibility rather than expenditure from joint income. In fact, it is only Rosie and Rebecca who use ‘we’ or ‘our’ when discussing ‘our actual take home salary’, and whether they would be ‘able to afford childcare’, considering this a household cost, rather than one that falls on them alone, as mothers.

This trend in participant responses is possibly influenced by similar language that pervades the media. It is not hard to find headlines such as ‘Working mothers face pay and childcare challenges, reports find’ (Guardian, 2017), ‘Lack of childcare found ‘destroying’ UK mothers’ careers amid COVID-19’ (Reuters, 2020), ‘Is It Becoming Too Expensive For Mothers To Work?’ (Grazia, 2022), and much academic research also focuses on the mothers’ earnings in relation to childcare<sup>34</sup>. This may be to acknowledge and remain inclusive of the fact that mothers still head up approximately 90% of the UK’s 1.8 million lone-parent families<sup>35</sup> and therefore only have their wage to cover childcare costs. Or it could be because in heterosexual couples, women are still more likely than men to be the lower wage earners, even before becoming parents, and the arrival of the first child only increases this wage gap further<sup>36</sup>. If one salary has to be sacrificed (or reduced through flexible or part-time working arrangements) because of unaffordable childcare fees, it is therefore likely to be the lower wage – the mother’s – as we see in Rebecca’s comments where she states it was ‘negligible’ for her to work.

At first glance, teaching seems to buck this trend: indeed, 48% of female teachers still in the profession in 2018 earned a little more, or substantially more than their partners with only 38% of female teachers being out-earned by ‘a little’ or ‘substantially’<sup>37</sup>. We don’t know, however, whether this holds true for those who leave. In this report, it is only Rosie who explicitly states that her husband out-earns her, and across the 28 teachers in our study who left for reasons associated with motherhood, only two more – Abigail and Sharon – refer specifically to their husbands’ salaries enabling them to ‘afford to leave teaching’<sup>38</sup>. The only other participant to compare salaries with her spouse in this report is Kallie, who reveals that she was the breadwinner in the couple when she was teaching.

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<sup>34</sup> OECD, *Net Childcare Costs in EU countries, 2021*, June 2022, available at: [https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/benefits-and-wages/Net%20childcare%20costs%20in%20EU%20countries\\_2021.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/benefits-and-wages/Net%20childcare%20costs%20in%20EU%20countries_2021.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> *Single parents: facts and figures*, Gingerbread, n.d., available at: <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/what-we-do/media-centre/single-parents-facts-figures/>

<sup>36</sup> ONS, *Women shoulder the responsibility of ‘unpaid work’*, 10 November 2016, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldtheresponsibilitofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

<sup>37</sup> Teacher Tapp, *What Teachers Tapped This Week #18 – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018*, 29 January 2018, available at: <https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/teachers-tapped-29-january/>

<sup>38</sup> The MTPT Project, *04. What’s Love Got to Do With It?*<sup>1st</sup> July 2022, available at: [www.mtpt.org.uk/light-research](http://www.mtpt.org.uk/light-research)

However, further data from Teacher Tapp indicates that the pay gap amongst couples might be more nuanced for teachers, depending on the region they live in. In the South West, North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber, for example, teachers are likely to out-earn their partners. In the East of England and West Midlands, teachers are as likely to be the breadwinners as the lower wage earners. It is only in London, the East Midlands and the South East where teachers are most likely to be ‘trailing spouses’<sup>39</sup>. This data, however, does not filter by gender, so any assumption about *gender* pay gap between teachers and their partners in these regions is based purely on the fact that teaching is a female-dominated industry.

Laura, Monica, Gauri, Kallie and Josephine’s comments might also be influenced by what Mezey and Pillard term ‘new maternalism’, a ‘cult of motherhood and domesticity’, harnessed by both politics and the media that encourages the notion that ‘parenting and care work are cast in exclusively female terms’ and that ‘mothers are the gold standard when it comes to care work’<sup>40</sup>. When the practical facts of both the gender pay gap, the financial motherhood penalty, and a belief – again, subconscious or otherwise – in new maternalism are combined, it is easy to see how these four participants might consider childcare, and associated costs, *their* responsibility.

In comparison, when Rosie says, ‘We wouldn’t have been able to afford childcare if I was only on a main scale teacher’s wage’, the consideration is of a joint responsibility for childcare – ‘we’. Like Josephine, Kallie and Rebecca, Rosie was a stay at home mother at the time the interviews took place. The use of ‘we’, however, could suggest a mindset that understands the financial benefit to the family unit of her taking on the childcare, rather than the sense of sacrificing a wage that belonged to her alone that we see in some of the other comments.

### **Incompatible Logistics**

As mentioned in the introductory literature review, it is not just the cost of childcare that posed a problem for the mother-teachers in this report. The combined logistics of nursery, childminder and wraparound start and finish times, school start and finish times, and commuting distances created significant conflicts between participants’ professional and personal responsibilities.

Four participants highlighted the incompatibility of their start and finish times as teachers, and the opening and closing times of childcare provision:

“We were in a position where we were trying to find basically a childminder or a nursery setting to match the hours of the jobs, or jobs that would match the hours of the nursery setting depending on availability in our area.” – *Rebecca*

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<sup>39</sup> Teacher Tapp, *What Teachers Tapped This Week #44 – 30 July 2018*, 29 July 2018, available at: <https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/what-teachers-tapped-this-week-44-30-july-2018/>

<sup>40</sup> Mezey, N. and Pillard, C.T.L., *Rethinking the New Maternalism*, January 2010, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46285808\\_Rethinking\\_the\\_New\\_Maternalism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46285808_Rethinking_the_New_Maternalism)

“Because it was a Children’s Centre nursery, it didn’t open particularly early. So it was always a bit of a rush to get my little girl into the nursery in order to get to work on time.” – *Rebecca*

“The cost and wanting to get there at specific times. So the childcare don’t always have the flexibility for such an early start, so sometimes getting to work for seven, which is what I needed to do, I wouldn’t have had any, you know, being able to drop E off and things like that, and doing after school activities, so if I need to stay later, it was quite tricky because I had to then try and find a way to be flexible around that.” – *Sophie*

“I was leaving at around half past four so I could pick the children up at 5 o’clock. It just became too much of a challenge with that and childcare and being able to pick the kids up on time.” – *Rochelle*

“It’s really difficult to find a childminder or childcare provider who’ll start at 6:30 in the morning and finish at 6:30 in the evening.” – *Marie-Ann*

These comments suggest that current childcare provision does not meet the logistical needs of parents who work traditional 9-5 jobs, let alone teachers who work longer than average hours during term time. There is further irony in the lack of joined up communication within the same sector: teachers with children are insufficiently served by nurseries, primary and secondary schools and yet there seems to be little discussion about the adaptations that these institutions could offer to cater for the needs of their own employees. The ongoing lack of flexible working opportunities in education, in comparison to other sectors, also means that the quick-fix solution of parents adapting their start and finish times to established childcare provision, is out of the question for many parent-teachers, including those referenced in this report.

Mylie and Rebecca point out the importance of the location of the childcare setting in comparison to their schools, and the impact of any sort of commute on different childcare needs:

“It became more difficult [to find] before and after care, trying to get them to school and then myself to school across town. Things like that became more difficult. We ended up having to hire a nanny for a while anyway. We couldn’t get around the drop offs and the pick-ups as well as the ones that were still at nursery level. So therefore, childcare logistics with that became a nightmare.” – *Mylie*

“That didn’t work with trying to drop children at school, pick them up from school or if I had to get home in an emergency.” – *Mylie*

“We found actually that it caused an awful lot of stress because you were always trying to – we went for a nursery setting, it was close to my area of employment – but because it was a Children’s Centre nursery, it didn’t open particularly early.” – *Rebecca*

We saw in **06. We're on a Road to Nowhere** that women, specifically mothers, were less likely than men to commute to work in part because of the logistical need to maintain childcare, domestic and work locations within close proximity. In Mylie's comments, we see the consequences of *not* keeping these three spheres geographically limited: managing the distance between 'drop offs and pick ups' at both 'school' and 'nursery' and a place of employment 'across town', 'became a nightmare' and required the additional cost of 'a nanny', which would have been more expensive for Mylie than a childminder or school-based wraparound care. Even when Rebecca bases her decisions regarding childcare specifically on location – 'we went for a nursery setting, it was close to my area of employment' – she finds that structural barriers still make these logistics impossible, as her nursery 'didn't open particularly early'.

Mylie's comment, 'we couldn't get around the drop offs and the pick-ups as well as the ones that were still at nursery level' reminds us that these geographical and commuting considerations are made even more complex with two or more children when they are at different childcare settings. These logistics may also have impacted Gauri, Rochelle, Olivia and Marie-Ann who, at the time of leaving teaching had at least one child at school – or about to start school – with a younger pre-school aged sibling.

In the best case scenario, parents have some degree of choice regarding the location of their nursery or childcare provider, or grandparents who support with care can come to the family home, or collect their grandchildren at time that suits the family's needs. However, the placement of children in state schools in England and Wales is decided by criteria such as catchment area, the prioritisation of children in care, those with special educational needs, and those with siblings already at the school, and in some cases, the faith-based nature of the school. All of this is then impacted by the birth rate of a given year, and the number of families with children of the same age in a specific location. Teacher parents who are informed in April, that their child will be starting reception at a school geographically distant from their home, place of work and younger siblings' childcare setting find themselves in the 'nightmare' that Mylie describes.

Mylie, Rebecca and Marie-Ann also emphasise the sparsity of appropriate – or *any* – childcare local to either their home or their school that meets their logistical needs. Mylie states, 'It became more difficult [to find] before and after care', and Marie-Ann says, 'It's really difficult to find a childminder or childcare provider'. Rebecca explains that even if nursery settings that offered the hours she needed were available, her access to it would still depend on 'availability in [her] area'.

This issue of available childcare is compounded even further when teachers' extra-curricular commitments are taken into account, as highlighted by Sophie and Stacey:

"Doing after school activities, so if I need to stay later, it was quite tricky because I had to then try and find a way to be flexible around that." – *Sophie*

“There would have been days where we wouldn’t have known who could pick him up because of parents’ evening or whatever.” – *Stacey*

Stacey’s comment in particular, emphasises the impossibility of teacher-parents’ situation: without family, or available private support, and when there are professional demands on both parents, teachers are forced to choose between fulfilling their professional duties, or leaving their children entirely without care. Of course, this isn’t a choice, and in these sort of ‘emergency’ situations that Mylie earlier, and now Stacey, describe, lack of childcare for a baby or a child is a very clear barrier to parent-, but particularly mother-teachers’ ability to do their jobs.

Comments from Rebecca and Mylie point out that the individual needs of each child, and each family can present additional considerations for childcare arrangements:

“It required the head teacher to be very, very flexible while I was starting to settle my little girl into the childminder, but we actually found that it caused an awful lot of stress.” – *Rebecca*

“My middle daughter also has epilepsy. So there was childcare issue there with making sure people knew what to do with her as well.” – *Mylie*

Whilst there are only two comments regarding the very specific needs of an individual child, the situations that Rebecca and Mylie are describing are not uncommon. The ‘stress’ of the separation anxiety that Rebecca describes and the need to spend time transitioning babies from one carer and setting to another, will be familiar to many parents, particularly over the return to work period or when changing childcare provider. Since the very normal developmental stage of separation anxiety can occur any time between 6 months to three years, and teachers take an average of 8.5 months maternity leave<sup>41</sup>, Rebecca’s anecdote is likely to reflect the experience of many mother-teachers. Not only does this cause ‘an awful lot of stress’, it also takes time both to hand over and leave a distressed child, and to recover from seeing your child in such a state before being required to perform professionally for colleagues and students.

Equally, 16.5% of pupils in England and Wales have some form of special educational need or disability, which includes health issues such as Mylie’s daughter’s epilepsy<sup>42</sup>. Of course, some of these 1.49 million pupils will be the children of teachers. Whilst in-school professionals are likely to have the training and support to provide a safe place to learn for children with SEND, it is not guaranteed that private nurseries, childminders, wraparound care providers, or even nannies will have the experience, qualifications or resources needed to look after Mylie’s daughter, adding an additional layer of complexity to her childcare logistics.

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<sup>41</sup> *Percentage of Teachers on Maternity Leave*, Freedom of Information Request, 5 January 2018, available at: [https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/percentage\\_of\\_teachers\\_on\\_matern#incoming-1115502](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/percentage_of_teachers_on_matern#incoming-1115502)

<sup>42</sup> Department for Education, *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources*, June 2022, available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1082518/Special\\_educational\\_needs\\_publication\\_June\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1082518/Special_educational_needs_publication_June_2022.pdf)



In many of these comments, we see the first of the two sub-themes identified earlier in this report – the emotional strain of organising childcare. The logistics involved are described as causing ‘an awful lot of stress’, ‘bit of a rush’, ‘quite tricky’, ‘didn’t work’, ‘more difficult’, ‘a nightmare’, ‘too much of a challenge’, ‘really difficult’, and Marie-Ann comments that her return to work was marked by ‘that vicious circle of returning quite early, crying baby, trying to manage childcare’. This is of course, on top of the many challenges that teachers face on a day to day basis, both in terms of workload and interaction with students, parents and colleagues. It is unsurprising, therefore, that comments from three participants included in the *Incompatible logistics* section of this report (Mylie, Marie-Ann, Sophie), are also included in **08. Don’t Leave Me This Way** describing a sense of overwhelm as a result of too much change, or the sudden transition back into school when returning to work.

## Partner Involvement

Increasingly, mothers in heterosexual couples are supported with childcare logistics by male partners keen to share parenting responsibilities more equally. Despite the narratives of new maternalism that have crept into participants’ comments when discussing whose salary is sacrificed to high childcare costs, almost a third of working parents split childcare equally, 83% of whom do so out of choice, not necessity<sup>43</sup>. The majority of childcare, however, still falls to mothers<sup>44</sup>, which is reflected in the simplicity of Marie-Ann’s comment:

“Most of the childcare and kind of organising the childcare fell to me.” – *Marie-Ann*

Indeed, the second of the sub-themes that we identified earlier in the report was the relative absence of references to male partners in comments regarding childcare. Already, comments from Laura, Monica, Gauri, Josephine and Kallie in the *Cost of childcare* section, and from Sophie, Rochelle, Marie-Ann and Mylie in *Incompatible logistics*, simply make no reference to their male partners or spouses and yet we know from comments included in **04. What’s Love Got to Do With It?** that Marie-Ann, Rochelle, Kallie, Mylie and Josephine are married or in established relationships with their children’s fathers.

Even if their contribution is minimal, women’s increased participation in the labour market over the last fifty years, has been facilitated by male partner’s involvement in domestic and childcare duties. It is potentially inaccurate, therefore, to assume from their absence in partners’ comments, that the male partners were not involved with childcare logistics at all. It would also be oversimplified to deduce that, had they been more explicitly involved, these mother-teachers would have been retained in the education sector. In fact, comments in **04. What’s Love Got to Do With It?** and further comments from Stacey and Kallie demonstrate that there is more nuance to decisions around the division of family roles.

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<sup>43</sup> Working Families and Bright Horizons, *Modern Families Index 2020 Summary Report*, available at: [https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Modern\\_Families\\_Index\\_2020\\_Summary-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Modern_Families_Index_2020_Summary-Report_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Women shoulder the responsibility of ‘unpaid work’*, 10 November 2016, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldtheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

Indeed, prior to her leaving teaching, it was Stacey's husband who acted as the primary caregiver for their son during term time, putting him very firmly in the minority, given that 'fathers' hours of care for young children are less than half those of mothers'<sup>45</sup>:

"My son was in nursery and he could be in nursery from half eight to six o'clock which was not a problem. My husband could do that. But then we had a real risk of my husband was going to have to work in Croydon, which meant he was commuting. We couldn't both commute. And it was costing us, and my son started school in September. So, we had to think: how can we do this? My husband wouldn't have been able to do everything five days a week. I didn't want my husband to do everything five days a week. I wanted to be more present. And so now we have until – my son goes to after school clubs, he doesn't go to Breakfast Club, he goes to after school club, and so he's not in complete wraparound childcare which he would have been had I still been teaching." – Stacey

"I would have had to work through the holidays, which I don't have to do now. I don't get many holidays but we now between me, my husband and my inbox we have a workable solution for the holidays, which is slightly easier than had I had to, did a load of planning and things in the holiday." – Stacey

In Stacey's comments, we see a focus on practicality, rather than gender conformity. Her career as a teacher, including the long hours she worked and her commute, were enabled by nursery provision, and her husband's ability to provide the solution to the otherwise problematic timings of 'half eight to six o'clock'. It is the risk of the removal of this solution – 'we had a real risk of my husband was going to have to work in Croydon, which meant he was commuting' – which forces a review of this untraditional arrangement.

However, after leaving teaching, Stacey – working as a Revenues Officer at the time of interview – does not take on all of the childcare herself. As a family, they still use 'after school club' and share things between them during the holidays. Leaving teaching does not result in Stacey becoming the primary caregiver, but rather to a more equal balance between herself and her husband who was, until that point doing 'everything five days a week'.

Interestingly, Stacey was the only participant who mentioned the school holidays which are often considered to be one of the most family-friendly appeals of teaching. However, she highlights that she 'would have had to work through the holidays', which she doesn't 'have to do now' in her new role. Although she has fewer holidays that she did as a teacher, the fact that she can fully stop working during this time, means that the 'workable solution' she has found with her partner is an improvement on the multi-tasking and split attention of the holiday periods as a teacher.

Stacey's continued use of 'we' when describing her new childcare arrangements contrasts Kallie, Gauri, Josephine and Kinga's use of 'I' in the later section in this report, *Desire to be the*

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<sup>45</sup> Gaunt, R., Jordan, A., Tarrant, A., Chanamoto, N., Pinho, M. and Wezyk, A., *Caregiving Dads, Breadwinning Mums: Transforming Gender in Work and Childcare?* Nuffield Foundation, University of Lincoln, September 2022, available at: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Caregiving-Dads-Breadwinning-Mums-Full-Report-September-2022.pdf>

*primary caregiver*. Her new choice of employment gives her something that neither teaching nor acting as a stay at home mother can – greater equality in parenting as a couple.

Kallie’s comments also demonstrate how her partner’s context influenced decisions around childcare arrangements:

“On paper I earned more than my husband but in terms of flexibility, benefits around my husband’s job, his was more appealing and it meant that it was going to be better for me to look after the child – and I wanted to look after the children.” – *Kallie*

“So the childcare – it made more sense for me to look to change what I did rather than him to change what he did because it still really works well for our family, what he does, whereas teaching – even though it would have been good at the six week holiday, that kind of thing, I knew the sort of hours I’d have to work in my job – where I was working at the time – and I knew that I’d have to get wraparound care as well as school time hours, so it just made more sense for me to change what I was doing and my husband to continue what he was doing.” – *Kallie*

Despite previous comments included in the *Cost of childcare* section – ‘I would be paying to work’ – Kallie’s comments here, like Stacey’s, are pragmatic, focusing on what ‘made more sense’, for the family as a unit – ‘it was going to be better for me to look after the child’, ‘it still really works well for our family’. Kallie also points to the ‘hours’ and her school setting – ‘where I was working at the time’ – as incompatible with childcare, echoing the barriers Stacey describes around the timing of her commute and available nursery opening hours.

Just like Stacey’s husband was in the statistical minority as the primary carer in the couple, Kallie is also in the national minority as the higher earner<sup>46</sup>. However, we have already seen that this trend is not always true for teachers<sup>47</sup>. Despite being the breadwinner, there is clearly more that makes a job ‘appealing’ to Kallie than money: ‘flexibility’ and ‘benefits’ and the elimination of the need for ‘wraparound care as well as school time hours’ outweighs both her higher salary and ‘the six week holiday’.

## **Family Support, or Lack of it**

Given that childcare is so costly, it is not uncommon for British parents to rely on family members, particularly grandparents for support. At least seven interview participants who had stayed in teaching as mothers aged 30-39 referenced their parents, or parents-in-law as part of their childcare arrangements, in comparison to just one in this report focusing on leavers. When grandparents are referenced in regards to the childcare arrangements of the participants included in this report, it is either because they are unavailable to provide

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<sup>46</sup> Waldersee, V., *Four in ten men in heterosexual relationships feel a responsibility to be the ‘main breadwinner’*, Society, Economy and Business, YouGov, 01 November 2018, available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/articles-reports/2018/11/01/four-ten-men-heterosexual-relationships-feel-respo>

<sup>47</sup> Teacher Tapp, *What Teachers Tapped This Week #18 – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018*, 29 January 2018, available at: <https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/teachers-tapped-29-january/>

support, or because participants were uncomfortable with the idea or experience of depending on relatives to look after their children.

We see again in this section, the gendered nature of caregiving, with three participants referring specifically to grandmothers, five referring to 'family', and two referring to grandparents. None of the comments refer exclusively to grandfathers or other male relatives.

Three participants explained that geographical distance prevents grandparents from being involved with care that would have supported them as mother-teachers:

"My husband and I live in Yorkshire. My family live in Leicestershire. His family live just south of Newcastle and so we have no help. We choose to live here and we love living here but it means that any childcare that we have or were going to have had at that point, was paid." – *Kallie*

"I am 250 miles away from my family." – *Stacey*

"I'm in a position where I don't have family around me." – *Sophie*

Interestingly, only one of the 28 mother-teacher participants included in the leavers' interviews who specifically mentioned relocating said that she did so to be closer to her parents for childcare support. Only two comments from those who had stayed in teaching mentioned moving home, or relocating to be closer to family for childcare reasons. As we see from Kallie, Stacey and Sophie, whilst family may offer support with childcare, this is not enough to prompt the teacher-mothers in our study to move.

Laura and Gauri's comments remind us that we cannot assume that it is more than geographical location that can make family, or grandparents unavailable to support with childcare:

"I didn't have any grandparents to look after my children so I was relying on private childcare for preschool aged children." – *Laura*

"At that point in time, I had a lot of family support for raising the children, that my mother in law used to look after my children like the Mum, and I wasn't there. And then the removal of that support, the loss of that support meant that I'm – in order to be a parent, I couldn't commit so much time to teaching and taking away from the time that you're able to put towards the heavy workload." – *Gauri*

It is unclear here exactly why Laura 'didn't have any grandparents' or why Gauri's 'support' was removed, or lost, but anything including tricky or estranged relationships with parents, bereavements, illness, if they care for other dependent relatives, or the fact that parents still work themselves can remove them from the equation when it comes to childcare.

What is evident, however, both from the first part of Gauri's comment – 'I had a lot of family support for raising the children, that my mother in law used to look after my children like the Mum' – and comments that will be included in later reports from mother-teachers who have *stayed* in teaching aged 30-39, is that support from grandparents does enable teachers to remain in the classroom by reducing childcare costs, easing the emotional transition back into work, and providing solutions to otherwise impossible logistics.

However, comments from four further participants indicate that even when grandparent or family support is an option, it does not necessarily offer a magic solution to the issue of childcare that acts as such a barrier to retention amongst mother-teachers:

"It would have been very reliant on my mum who's – she's not elderly or anything – she's quite fit. But it would have been very reliant on her doing the bulk of the childcare." – *June*

"My parents are, you know, sort of an hour away and will help us from time to time but I just felt like I couldn't really ask them too much. It wasn't fair on them to do such a long day." – *Marie-Ann*

"There's so much pressure when outside of school it looks really good – you know, you get all the holidays to look after your children but that was an added pressure because we would have to get family to come and visit and stay to look after our children" – *Rochelle*

June, Marie-Ann and Rochelle's comments are charged with the emotional pressure of requesting support from their families. For June, despite the fact that her mother is 'not elderly', and 'quite fit', the repeated phrase 'very reliant' and 'bulk of the childcare' implies a sense of unease that to make such a request would be unreasonable of her. Marie-Ann expresses this feeling more plainly, saying, 'I just felt like I couldn't really ask them too much', 'It wasn't fair on them to do such a long day', and Rochelle talks about 'so much pressure', and the 'added pressure' of both asking for family support and then managing the additional considerations of hosting visitors.

In all three comments, there is a sense of guilt associated with the thought of asking too much of family members when participants feel that they should, or could be more available for their own children if they weren't teachers. Within this, there are echoes of the new maternalism described by Mezey and Pillard, with the suggestion that it is the mother's responsibility – not the grandparents' – to provide childcare, as well as protect the physical and mental wellbeing of their own parents. However, research shows that taking responsibility for childcare can be beneficial for grandparents: almost all of those surveyed by Age UK enjoyed watching their grandchildren flourish, more than half of those who provide regular care enjoy that it keeps them 'physically and mentally active', 14% state that it warded off feelings of loneliness, and almost two-fifths 'admitted it gave them a sense of purpose'<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Age UK, *5 million grandparents take on childcare responsibilities*, 29 September 2017, available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/articles/2017/september/five-million-grandparents-take-on-childcare-responsibilities/>

Two comments from Rosie and Stacey offer different reasons for feeling uneasy about asking for grandparents or other family members to take responsibility for childcare:

“In the short period of time I went back to work my notice after maternity leave he bonded with my mother in law far more than he did with me and it’s been really difficult taking that back over and having him again, getting him used to having me around again.” – *Rosie*

“I’ve missed one performance and one sports day to work but I’ve had other people to do that and I still feel bad. But, it would’ve been so much more of an issue had I still been at my school” – *Stacey*

Both Rosie and Stacey describe emotive experiences of feeling substituted or seconded in their children’s life. For Rosie, this was the ‘difficult’ experience of seeing that her son ‘bonded with [her] mother in law far more than he did with’ her when she returned to work for a ‘short period of time’, and the Stacey, this was having ‘other people’ attend her child’s ‘performance[s]’ and ‘sports day’ instead of her.

Relying on grandmothers, or ‘other people’ was one solution to enabling both Stacey and Rosie to work as teachers, but not – when it came to it – a solution that they wanted to continue. There is a sense of regret in Rosie’s comments, at feeling replaced, even if for a short period of time – ‘it’s been really difficult taking that back over and having him again, getting him used to having me around again’ – and a negativity over the perceived damage done to her bond with her son through relying on her mother-in-law for childcare. Equally, even though *someone* was present for her son at these important events, Stacey says she ‘still fe[lt] bad’ and seems relieved that she has remedied this ‘issue’ by leaving teaching.

## Part Time / Flexible Working

Flexible and part-time working arrangements, or lack thereof, has already been mentioned in comments included in **06. We’re on a Road to Nowhere** and **08. Don’t Leave Me This Way** and is largely considered by educational think tanks as one of the most effective ways that we could improve the recruitment and retention of teachers<sup>4950</sup>. There is a significant relationship between the need for flexible working and childcare responsibilities, with 62% of parents across all industries reducing their working hours to manage childcare costs<sup>51</sup>. In education alone, studies continue to find that the overwhelming majority of flexible working requests come from women with caring responsibilities<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Department for Education, *Flexible Working in Schools*, 16 May 2022, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2#benefits-of-flexible-working>

<sup>50</sup> Sharp, C., Smith, R., Worth, J. and Van den Brande, J., *Part-time Teaching and Flexible Working in Secondary Schools*, NFER, June 2019, available at: [https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3476/part-time\\_teaching\\_and\\_flexible\\_working\\_in\\_secondary\\_schools.pdf](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3476/part-time_teaching_and_flexible_working_in_secondary_schools.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Pregnant then Screwed, *Nearly a Fifth of Parents Have had to Leave their Jobs Because of the Cost of Childcare*, March 2020, available at: <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/press-release-nearly-a-fifth-of-parents-have-had-to-leave-their-jobs-because-of-the-cost-of-childcare/>

<sup>52</sup> NASUWT, *Flexible working – The Experience of Teachers*, n.d., available at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/static/uploaded/6fd07ce3-6400-4cb2-a8a87b736dc95b3b.pdf>



Comments from four participants in this report emphasise the interdependence of flexible working and childcare arrangements for mother-teachers. Either part-time working is needed so that mothers can take on some of the childcare themselves – either because of a desire to spend time with their children, or because their full time earnings do not cover full time childcare costs – or they need clarity around flexible working arrangements to organise logistics with their childcare providers, be this a nursery, childminder, their partners, or other family members.

Even when flexible or part-time working is granted, Monica and Marie-Ann explain how the logistics of school timetabling mean that it can create even greater complexity for mothers:

“Your days aren’t secure each year. So, for example: my mum always has a Monday off work, but that could change. And I could be working on Thursday and Friday the following year. So if you could guarantee set days each year, that would help. If I knew it would be Monday and then one another day, then I know I’ve only got to pay for one day childcare, that would help.” – *Monica*

“It’s been really difficult to manage childcare, because lots of schools have a two week timetable system. And that makes it really difficult because often you’ll be working different days across the two weeks.” – *Marie-Ann*

With her desired part-time working hours, Monica develops an ecosystem of childcare across three providers: herself, her mother, and a third, paid childcare setting, with the express desire to use the solutions of family support and flexible working to reduce the cost of childcare to just ‘one day’ per week. Despite the fact that teachers’ salaries are in line with the average in England and Wales, this patchwork of childcare arrangements is described by Lyonette et al. as the solution chosen by ‘British mothers who are less affluent’ and who have ‘more limited options’ when it comes to childcare<sup>53</sup>.

Monica’s comments also highlight the precarious nature of childcare arrangements: the possibility of her working days changing every year means that Monica’s carefully organised system could collapse, on an annual basis. All three parties are reliant on the school timetable, which is often not finalised until the summer term and Monica’s set up is then dependent on two further sets of moving parts – her mother’s availability, the staff to children ratios at her private provider, and therefore the ability to rearrange her children’s days at short notice. Without a ‘guarantee’ of ‘set days each year’, Monica faces an annual reshuffle – a potentially stressful and unsettling process for both her and her children. As we see in her previous comments, where these logistics cannot be resolved, she is simply left in a position where ‘the cost of paying into nursery or childcare at all’ is not financially viable.

Equally, Marie-Ann’s comment highlights the lack of alignment between private childcare providers and the way that state schools in the UK are run. Very few external childcare

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<sup>53</sup> Lyonette, C., Kaufman, G., and Crompton, R., ‘We both need to work’: maternal employment, childcare and health care in Britain and the USA, Work Employment Society 2011 25:34, British Sociological Association, Sage, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227575918\\_We\\_both\\_need\\_to\\_work\\_Maternal\\_employment\\_childcare\\_and\\_health\\_care\\_in\\_Britain\\_and\\_the\\_USA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227575918_We_both_need_to_work_Maternal_employment_childcare_and_health_care_in_Britain_and_the_USA)

providers will cater for children who attend on different days each week because of their own staffing and ratio requirements, and yet operating according to a two week timetable is not uncommon in many secondary schools. The situation that Marie-Ann describes either requires her to rely entirely on tailored family or nanny support, or to pay for a full-time childcare place for her children. This, however, completely defeats the object of working part-time if Marie-Ann is doing so for financial reasons, or because she wants to spend more time with her baby.

The relationship between finances, part-time working and childcare is emphasised again by Kallie:

“I would be paying to work, so there was no way that it made sense for me to work if I couldn’t get part time, and I couldn’t.” – *Kallie*

Given that ‘lack of flexible / part-time working arrangements in teaching’ and ‘childcare logistics’ was chosen by a third of the respondents to our initial survey as a reason for leaving teaching aged 30-39, it is clear that increased flexible working opportunities is one way of mitigating the cost of childcare, and therefore an effective retention strategies for mother-teachers. More than this, however, Rochelle’s comment that ‘the flexibility to work out childcare’ would be a consideration for her if she were to return to teaching in the future, suggests that flexible working could also act as a successful approach to recruitment for schools.

What is evident in the comments in this report, however, is the lack of creativity and true flexibility that characterises flexible working in the education sector. Kallie, Marie-Ann and Monica all refer, or allude to *part-time* working rather than more varied flexibility in order to manage childcare costs and logistics. However, by dropping down to part-time hours, they increase the impact of the gender pay gap. Part-time roles, which are more likely to be filled by women, particularly mothers, also ‘tend to be lower paid per hour in comparison to full-time jobs’, and part-time workers are also more likely to experience limited pay progression<sup>54</sup>. This is because part-time roles at leadership or executive level are still uncommon, forcing mothers to choose between a senior role or part-time hours. For this reason, ‘This “part-time pay penalty” is one of the biggest contributors to the gender pay gap’<sup>55</sup>.

These wider sector trends are almost exactly reflected in the education sector: the prevalence of part-time working is lower at senior leadership level where salaries are higher. Women working full time as secondary teachers earn 2.8% less than their male counterparts, and this increases to 10.6% even when women working part-time are compared to men working part-time. At primary level, however, although full time female teachers earn 3.6% less than their male colleagues, they earn 3.6% *more* when on part-time hours in comparison to male

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<sup>54</sup> Tetlow, G., *Part-time working plays crucial role in gender pay gap*, Financial Times, February 5 2018, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/fccde92e-0817-11e8-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5>

<sup>55</sup> Abid, H., *The Gender Pay Gap in the UK*, Women’s Budget Group, November, 2021, available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Gender-Pay-Gap-briefing.pdf>

primary teachers working part-time<sup>56</sup>. These positive figures that buck national trend are impacted by the fact that part-time working is more common at senior levels in primary schools than in secondary<sup>57</sup>.

The offer, however, of *flexibility* within full time positions, rather than the more traditional part-time model, could have both retained a number of teachers in this report *and* maintained their salary and wage progression. Later in this report we will see that childcare logistics and commutes contributed to Rebecca, Sophie, Mylie and Marie-Ann’s decision to leave teaching. Flexibility that involved late starts could have provided a solution for these four teachers, enabling them to manage their morning drop-offs, whilst remaining on a full time contract. Equally, timetabling that enabled early finishes may have offered Rochelle and Mylie the opportunity to manage the school pick up and spend valuable time with their children in the afternoons and evenings.

## School Attitudes

Two comments from Rochelle reveal how school attitudes towards parent-colleagues can exacerbate the tension of balancing childcare and work commitments:

“It just didn’t feel very supportive when you had childcare issues.” – *Rochelle*

“When it came to – I did have to take time off when my children were sick and whenever I did it felt like I was being punished even though they knew I had children. I wasn’t the only one in the department. I would do my best to arrange with my husband, who was also a teacher, to manage the childcare between us if one of them was off sick.” – *Rochelle*

There might be greater flexibility for babies and pre-school aged children cared for by a nanny, childminder or family member, but many nurseries have strict policies regarding children attending when they are unwell. This was particularly true during the COVID-19 pandemic, even during periods where childcare providers were open. Working parents are entitled to take dependents’ leave, which offers them 18 weeks of unpaid leave up until their child’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This unpaid leave can be used for a variety of purposes, including to care for unwell children. Some schools may also have paid compassionate or dependents’ leave policies, but as women are still more likely to take on the majority of caring responsibilities<sup>58</sup>, relying solely on unpaid leave indirectly discriminates on the grounds of sex because it leaves women who need to take time off at a financial disadvantage.

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<sup>56</sup> Gender pay gap explorer, ONS, 26 October 2022, available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/genderpaygapexplorer/2019-06-07>

<sup>57</sup> Patience, L., *A raw deal for part-time leaders?*, Impact, The Chartered College of Teaching, February 2 2021, available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/genderpaygapexplorer/2019-06-07>

<sup>58</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Women shoulder the responsibility of ‘unpaid work’*, 10 November 2016, available at:

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

At the time of leaving teaching, Rochelle worked as a full time middle leader and her husband ‘was also a teacher’. Whilst we don’t know any details about her husband’s role, the fact that Rochelle says, ‘I would do my best to arrange childcare with my husband’ and ‘manage childcare between us’ suggests that she is part of the third of couples who split childcare between them as a way of striving for greater domestic and professional equity. Despite this, Rochelle still feels the sting of discriminatory attitudes from her school. She says her school, ‘didn’t feel very supportive’ and even describes a feeling of being ‘punished’ for attending to her sick children.

As well as the gendered trends surrounding childcare, these comments also hint at the presenteeism that plagues the teaching profession more widely. Comments from leavers regarding workload and working hours suggest that any time off, for any reason, resulted in negative consequences – either in the reactions of senior leaders, or the workload that awaited teachers upon their return to school. On top of the logistical stress, guilt and provision of cover work that accompanies taking time off as a teacher, it is easy to see how these negative attitudes from her school may have contribute to Rochelle’s debate about whether teaching was really worth it.

### **One Child Starting School**

Despite the IPPR and Save the Children finding that ‘mothers’ rates of full-time work increase[s] as their youngest child grows older, and particularly as they reach the milestones of starting primary school<sup>59</sup>, comments included in the previous section, *Incompatible Logistics*, highlights the additional layer of complexity involved in managing childcare arrangements across multiple children attending multiple different settings.

Comments from Stacey, Olivia and Mylie show us that far from the hope that things would get easier once their children began school, there were new challenges to contend with:

“My son started school in September. So, we had to think: how can we do this? My husband wouldn’t have been able to do everything five days a week. I didn’t want my husband to do everything five days a week. I wanted to be more present. And so now we have until – my son goes to after school clubs, he doesn’t go to breakfast club, he goes to after school club, and so he’s not in complete wraparound childcare which he would have been had I still been teaching.” – *Stacey*

“We’ve had a growing number of young primary school aged children start at, kind of in the area, and lots of primary schools have grown and there hasn’t been the increase in after school and before school places in the breakfast clubs and after school clubs and it was becoming a bit hit and miss whether or not I would be able to get them, get my elder daughter into one of these things.” – *Olivia*

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<sup>59</sup> Statham, R., Freedman, S. and Parkes, H., *Delivering a Childcare Guarantee*, Institute of Public Policy Research and Save the Children, December 2022, available at: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-12/delivering-a-childcare-guarantee-dec-22.pdf>

“I’ve got three young children and everyone had said once they start school it gets easier, once the first started school and then it became more difficult [to find] before and after care, trying to get them to school and then myself to school across town.” –  
*Mylie*

For Stacey, her son starting school combined with her husband’s potential commute signals the need to change her current way of working. Without the longer hours sometimes provided by nurseries and childminders, or her partner available for pick ups and drop offs, Stacey is forced to ask, ‘how can we do this?’ Even if the timings of breakfast and after school clubs had matched the needs of two commuting parents, Stacey realises that she doesn’t want her son to be ‘in complete wraparound childcare’ at this point, but that she ‘wanted to be more present’. Having left teaching, this means that she (or / and her partner) can drop their son off to school in the morning, removing the need for him to ‘go to breakfast club’, even though he still attends ‘after school club’.

Even when parents choose to use ‘complete wraparound childcare’, Olivia’s comments humanise the consequences of the 16% increase in primary school aged children between 2009 and 2022<sup>60,61</sup>. Despite this increase in pupil numbers, in her area, ‘there hasn’t been the increase in after school and before school places in the breakfast clubs and after school clubs’, leaving her in a ‘hit and miss’ situation when it came to organising childcare for her daughters. The 2022 IPPR and Save the Children report agreed that ‘access to breakfast and after school clubs is patchy and unreliable’ and even the solution potentially offered by wraparound childminders is ‘often in short supply, leaving parents without access to informal care with few options’<sup>62</sup>.

The issue of availability of wraparound care for school-aged children is echoed by Mylie – ‘it became more difficult [to find] before and after care’ – as well as the incompatibility of school start times for teacher mothers. Like Mylie and Olivia, one in four parents state that it would be impossible to do their jobs without wraparound care, with this figure rising to 31% when looking only at women<sup>63</sup>. Without either flexibility for these participants around start times at school, or childcare provision that starts early enough for them to arrive at their workplace on time, it is physically impossible for them to be in two places at once.

Whilst our previous report, **08. Don’t Leave Me This Way – Experiences of the Return to Work Period**, highlighted the vulnerable two year period that follows the return from maternity leave, Stacey, Mylie and Olivia’s comments suggest that one or more children starting school presents yet another retention risk, as mothers re-organise their childcare and re-establish their work-home routines. Additional support for teacher-mothers in the first

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<sup>60</sup> Wilkins, J., *National Pupil Projections: Future Trends in Pupil Numbers*, Department for Education, 26 July 2012, available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/219536/osr152012.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/219536/osr152012.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Gov.uk, *National Pupil Projections*, 14 July 2022, available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/national-pupil-projections>

<sup>62</sup> Statham, R., Freedman, S. and Parkes, H., *Delivering a Childcare Guarantee*, Institute of Public Policy Research and Save the Children, December 2022, available at: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-12/delivering-a-childcare-guarantee-dec-22.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Churchill, F., *One in four parents could not do their jobs without wraparound care*, People Management, 23 February 2021, available at: <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1742964/one-in-four-parents-could-not-do-their-job-without-wraparound-care>

five years following their return to work, could therefore be essential in tackling the logistical challenges that contribute to the high attrition rates amongst female teachers aged 30-39.

### **Length of Time Spent in Childcare**

The last two sections of this report explore further the choices that participants expressed around their childcare arrangements, rather than the necessities of affordability, availability and compatibility.

The first of these choices focuses on the length of time that participants' children spent at nursery, with childminders, relatives or babysitters:

“Most of the time, I wasn't going to be at home between sort of seven in the morning 'til half seven at night. So that wouldn't be particularly fair on either my mum for childcare or the baby.” – *June*

“I was getting very frustrated that I was having to leave my children quite early in the morning with the babysitter to be able to get to school at the right time and then I would be picking them up quite late around 5 o'clock, half past 5.” – *Rochelle*

“I would have dropped off my little son at 7:30 in the morning and not seen him 'til nearly 7:00pm in the evening.” – *Rosie*

“That meant that my child, once I had a child was going to be in nursery from the age of nine months old, from 7:30 in the morning, until quite late in the evening.” – *Rosie*

“Most of the childcare and kind of organising the childcare fell to me and the fact that really quite a lot of the time I needed to be in at seven o'clock in the morning and then wouldn't be home really until sometimes half past six or even later in the evening if I had a concert or some kind of musical event or extracurricular event or rehearsal. It just meant that, one, it wasn't fair on my children to leave them in childcare for that length of time.” – *Marie-Ann*

“I knew the sort of hours I'd have to work in my job – where I was working at the time – and I knew that I'd have to get wraparound care as well as school time hours, so it just made more sense for me to change what I was doing.” – *Kallie*

All of these comments emphasise the untenable workload that was raised as the main reason that female teachers chose to leave aged 30-39 in our initial survey. Although we will not be writing a separate report focusing on workload, it is important to note that 148 comments from across the 28 leavers who contributed to our qualitative interviews focused on this topic, with many commenting on the long working hours that were required of them. According to



the 2019 Teacher Workload Survey, teachers work, on average, 49-54 hours per week<sup>64</sup>, equating to 10-11 hour days across a five day week. June, Rosie and Marie-Ann describe 11 to 12 hour days and both Rochelle and Kallie refer to starting ‘quite early in the morning’, ‘picking them up quite late around 5 o’clock, half past 5’, ‘the sort of hours I’d have to work in my job’.

Interestingly, four participants commenting above had organised childcare solutions: be that through relatives (June), a ‘babysitter’ (Rochelle), nursery (Rosie) or unspecified ‘childcare’ (Marie-Ann). It is only Kallie who did not have a childcare confirmed at the time she is referring to in her comments. Despite these childcare solutions, however, this set up was not what these participants wanted, feeling that such long hours were bad for their baby, bad for their baby’s carer, or bad for them as parents.

June and Marie-Ann explicitly state that these long days ‘wouldn’t be particularly fair on... the baby’, ‘it wasn’t fair on my children to leave them in childcare for that length of time’, and Rosie’s comment implies that being ‘in nursery from the age of nine months old, from 7:30 in the morning until quite late in the evening’, was not appropriate for such a young baby. What’s more, June reflects that ‘seven in the morning ‘til half seven at night’ also wasn’t ‘fair’ on her mother, who provided the childcare.

For three participants, the enforced reflection about what was fair, or appropriate for their child, also prompts them to reflect on their own wellbeing, and review working patterns that had become normalised, or expected. Rochelle states that she ‘was getting very frustrated’ at ‘having to leave [her] children quite early’, Rosie is apprehensive that she ‘would have... not seen’ her ‘little son’ ‘til nearly 7:00pm in the evening’ had she put him in nursery, and Kallie takes a moment to pause and reflect on ‘the sort of hours [she’d] have to work in [her] job’. In each case, participants decide that even though they *could* put their children into childcare for the length of time needed for them to complete their 10-12 hour working days, they didn’t *want* to begin, or continue such a lifestyle as parents.

### **Desire to be the Primary Caregiver**

The second of these choices is participants’ decision be the primary caregiver to their child, rather than access paid childcare or family support to return to, or continue working. We have already seen this desire in Gauri, Kallie and Josephine’s comments in the previous section, *Cost of Childcare*, where they feel they would be paying to facilitate a lifestyle that they didn’t actually want. In all of these comments, we can see traces of what Mezey and Pillard would consider ‘new maternalism’, with the belief that – rather than nursery, relatives, partners or childminders – ‘mothers are the gold standard when it comes to care work’<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Walker, M., Worth, J. and Van den Brande, J., *Teacher workload survey 2019*, for Cooper Gibson Research, Department for Education, October 2019, available at:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/855933/teacher\\_workload\\_survey\\_2019\\_main\\_report\\_amended.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/855933/teacher_workload_survey_2019_main_report_amended.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Mezey, N. and Pillard, C.T.L., *Rethinking the New Maternalism*, January 2010, available at:  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46285808\\_Rethinking\\_the\\_New\\_Maternalism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46285808_Rethinking_the_New_Maternalism)

The comments regarding participants' desire to be the primary caregiver can be separated into two categories: these mother-teachers both *wanted* to spend more time with their children, but some were also concerned about the impact of putting them into childcare at an early age:

“On paper I earned more than my husband but in terms of flexibility, benefits around my husband’s job, his was more appealing and it meant that it was going to be better for me to look after the child – and I wanted to look after the children.” – *Kallie*

“I wanted to be around to help my son read, I wanted to be able to go on, you know, school trips with him, and go and see his Christmas play and everything, and I wouldn't have been able to do that in quite the same way.” – *Stacey*

“I’m paying for nursery fees at the same time. And I thought, essentially, I thought, why should I pay for someone else to look after my children while I look after a classroom full of children throughout the day, and I’m actually making very little money when I could just look after my own children and have lots of fun?” – *Gauri*

“I knew that I wanted to be primary caregiver to my children.” – *Josephine*

Despite the privilege of choice included in these comments, Kallie’s list of ‘flexibility’ ‘benefits’ and the fact that, overall, it ‘was going to be better for [her] to look after the child’, regardless of what she ‘earned’ shows us that there are a number of factors that lead to mothers acting as the primary caregiver, and – especially considering that Kallie *was* the primary caregiver – these considerations don’t always fit neatly into gendered stereotypes around male breadwinners and female caregivers. Rather, they are influenced by the complexities of cost, logistics, joint decision-making amongst couples, family support, and attitudes from employers explored in this report.

However, in this first set of comments, we do see participants benefitting from the privilege of choice. Regardless of the financial implications of childcare, or their experiences at their school, it is important for Kallie, Stacey, Gauri and Josephine to be their children’s primary caregiver. They use phrases such as ‘I wanted to look after the children’, ‘I wanted to be around to help my son read... to go on... school trips with him, and go and see his Christmas play’, ‘I could just look after my own children and have lots of fun?’, ‘I wanted to be the primary caregiver to my children’. At the time of interview, both Kallie and Josephine were stay at home mothers – as were five further participants – whereas Gauri and Stacey’s vision of acting as the primary caregiver involved continuing with paid work, just in a more flexible industry.

Stacey’s comments emphasise that it is not just when children are babies that parents might want to be more present but – as we saw in the previous section *One child starting school* – new logistical and emotional needs arise for both children and parents. In emphasising all the new experiences her son will have at school – ‘read’, ‘school trips’, ‘Christmas play’ – Stacey echoes the vision of parenthood denied to the colleagues described by Sophie in **05. We Don’t**

**Need Another Hero...?** The requests from these colleagues, to ‘go and see this assembly that [her] child was speaking in’ were denied, and they ended their teaching careers feeling that they were ‘never there’ at any of their own children’s events. Instead of feeling as if they are missing out on the things they consider important, the four participants above are choosing to leave teaching in order to parent in a way that matches their values.

Josephine, Kinga and Stacey’s comments also reveal concerns around the emotional impact of childcare:

“I didn't really want to send them to nursery from a very young age personally.” – *Josephine*

“I didn't want to be an absent mum you know.” – *Stacey*

“I didn’t want my husband to do everything five days a week. I wanted to be more present.” – *Stacey*

“Put my child into childcare, which seems a little bit – I’m an early years teacher, so it just seemed a little ridiculous that I would be putting my own child into childcare to care for other people’s children.” – *Kinga*

Josephine refers to the emotional impact she anticipates nursery or other childcare provision having on her ‘very young’ baby, but Stacey and Kinga talk about the impact that this would have on them on their partners. Stacey’s fear of being an ‘absent mum’, or relying on her partner ‘to do everything five days a week’ reflects her dissatisfaction at her previous set up as a teacher, where she was unable to be present to manage any of the childcare logistics for her son. Echoing Gauri’s previous comments, Kinga also expresses her own discomfort (rather than her child’s) at the thought of expending her energy and expertise on ‘other people’s children’ rather than using this to benefit her ‘own child’.

This unease at the thought of ‘someone else look[ing] after my children’, ‘putting my own child into childcare’ may be particularly influenced by participants’ role as teachers – a career that centres entirely around children and their development. Particularly for Kinga who, as ‘an early years teacher’ has professional knowledge and experience of her baby’s age range, the thought of outsourcing this to ‘childcare’ ‘seems a little bit... ridiculous’. It is important, however, to point out the irony in Kinga’s comments. Despite being an ‘early years teacher’, she does not see the value of exposing her own child to an external setting like a nursery or with a childminder. Although such settings provide babies and young children with important opportunities to socialise, grow in independence and develop relationships outside the home, Kinga’s comments suggest that as a mother, she considers herself the ‘gold standard’ when it comes to her own child’s care.

## **Suggestions for Schools and Individuals**

The complexity and cost of organising childcare in the UK can be a significant barrier to mother-teachers' ability to continue working in what can sometimes be a rigid profession logistically incompatible with the demands of parenthood, particularly motherhood. We have seen in our stayer's survey that when these logistics can be managed, they enable women aged 30-39 to remain in the profession. When they cannot, childcare logistics contribute to the decision to leave for a third of this demographic.

The fact remains that the childcare systems in the UK are not fit for purpose – neither for the parents that use them, nor the under-funded and stretched providers. Significant change is needed at government level to completely overhaul our approach to ensure that childcare provision better supports our economy.

In the meantime, there are some “sticking plaster” solutions that schools and individuals can implement to mitigate the barriers presented by, and reduce the cost of childcare.

In general terms, the responses from the 15 participants in this report have indicated that schools can take the following actions to support mother-teachers aged 30-39 with their childcare arrangements:

- Raise awareness of tax-free childcare, child benefit and any other financial support available through relevant policy documents, and face to face conversations with colleagues.
- Include additional financial support for childcare as a school or MAT recruitment and retention benefit.
- Negotiate with local childcare providers to secure term-time only hours, or reduced rates for your staff.
- Consider the viability of establishing an on-site creche.
  
- Avoid and address discriminatory practices that result in financial penalties for women. This might include:
  - Providing training for middle leaders, senior leaders and line managers to ensure that discriminatory attitudes and practices around working mothers do not occur.
  - Challenging any discriminatory practice in hiring or promoting processes.
  - Ensuring that part-time TLR holders are paid fairly if they are completing the full TLR role.
  - Reviewing absence policies to ensure that mothers taking time off to care for their children are not financially or professionally punished.
  
- Provide flexible full-time working opportunities to support with drop off and pick up, or commuting logistics.
- Ensure that part-time and flexible working opportunities are offered at all levels, including at leadership level.
- Discuss part-time and flexible working options with fathers as well as mothers.

- Remember that colleagues who are grandparents may also need flexibility to manage childcare responsibilities.
- Consider flexibility and creative options around after school commitments such as parents' evenings.
- Consider that mother teachers may need flexibility to manage childcare arrangements up until their youngest child begins school.
  
- Address heavy workloads and cultures of presenteeism that result in teachers being present on site for long hours.
- Consider the impact of timetabling on childcare arrangements, particularly over two-week timetables, but also how timetabling at the beginning and end of the day can support full-time flexibility or reduce cover needs in the case of childcare emergencies.
  
- Support teachers who need to relocate to be closer to family support by connecting them with any Trust or network connections you have in their new region.
- Offer sabbaticals for teachers who want to extend their maternity leave to spend more time as their child's primary carer.

For individuals who have read this report feeling that they are in the same or a similar position to our 15 contributing participants, and are searching for affordable and accessible childcare solutions to support them to remain in teaching, consider the following actions:

- Remember that childcare costs are a joint household spending, not the sole responsibility of the mother. If you are in a two-parent family, discuss ways in which *both* parents can adapt their working lives to reduce childcare costs and manage logistics. This is particularly relevant to parents in heterosexual couples.
  
- Review exactly what you might need to manage childcare logistics and reduce costs, and propose a full-time flexible working plan to your school. This could include:
  - Late starts and early finishes to reduce wraparound fees or manage nursery opening times and commutes
  - Condensed hours to give you one or more days a week at home with your pre-school aged children
  - Working from home arrangements to allow you to do one or two drop offs / pick ups per week.
  - Remember, discuss how your partner can do these things, too!
- Build a community of family, friends and paid babysitters who can provide emergency childcare when needed.
- Remember that asking grandparents and family members to support with childcare can be beneficial to them, as well as you. Discuss what the optimum involvement would be for your relatives, and consider outlining a verbal or written contract that includes clear boundaries for both parties.
  
- Discuss and negotiate term-time arrangements with your nursery or childminder.

- Ensure you are accessing tax-free childcare and child benefit to support with childcare costs.
- Look ahead in the school calendar and identify potential issues with after school commitments each term. Discuss potential solutions with your line manager and SLT in advance.
- Communicate with timetablers and senior leaders about your childcare needs if these are complicated by two-week timetables, or other lesson or form time allocations.
- If you are considering relocating to be closer to relatives for childcare reasons, use MAT, or external edu-networks like The MTPT Project and WomenEd to secure employment in your new location.
- If you are taking an extended career break to take care of your child, but are considering returning to teaching in the future, remain connected with The MTPT Project, and subject- or phase-specific networks to support your return when you are ready.
- Use reporting systems within your school or through your union to call out discriminatory behaviour, systems or practices that focuses on, or occur as a consequence of, your childcare needs.

### **Want to find out more?**

If you have any further questions about this report or our findings about how childcare contributes to teachers' 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](http://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](http://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](mailto:mtptproject@gmail.com) or find her spending too much time on Twitter [@mtptproject](https://twitter.com/mtptproject)