

Maternity and Paternity Attrition

amongst the teacher and support staff workforce

A 2025 MTPT Project report, *Maternity Attrition and its impact on the teacher workforce* revealed the high rates of attrition amongst teachers over the first four years of their return from maternity leave.

Further data acquired from the DfE through a series of freedom of information requests compare this maternity attrition amongst teachers with three further staff groups:

- Teaching Assistants – maternity returners
- Teachers taking an extended period of paternity leave (3 or more weeks)
- Teachers taking a period of standard paternity leave (1-2 weeks)

Staff Taking Maternity / Paternity Leave

On average, 15,034 teachers and teaching assistants begin a period of maternity or paternity leave each year.

Although there are more female teaching assistants (92%) than female teachers (76%), the data reveals that a higher percentage of teachers take a period of maternity leave than any other group:

Staff Group	Total workforce	Percentage of workforce
Teachers – maternity returners	454,702	2.18
Teaching Assistants – maternity returners	265,167	0.89
Teachers – standard paternity leave	454,702	0.48
Teachers – extended paternity leave	454,702	0.13

Table 1: percentage of different workforce groups taking maternity / paternity leave – average across data sets spanning from 2016-2024

This is unsurprising as just 26.6% of teaching assistants are aged 25-39 – the “child-bearing” bracket – in comparison to 49.4% of teachers.

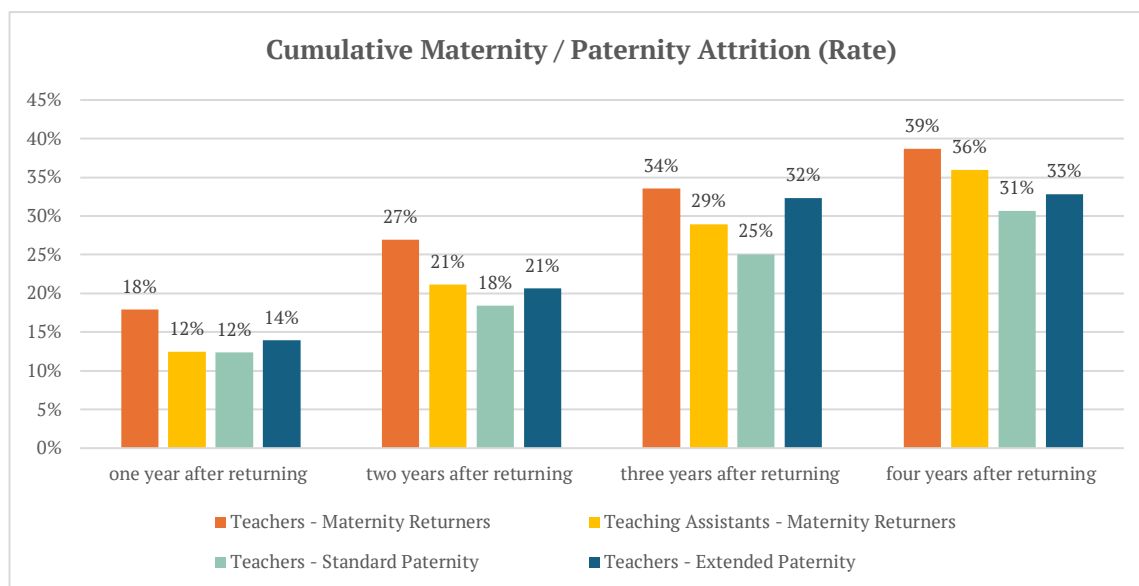
Maternity / Paternity Attrition

Across all four groups, we lose 5,456 staff members over the four-year period following maternity or paternity leave, 36% of the original total cohort. Almost two fifths of this total loss occurs in the first 12 months following the return to work:

Attrition (Headcount)	starting headcount	one year after returning	two years after returning	three years after returning	four years after returning
Teachers - Maternity Returners	9,902	1,773	2,665	3,321	3,835
Teaching Assistants - Maternity Returners	2,366	294	500	685	851
Teachers - Standard Paternity	2,184	270	402	547	669
Teachers - Extended Paternity	582	81	120	188	191
Total staff attrition		2,418	3,687	4,741	5,546

Table 2: cumulative attrition (headcount) amongst maternity / paternity returners – average across data sets spanning from 2016-2024

For all four groups, the first 12 months following the return to work represents the highest risk of attrition. Teachers returning from maternity leave remain the group most likely to leave over a four-year period:



Graph 1: cumulative maternity / paternity attrition rates – average across data sets spanning from 2016-2024

Over a three-year period, the second highest attrition rate is amongst teachers taking extended paternity leave. This is overtaken by teaching assistants returning from maternity leave by the fourth year following the return. Teachers taking standard paternity leave are at least risk of attrition following their return.

The difference in attrition rates between teachers (18%) and teaching assistants (12%) taking maternity leave could also point to the different demands of these job roles and the consequent impact on family life.

Rates of Paternity Attrition

That teachers taking an extended period of paternity leave represent the second highest attrition rate of all four groups over a three-year period suggests that the conflict between parenting and working in schools is not gendered. Rather, it could be more dependent on who takes on the caring role within the first 12 months of their child's life.

However, the lower overall rates of attrition amongst teachers taking an extend period of paternity leave in comparison to teachers taking maternity leave suggest that fathers / non-birthing partners are less likely to experience the challenges of re-entering the workforce as birthing mothers. This is true for both the first 12 months of the return and over a four-year period.

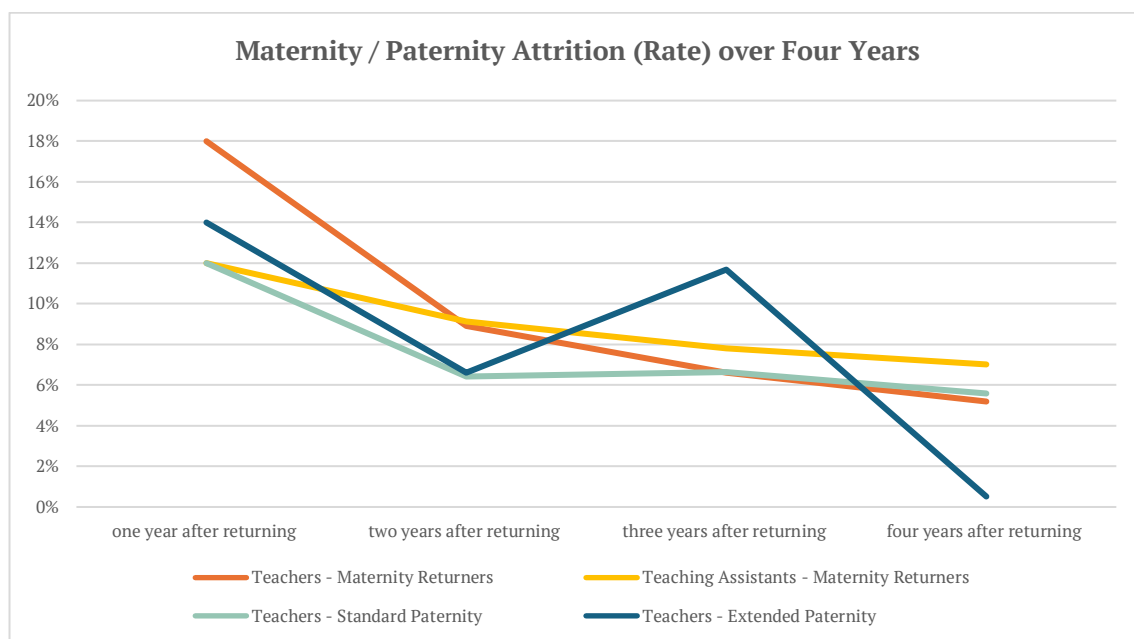
Some possible reasons for these lower attrition rates amongst extended paternity returners could be because they:

- Take their leave in the first weeks of their child's life and return to work whilst their partner is still at home to continue with the childcare and domestic load
- Take shorter periods of absence from the workforce overall
- Are more likely to share their leave with a partner simultaneously
- Are more likely to take a period of extended paternity leave *after* their partner has taken an earlier period of maternity leave

In the last two cases, there is a higher chance that childcare, and the domestic load are established and shared more equally between a couple, rather than falling on one parent alone. This sharing of home responsibilities makes the transition back into work more manageable for both parents.

Year on Year Attrition Increment

For teachers and teaching assistants taking maternity leave, attrition gradually slows over the four years following the return. Attrition amongst teachers taking a standard period of paternity leave plateaus between 6-7% across the second to fourth year of return. However, for teachers taking an extended period of paternity leave, we see an increase in leaving rates in the third year, and then a significant decrease in the fourth year following their return.



Graph 2: year on year maternity / paternity attrition increment – average across data sets spanning from 2016-2024

The spike in attrition in the third year following the return amongst teachers taking a period of extended paternity leave coincides with –and therefore may be influenced by – either funded childcare hours or the age that the child starts school.

Recommendations

At school, multi-academy trust, local authority, and DfE level, we suggest that:

- Absence and retention data related to maternity, paternity and shared parental leave is tracked, published and reviewed on an annual basis for all groups of teaching and support staff
- Parental leave and pay are improved and equalised for all school staff in line with other public sector industries
- The current [Cradle to Classroom](#) coaching model is promoted and expanded both at school level, and nationally

Department for Education, 2025. *Teachers taking extended paternity leave: response to a Freedom of Information request*. Available at: https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/teachers_taking_extended_paterni#incoming-3339188 (Accessed: 12 August 2025).

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The New Britain Project in collaboration with The MTPT Project (2024) *Missing Mothers: breaking the cycle of teacher attrition*. Available at: <https://www.newbritain.org.uk/missing-mothers>