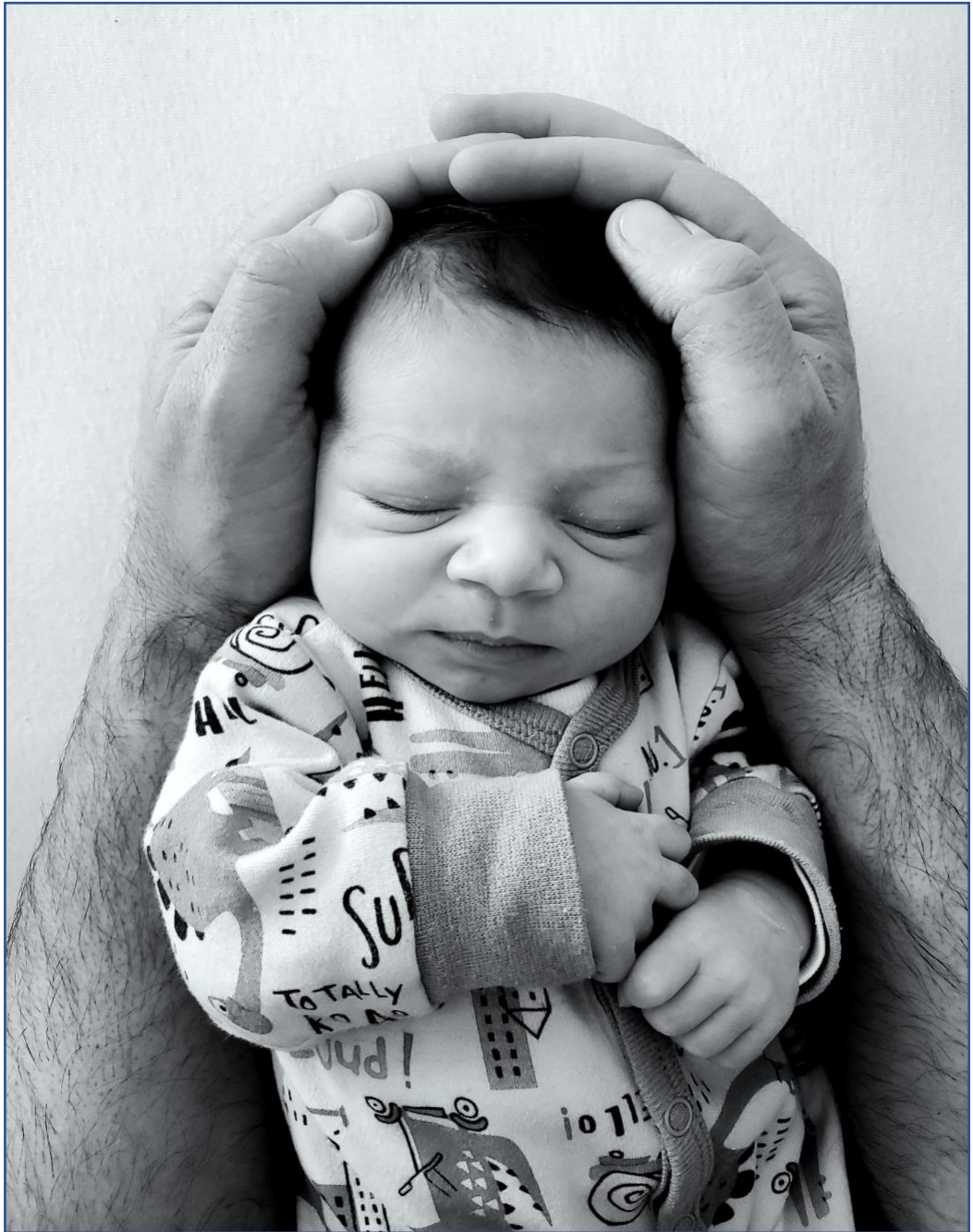


AUGUST 2020



EXPERIENCE OF RESEARCHERS TAKING MATERNITY, PATERNITY, ADOPTION, AND/OR PARENTAL LEAVE:

REPORT ON QUALITATIVE DATA

UK Research Staff Association



supported by Vitae



Experience of Researchers taking Maternity, Paternity, Adoption, and/or Parental Leave: Report on qualitative data has been written by **Dr Rebekah Willson**, McGill University (Canada).

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The UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA), supported by Vitae, provides a collective voice for research staff in the UK, working with local research staff associations and informing policy. Vitae provides resources, courses and events for research staff. Vitae works closely with the UKRSA to deliver projects, and provides administrative support and continuity.



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Introduction

Experience of Researchers taking Maternity, Paternity, Adoption, and/or Parental Leave: Report on qualitative data by the UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA), is the first publication looking specifically at the experiences of researchers taking childcare leave. It explores the wide and varied experiences of researchers as described by 365 questionnaire respondents, following a UKRSA survey in 2017. This report undertakes a qualitative analysis of free text comments in response to 10 questions that gave respondents the opportunity to expand on their answers (see Appendix A for the list of questions). The term “researchers” describes a broad spectrum of higher education employees who actively engage in the delivery and direction of research projects, and therefore researchers had a wide variety of needs, preferences, and experiences, meaning that the responses varied widely. Despite the variety, some trends from the responses became clear. To understand the trends, the responses have been divided into three general categories: Situational Factors, Personal Context, Types of Experiences, and Advice & Effective Practices.

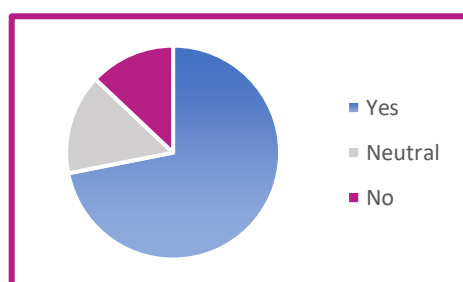


Figure 1: Overall experience of leave was positive

Some key trends:

Situational Factors

Situational factors played a large role in the experiences reported by researchers. These factors included line managers and primary investigators (PIs), departmental culture, the HR department within the university, and the type of contract on which researchers were working.

Personal Context

Only a small percentage of respondents identified themselves as members of groups with protected characteristics. As there was a great variety in experiences and responses that no clear pattern emerged. Examining the complex and varied potential impacts of these protected characteristics on researchers' childcare leave experiences are important areas for future study.

Types of Experiences

While the majority of experiences was positive (~70%), a significant portion of experiences were negative (~13%) (Figure 1). Throughout the responses there was an acknowledgement that childcare responsibilities necessitate new ways of working. In particular flexible working arrangements, remote working, and changes to work patterns were needed to accommodate changes in circumstances and in priorities. The ability to work flexibly and remotely were seen positively, facilitating being able to work and take care of young children.

Advice and Effective Practices

Researchers offered a wide range of advice from general life advice to specifics about childcare vouchers, documenting everything, ensuring appropriate holiday accrual, and keeping track of pay. The more general forms of advice were often about keeping perspective on what is important, balancing work and home life, and doing what is best for oneself. From these a leaflet on “Tips for researchers taking maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave and advice for institutions and employers” was created.

Situational Factors

Situational factors played a large role in the experiences reported by researchers. These factors included line managers and primary investigators (PIs), departmental culture, the HR department within the university, and the type of contract on which researchers were working.

Line managers and PIs

Line managers and PIs, as immediate superiors, had a great amount of influence on both what happened before, during, and after the leave, as well as the type of experience (positive or negative) encountered. Many line managers were sources of support for researchers, helping them to navigate the policies and options, helping them to make decisions about what to do, and agreeing to changed work patterns that allowed researchers to make the decisions that were right for them.

“I was concerned because my contract was due to expire during my maternity leave, but my line manager was really supportive and managed to extend my contract/the grant I was working on to allow me to take six months.” (Respondent 200)

“My manager allowed me to work from home during the end of my pregnancy as I had health issues. He also allowed me to come to an important meeting while I was on maternity leave and bring my baby with me so that I could keep in touch.” (Respondent 206)

“If you have a PI who will move heaven and earth to make sure you are supported through taking a long period of leave and working out balancing family & work then you have a shot at "success" in academia. If not, and your boss is indifferent or downright unsupportive then make an exit strategy because academic success comes when others open doors for you. Unfortunately academia is not about being smart or hardworking - we all are - it's about who makes success happen for you.” (Respondent 39)

Conversely, some line managers were unsupportive and made the experience of going on leave more difficult.

“Negative - poor handling of the leave by my line manager, no cover provided in time, no reduced workload (rather increased workload)” (Respondent 251)

“... took 6 months maternity leave, should've returned to my job as it was when I left it, but didn't. Received no support from HoD so applied for another job and left the department less than 6 months after returning. Emotionally and mentally this was a hard time.” (Respondent 296)

Departmental culture

Departmental culture has a large impact on how parental leave was experienced. While line managers and PIs are part of this culture, it goes beyond individuals. Researchers mentioned negative reactions they received from colleagues, pressure to not take leave or to shorten leave, being “punished” by having work taken away, and even discrimination.

“I was strongly encouraged to take no more leave than absolutely necessary. Felt bad for taking any leave at all.” (Respondent 40)

“Lab boss on hearing I was pregnant and discussing maternity leave: “we are not going to pay you to watch daytime television”” (Respondent 212)

“On return to work I was effectively demoted - having once led large national projects, I was given menial administrative tasks such as spellchecking minutes (I am educated to PhD level with over 10 years experience in research). I was then told I was not working at the correct level to apply for promotion due to changes outside of my control and despite having been supported to do so prior to maternity leave.” (Respondent 248)

“When I went for promotion to Professor, my departmental colleagues opposed my application because “you have taken a year on Maternity leave.” True story, Russell Group University, 2013.” (Respondent 183)

Human resources

Many researchers discussed their interactions with HR. Unsurprisingly, researchers were often unfamiliar with the options, policies, and procedures when it came to parental leave, and frequently turned to their HR departments. While HR departments were not the only source of information about parental leave, they were important sources, as well as being responsible for how some of the policies were implemented. Experiences with HR varied greatly, from finding HR to be informative and helpful to being unaware of policies and unable to provide support. Both positive and negative experiences had real consequences for researchers.

“I really appreciated a one-to-one appointment with an HR advisor before going on leave. It wasn't just offered but simply organised for me, and it made me feel supported. I also remember noticing and valuing that every HR staff member I had contact with took the time to say 'congratulations' and not just launch into the bureaucracy.” (Respondent 48)

“HR were very helpful in helping me work out what I needed to do - forms to be completed, by when etc. etc. and work out my leave entitlement e.g. what I accrued while on my maternity leave and when this could be used once returned to work.” (Respondent 160)

“There was a lot of confusion from HR with regards annual leave I had accrued, I still do not believe I got my full entitlement. ... I did not know that I could have phased more gradually back into work until I had already returned. This would have made things much easier but again this information was not provided to me by HR.” (Respondent 340)

“I would have liked a meeting with HR. There was no real contact and I had to read all the policies myself. This resulted in me not understanding how much annual leave I had, and then struggling to be able to use it. I also felt there is probably lots of support and different options that I never knew about.” (Respondent 362)

Problems seemed to be particularly apparent for PhD students, post-docs, and those working on fixed-term contracts.

“However, when dealing with HR, it was as if no post-doc had ever had a baby before. Nobody knew who would cover maternity pay, what pay I was entitled to given that my contract was due to end during the leave period etc. It was very stressful at times, trying to sort all this out whilst pregnant. On return to work, there was no meeting or plan to get me back up to speed. I was left to my own devices which was quite scary.” (Respondent 34)

Contract type

The type of contract on which researchers worked was one of the most important factors in how their leave was experienced. Those on permanent contracts had more straight-forward experiences, while those on fixed-term contracts had more uncertainty about what leave they were entitled to, whether their position could be put on hold, whether they would have a job to return to, and what financial support they would receive. Taking leave while on a fixed-term contract often had significant consequences.

“If one has an independent fellowship, a permanent contract, one is able to access a whole host of privileges, support and most importantly security that is by no means available fixed term staff. Parental leave is enforcing the already heavily hierarchical structure in research and is failing the workforce that is in fact carrying out the research. There is little understanding, compassion or interest in providing security for fixed-term researchers.” (Respondent 37)

“As a postdoc on a fixed term contract, maternity leave was an intimidating prospect. I didn't have much funding left to return to at the end of leave and was worried about finding another job- if grant applications were unsuccessful I would have to move to another institution which would mean massive disruption to family life, moving to a new city etc. Or choosing another career.” (Respondent 80)

Some researchers had stories about the consequences of taking leave whilst being on fixed-term appointments that were difficult to hear.

“I was unable to return to work at 4 months, as planned, due to health complications. By the end of the extended maternity leave, my funding had expired, and I was forced to move out of London to Midlands, with no professional support network, and no opportunity to commute to London in order to be redeployed. At the moment, am trying to apply to (very few and far between) positions at local universities, but with no success so far. Have never thought before that "falling through the cracks" would happen to me, but I was wrong. To be honest, the responsibility to care - and, ideally, provide for - my child is the only thing that keeps me going.” (Respondent 15)

While contracts made a large difference to the experience of parental leave, this could be mitigated by line managers and PIs.

“My experience was largely positive but since I have returned we've had a change of management and I am not sure it would be so positive next time around. In particular, my old manager wrote me into a funding bid while I was on maternity leave so that I had some work ready for me on my return, whereas she has now retired and this no longer seems to happen when people are on maternity leave. Instead, research staff with open contracts are returning from maternity leave with no funded projects (if they don't bring funding in within 6 months or so they may be made redundant).” (Respondent 23)

“I was concerned because my contract was due to expire during my maternity leave, but my line manager was really supportive and managed to extend my contract/the grant I was working on to allow me to take six months.” (Respondent 200)

Personal Context

Participants were asked for their demographic information, including whether they belonged to a protected group. While some participants left these questions blank or selected “Prefer not to answer,” others provided responses. While the number of participants who were members of protected groups was small, their comments were examined separately to see if responses indicate issues particular to their personal context(s). Only 5 respondents indicated they had a disability of some kind and with numbers so low, no pattern of experiences was evident. Additionally, no respondent mentioned their disability as part of their leave experience. This was also the case with the 11 respondents that indicated LGBTQ+ sexual orientation. Thirty respondents indicated that they are a person of colour. There was a great range of responses and no clear patterns emerged. However, two participants specifically mentioned their race and/or nationality in their response.

“My experience is very negative as I wasn't provided with any sort of support from my University. I was forced to go back to research after a very short period. Now after one year I'm still suffering from the emotional impact of that experience. No one should experience what I went through, and no one should be judged by their nationality. International researchers are also humans have rights, and should be allowed to take at least a 3 months maternity leave particularly those who have no family support.” (Respondent 211)

“Negative experience during maternity Leave due to discrimination based on nationality (Ethnic minority)” (Respondent 255)

When asked if they had any advice for others planning to go on leave, these participants responded,

“If you are an International researcher think thousand times before getting pregnant or considering taking maternity leave. My apologies for the harsh advice to other researchers but my negative experience with [University] was very unexpected.” (Respondent 211)

“Please design some surveys targeting minor ethnic groups and third world countries as they really experience discrimination.” (Respondent 255)

Paternity experiences

The majority of responses were from those who went on maternity leave (73%, n=268); the next largest group was those on paternity leave (21%, n = 77). There were relatively few taking parental leave (3%, n = 12) or adoption leave (2%, n = 7). Those on paternity leave mentioned some unique experiences, including feelings of discrimination, the challenge of leave that is so short, and a lack of information about leave which is less well established. However, not all experiences were negative.

“Why is it not sex discrimination that a father only receives 1 week full pay and 1 week statutory pay, while the mother can receive up to 16 weeks leave with full pay, and is further entitled to a full years maternity leave?” (Respondent 52)

“As a man taking shared parental leave, I received no info from HR about keeping-in-touch days, or about a funding scheme that could potentially have provided 3 months of postdoc support to help keep my research team running. HR and my line management were utterly piss-poor, as usual.” (Respondent 283)

“college provides 2 weeks of paternity leave, but nothing beyond that. Longer parental leave (for fathers) are not be viewed favorable and are not financially feasible.” (Respondent 169)

“I was able to spread my paternity leave in agreement with my line-manager so that I have effectively worked part time for an extended period of time. I felt well supported in this aspect.” (Respondent 182)

Adoption leave

While there were very few parents who took adoption leave, some mentioned aspects of their experience that were unique. In some cases, leave for adoption was talked about as being new and that there were issues with logistics around the leave.

“Because of the adoption process it was difficult to provide with an exact date for starting the leave that will allow for the maximum benefit, I had to use annual leave to cover for that.” (Respondent 258)

“The government policies and laws on adoption leave do not reflect the realities of adoption, which means that - as my employer follows this - the local policies are problematic. What is positive is the possibility of shared parental leave, and that in my institution there is shared parental pay.” (Respondent 286)

“Took shared adoption leave, my partner is 'primary adopter' - find terminology 'Paternity leave' out of touch I am a woman and not a 'father'” (Respondent 335)

“My adoption leave was handled perfectly by my university. ... I wasn't aware I could take adoption leave until my HoD told me I could. He walked me through the process and everything was arranged with the minimum fuss.” (Respondent 270)

Types of Experiences

Experiencing new ways of working

Throughout the responses there was an acknowledgement that after having children situations change and that there needs to be new ways of working – particularly flexible working arrangements, remote working, and changes to work patterns – to accommodate changes in circumstances and in priorities. The ability to work flexibly and remotely were seen as very positively, facilitating being able to work and take care of young children.

“Reduced workload returning to work was essential, as was flexibility (allowed to work part-time, I can choose my hours - within reason)” (Respondent 149)

“For my third child, I was able as the PI in the lab to hold lab meeting at home and to bring the baby for meetings at the office and found that very useful to keep up to date and found that going back to work was much easier. I took all my KIT days and used them as a flexibility tool when I came back.” (Respondent 62)

“I was allowed to change to flexible working hours. Additionally my mentor allowed me to use his office to breastfeed (I was in a shared space). My husband would come by at times with my little one and I would breastfeed him. At other times, I would work from home. Other times I worked night shift (I was a researcher) from 8pm until 5am, so I could be off the next day with my son. It was tough but it would have been impossible without this admin support.” (Respondent 76)

“My employer during my pregnancy was not helpful at all. My current employer has allowed part-time, flexible working from home that has allowed me to return to work while still caring for my child.” (Respondent 144)

“I have since been able to access the family friendly policy and officially reduce my hours which enables me to support my daughter as she goes through school.” (Respondent 296)

Negative experiences

A lot was said about the negative experiences before going on leave, during leave, and returning from leave. Below is a list of codes used to categorise the types of negative experiences reported.

- Conflict with job
- Detrimental to career
- Discrimination
- Excluded
- Guilt
- Lack of clarity
- Lack of contact
- Lack of coverage
- Lack of flexibility
- Lack of information
- Lack of physical infrastructure
- Lack of support/help
- Negative reaction
- Poor implementation
- Poor provisions
- Pressure
- Previous negative experience
- Problem with ad hoc childcare
- Problem with childcare
- Problem with contract, security, role
- Problem with personal finances
- Problem with policies, procedures
- Problem with research funding
- Problem with transition
- Problem with work/workload
- Unable to take leave

The negative experiences reported by researchers were varied, many related to practical aspects of work including childcare (both regular and emergency childcare) and finances.

“Finding the right childcare in time to return to work was incredibly stressful and upsetting that I considered resigning. It was on my mind for six months after returning to work.” (Respondent 96)

“Going back to a full time job was very stressful in the beginning especially when I needed to find emergency childcare on days my baby was sick and I still needed to go to work.” (Respondent 186)

“I would like to expand on two points: 1) on whether finding childcare was not an issue: the cost of childcare is an issue in itself. It is far too expensive and does not promote equality of opportunities ...” (Respondent 153)

“How can a married couple start work at 9.00 when schools only open at 8.45. I drop my kids off at 8.45 and then my commute to work is 35 minutes. I can not be at work for 9. Then the school closes at 3.15. There is no after school club! In order to be at the school for 3.15 I or my wife need to leave work at about 2.40. This is joke in the modern world. we have complicated shared flexible working arrangement to cover this but the perception at work is that you are "never in". The school day and the provision of afterschool care is severely limiting my ability to be productive.” (Respondent 325)

“The package we receive is not good enough to fully feel 'supported' to take leave: we can only be on full salaries for a short period of time (8 weeks in my own institution), and taking longer requires that we are able to do without 50% of our salary - which some of us may do and others may not.” (Respondent 153)

“I couldn't afford to take as much leave as I wanted to.” (Respondent 305)

While many negative experiences were related to the situational factors discussed above (e.g., departmental culture, contract type, etc.), other negative experiences were related to the transitioning away from work, coverage whilst gone, and transitioning back to work.

“My maternity leave was not organised before I went on leave so there was no handover and 6 weeks now I have returned to work. As my full role was not detailed to her she has not maintained all of the aspects of my work whilst I have been away so I have had to answer emails for the last 4 weeks of my maternity leave which I deeply resent.” (Respondent 346)

“For women on maternity leave, there are major issues surrounding continuity of research and academic reputation. I suffered with enormous problems protecting my intellectual property while on leave, partly as I left one job and started a new one after leave, so didn't have access to institutional legal advice etc. I found, on leave, that others (all male incidentally), were more than happy to appropriate my work and ideas.” (Respondent 25)

“My experience was generally good. However, there was the constant feeling that you cannot never 'catch-up' afterwards. This was because it was seen as a 'choice' and in a way you just have to deal with the consequences. This made returning to work tough as my partner and I had to juggle demanding full-time careers (in a highly competitive environment), childcare etc. I suffered from sleepless nights, anxiety etc. from fear that my contract will not be renewed as I compete with those with less responsibilities.” (Respondent 76)

“When I returned to work there was quite a big backlog of jobs. Some colleagues hadn't been told by the Dept that I was away and were questioning why my work hadn't been done. There was no cover for me whilst away. When I returned I had to work longer days to catch up without overtime or any support.” (Respondent 279)

Some researchers had an overall negative view of having children and an academic career at the same time.

“Early career researchers have many pressures in terms of starting their career with grants, and especially paper writing. Having children unfortunately massively gets in the way of this, and I feel this is not really taken into account, especially at progression meetings, probation, and promotion. Sure, it's recorded, but I don't feel it is seriously considered.” (Respondent 111)

“Sadly it's career versus children, which for men means you won't see as much of them as you'd like, and for women means avoiding having them unless you have already attained a permanent position or are in a very stable financial position that enables you to work essentially for free to get back in.” (Respondent 84)

Positive experiences

While negative experiences are often the focus, many researchers also mentioned having positive experiences overall or positive aspects of their leave. Again, the types of experiences varied widely. Below is a list of codes used to categorise the types of positive experiences reported.

- Being able to take leave
- Childcare arrangements
- Clarity (leave, work)
- Contact
- Contract, extension, new job
- Coverage (research, work, projects)
- Financial support
- Flexibility in working arrangements
- Good policies
- Inclusion
- Information accessibility
- Kept up with work
- No pressure
- Physical infrastructure
- Positive transition
- Remote working
- Risk assessment undertaken
- Security of position
- Support
- Work hours, load, pattern

While many positive experiences were related to the situational factors discussed in the first section (e.g., departmental culture, contract type, etc.), other positive experiences were related to the support received from colleagues and, particularly, line managers. Many researchers expressed beliefs that line managers and PIs who had children were more supportive and accommodating.

“When I was on maternity leave I experienced PND [post-natal depression] and was offered support for this through my University Employer which I found was most valuable. I was provided with a designated area for expressing milk during the day to help support on going breastfeeding when I returned to work. I was provided with a mentor to support my work/life balance concerns.” (Respondent 163)

“I had a completely great experience and felt supported all the way. And I felt that compared to other new mothers at the same time I was very well supported and enabled in academia” (Respondent 69)

“My line manager has been very supportive and understanding of the struggles of returning to work with young children. He has allowed me time to get my focus back on work and has not questioned when I might have to work a bit more flexibly in order to manage childcare, or to stay home to look after a sick child. This has made me feel supported and valued.” (Respondent 362)

“I had a very positive experience after being on maternity leave twice. I believe I have been very lucky as my manager/PI has always been extremely positive about anything related to my family. I believe this is because he has children. I have heard many stories of other parents that haven't been so lucky.” (Respondent 155)

Many respondents provided specific aspects of their experiences – often facilitated by their universities and those in positions of authority – which are discussed in the section *Advice & Effective Practices* below.

Advice & Effective Practices

Researchers were asked about the advice they would give to others going on parental leave, as well as examples of good practices. Researchers offered a wide range of answers, which are captured by the list of codes below.

- Arrange childcare early
- Arrange coverage
- Communication
- Contract help, advice
- Determine work done on leave
- Do not feel pressured
- Do what is right for you
- Enjoy your time
- Flexible working
- Get help from HR
- Get information (options, policies)
- Keep in contact
- Negotiate (leave, hours, return)
- New workload or pattern
- Planning
- Return to work
- Start early
- Get support
- Take leave
- Talk to your line manager
- Talk to others (colleagues, parents)
- Talk to your union

Advice

Researchers offered a wide range of advice from general life advice to specifics about childcare vouchers, documenting everything, ensuring appropriate holiday accrual (“Don't forget that you accrue annual leave during maternity leave.” -Respondent 268), and keeping track of pay (“Check your pay slip every month!” -Respondent 348). The more general forms

of advice were often about keeping perspective on what is important, balancing work and home life, and doing what is best for oneself.

“Remember, becoming a parent is probably one of the biggest thing you will ever do. Try not to let your career compete with your role as a parent. Try and find that balance.” (Respondent 76)

“Have patience and be kind to yourself. It is hard to get back to where you were pre-children but you don't have to prove yourself every second of every day. You will be ill, your children will DEFINITELY be ill and you will feel like you are letting people down all the time. It gets easier. Your time management skills improve 100%, you learn to prioritise much better and you learn what to expend energy worrying about and what not.” (Respondent 148)

“Take the leave that suits you and your family and be aware that your priorities may shift after the birth. I'm glad I waited until I had my baby before informing my line manager of my return date. It meant I had time to experience being at home and decided if I missed work life (and/or finance) and wanted to rush back, or take a bit longer for a variety of reasons (i.e. enjoying the maternity leave, sick child, availability of preferred child care, etc.).” (Respondent 280)

Examples of effective practices

As mentioned, many of the positive experiences had to do with specific aspects of their experiences, often facilitated by their universities and those in positions of authority. These frequently had to do with practical aspects of their parental leave including:

Physical and social infrastructure

“I did have great support from facilities in finding a room for expressing milk as I was still breastfeeding on return and they were careful to make sure I would have everything necessary from day 1 (private lockable room, fridge, keycard access).” (Respondent 6)

“The University does help to facilitate a returning from maternity leave group where you meet with other parents for a chat. I found that really helpful” (Respondent 340)

Keeping in touch (KIT) days

“I enjoyed using my KIT days to continue work on a project I was doing. I was passionate about it but they were very supportive and we were very clear about what I would and would not do during those days.” (Respondent 225)

“My KIT days were invaluable to train my babies into the childcare system, because I was able to 'build-up' their nursery hours, as well as lower myself back into work slowly.” (Respondent 152)

Accessible information

“I was able to find most information online, and clarify things with a named contact in HR if I had queries.” (Respondent 18)

The university HR department answered all my questions fully and gave me more information than I thought I needed. It was so helpful, particularly when I was pregnant first-time and everything is new and confusing.” (Respondent 240)

Beneficial policies

“The university I work for has a generous (I think) and transparent maternity leave policy.” (Respondent 18)

“The "returning carers" scheme helped me in gaining visibility in the research community once I came back from maternity leave” (Respondent 12)

Financial Support

“My husband and I took shared parental leave. I took 20 weeks, my husband (the next) 12 weeks. The whole period we received our normal income. This was incredibly helpful.” (Respondent 207)

“My research team draws on pooled funding to support researchers. This is a very positive model, which means that there are often funds to cover things like a maternity leave and colleagues in my Centre simply would not tolerate someone going on a period of leave for childcare without the appropriate University designated pay.” (Respondent 334)

I have been able to receive childcare vouchers which have helped cover the high costs of childcare.” (Respondent 50)

Childcare support

“I partake in Salary Sacrifice to fund our daycare through the university - this represents an incredible savings and was easy to set up.” (Respondent 9)

“My employer had an on-site nursery which was an enormous help with having young children and working full-time throughout.” (Respondent 72)

“Nursery on site and flexible work hours that allowed continuous breastfeeding” (Respondent 29)

Work coverage

“work covered by another individual while on leave - this was useful in that I could relax knowing the job was being done while I was off,” (Respondent 248)

“I have had two good experiences of maternity leave. It was clear that taking the maximum year off was not a problem, I had good cross over time with my cover people beforehand and I was well supported on my return to work.” (Respondent 356)

“Academic staff in my department are supported by teaching cover (usually someone employed on maternity leave cover to cover teaching duties) and also a 'research advocate' is employed part-time to be the eyes/ears/voice of the staff member in the department whilst the staff member is on leave. This person attends meetings on their behalf, keeps abreast of opportunities and generally 'advocates' for the member of staff who is away. (Respondent 136)

Flexible and remote working

“Flexibility with working at home. Athena swan fund support to pay a technician to help with some of my work in my absence.” (Respondent 197)

“Flexible working and reduced hours have helped in my return to work. Again, I realise that this is not the same for everybody but my PI has been very supportive.” (Respondent 319)

Effective practices

From researchers' discussions of their positive experiences, as well as the advice they would give to other researchers, a list of effective practices can be put together. A list could be summarised as:

1. Universities should provide secure work to have a job to return
2. Researchers should speak to a range of people
 - a. Discuss options with line managers
 - b. Discuss experiences with colleagues who have been on leave
 - c. Discuss options, benefits, pay, etc. with HR
3. Universities and HR departments should communicate clearly with researchers, presenting information, policies, and options about parental leave

4. Departments should allow parents to choose what suits them best
5. Departments should provide coverage for research
6. Departments should allow parents to take the lead to keep in touch during leave as much or as little as they want
7. Researchers and line managers/PIs should communicate clearly to create and implement a return to work plan
8. Departments should offer flexible working, remote working, and a change to workload to facilitate return to work
9. Universities and departments should foster cultures that support parents and taking parental leave; this includes support from line managers and providing childcare options

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About UKRSA

The UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA), supported by Vitae, provides a collective voice for research staff in the UK, working with local research staff associations and informing policy. Vitae provides resources, courses and events for research staff. Vitae works closely with the UKRSA to deliver projects, and provides administrative support and continuity.

UKRSA activities are divided into two categories, communities and policy, which include the following components:

Communities

The UKRSA

- supports the development of local and regional research staff associations
- develops and maintains online social networking resources for research staff
- represents the interests and views of research staff in interactions with relevant national bodies
- maintains a collaborative committee comprised of members of research staff and developers

Policy

The UKRSA

- provides input on policy affecting research staff at UK institutions
- informs research staff of relevant policy issues

For further information about the UKRSA go to <https://ukrsavitae.wixsite.com/ukrsa> or contact ukrsavitae@gmail.com

Appendix A – Questionnaire Questions Examined

7.a. If you do not feel you would be supported [to take maternity, paternity, adoption, or parental leave if you needed to in the future], can you briefly share why not? If you don't know, can you share what would clarify this for you?

8.a. If you would like to expand on any of your responses above, such as why your experience of leave was positive or negative, please do so here:

- Asked level of agreement/disagreement with statements – positivity of experience, support, etc.

9.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

- Related to other barriers experienced

10.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

- Related to enablers experienced

11.a. If you would like to expand on your answers above, or describe any other initiatives that you experienced or would have liked, please do so here.

- Asked if experienced

12. We would like to collect examples of experience of maternity, paternity, adoption, and parental leave for researchers, both positive and negative. If you feel able, would you please share your experience here? Your responses may be quoted in the report, but will not be used in such a way that you will be able to be identified.

13. Can you share any examples of good practice which your place of work followed concerning maternity, paternity, adoption, or parental leave?

14. Which sources did you use to find information about taking leave (e.g. entitlement, whether your contract covered leave, taking leave, and returning to work)?

15.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

- Related to information or support that would be most useful

15.b. Finally, can you share a piece of information or advice you would pass on to other researchers taking maternity, paternity, adoption, or parental leave?