



EMERALD POINTS

**MOTHERHOOD  
AND INITIAL  
TEACHER  
EDUCATION**

The Experiences of Student  
Teacher Mothers

**JOAN WOODHOUSE  
LAURA GUIHEN**



# MOTHERHOOD AND INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

This important book is pertinent at a time where teacher recruitment and retention are in crisis. In a context where 3 out of 4 teachers are women, this book offers a valuable contribution in an under-researched area to understanding the experience of mothers training to be teachers. In doing so recommendations are made which we ignore at our peril if we wish to keep teachers in the profession.

The serendipitous comparison of experiences of training to be a teacher before and during Covid offers a novel contribution to how policy and practice is not immovable. A strong, informed and balanced argument of how pro-active strategies around flexibility and compassion can empower student teacher mothers to succeed is hard to ignore.

An informative review of the literature is given which provides a useful context to the subsequent research underpinning the book. The discussion around feminist approaches to research and its coherent relationships with ontology and epistemology are clearly explained and will be of great value to anyone grappling with these important ideas as part of their own academic journeys.

The testimonies of the women are powerful and lead to a rich understanding of their day-to-day lived experiences. Through this understanding of the enablers and barriers to these marginalised women successfully achieving QTS those of us involved in supporting others in the profession can learn a lot. Whilst the book focusses on the experiences of student teacher mothers, and this is important in its own right, educators might wish to reflect on the experiences of women teachers more widely in light of what they learn from Woodhouse and Guihen's discussion of the findings. The recommendations for flexibility in the ways teachers are trained and a compassionate consideration of how they might be best supported arguably transcends beyond the qualification period if we wish to keep highly trained, dedicated people in the profession.

Particularly notable in its emergence from the women's words is how teaching is not a job but is a way of life which family members are also drawn into. This should not be under-estimated when supporting student teachers in developing sustainable careers, and when developing policy and practice around teacher recruitment and retention.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, it is informative, thought-provoking and accessible. I would highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in supporting teachers to thrive, particularly at the very start of their careers but also beyond.

—*Dr Suzanne Brown*, Senior Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education,  
Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University

*Motherhood and Initial Teacher Education* provides a critical and much-needed exploration of the unique challenges faced by mothers during the demanding PGCE year. By giving a voice to the often-overlooked experiences of student-teacher mothers, it offers a nuanced understanding of their specific needs and challenges that is often absent in ITE literature. This book is essential reading not only for those directly involved in ITE program design and delivery but also for educational policymakers and advocates who are committed to fostering equity, inclusion, and wellbeing in education. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in making ITE programmes more inclusive and supportive.

—*Sarah Emmerson*, PGCE Secondary Course Lead,  
University of Worcester

*Motherhood and Initial Teacher Education* is a timely and important contribution to the field of teacher education, shedding light on the often-overlooked experiences of student teachers who are also mothers (STMs). In a sector that promotes inclusivity and gender equity, this book reveals the ongoing institutional inflexibility and lack of empathy that many STMs continue to face. Drawing on interviews with two cohorts of women undertaking a one-year Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme before and during the COVID-19 pandemic the authors offer a nuanced, research-informed account of the systemic and personal challenges encountered by these women.

The book highlights the multiple pressures STMs navigate, including time management and persistent feelings of ‘mum guilt’, as they juggle family life, academic study, and professional placements. These challenges were further intensified by educational institutions that, to an extent, lacked the empathy and understanding needed to support them effectively.

What makes this study particularly powerful is its dual focus: it not only captures the lived realities of STMs but also reflects on the flexible and family-friendly practices adopted by some ITE providers during the pandemic. These examples offer a roadmap for building more compassionate, inclusive, and responsive educational environments.

This book is essential reading for teacher educators, higher education, policymakers, and anyone involved in educational leadership or reform. It serves as both a call to action and a source of encouragement for mothers considering a teaching career. At a time of teacher shortages, *Motherhood and Initial Teacher Education* persuasively reimagines ITE through an inclusive and empathetic lens that supports all aspiring educators.

—*Dr Sadiya Osman*, University of Leicester

This book is a must-read for initial teacher educators, beginning teachers, school leaders and policymakers. It provides a timely and topical research-informed discussion of challenges mothers face as they prepare for teaching careers. It comes at a time of significant challenge for teacher recruitment and retention in the UK and elsewhere. Joan Woodhouse and Laura Guihen emphasize institutional compassion and flexibility are needed in initial teacher education in universities and schools. All educators are likely to benefit from such an approach, regardless of career stage.

—*Kay Fuller*, Professor of Gender and Educational Leadership,  
University of Nottingham

The lived experience of student teachers often gets lost in the current fetish for big data in England's education system. This volume offers an important insight into the challenges student mothers face when training to be teachers in England in an innately inflexible system. At a time when the country is experiencing a protracted recruitment and retention crisis, policy makers would do well to take note and reflect on the rich narratives of those experiencing the consequences of policy changes made at a far remove from the day to day paradoxes of balancing the intensity of teacher education with parental responsibility.

—*Phil Wood*, Nottingham Institute of Education,  
Nottingham Trent University

# MOTHERHOOD AND INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

The Experiences of Student  
Teacher Mothers

BY

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India  
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83608-323-8 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-83608-322-1 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-83608-324-5 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*In memory of our beloved friends Claire Frodsham (1959–2023)  
and Catherine Williams (1986–2024).*

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BERA	British Educational Research Association
DfE	Department for Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAP	Early Assistance Programme
EORR	Equality of Opportunity Risk Register
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GTP	Graduate Teaching Programme
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IT	Information Technology
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
MA	Master of Arts
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NGA	National Governance Association
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NUS	National Union of Students
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFS	Office for Students
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PE	Physical Education
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate of Education or Professional Graduate Certificate of Education
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SCITT	School-Centred Initial Teacher Training
SEN	Special Educational Needs

SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
STMs	Student Teacher Mothers
TA	Teaching Assistant
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UK	United Kingdom
UUK	Universities UK

# INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION TERMINOLOGY (ENGLAND)

**Centre-based training:** The education offered by the lead partner (such as an HEI or teaching school) through lessons, lectures and other means

**Graduate Teaching Programme:** An employment-based route into teaching, allowing student teachers to work whilst undertaking training in school

**HEI:** Higher Education Institution

**ITE:** Initial Teacher Education, otherwise referred to as Initial Teacher Training (ITT)

**ITE/ITT partnership:** The accredited ITT provider (typically a HEI or SCITT), working in partnership with lead partners and/or placement schools to provide initial teacher education

**Mentor:** A nominated individual employed at the placement provider school, responsible for supporting student teachers and coordinating their education whilst they are on placement

**PGCE:** Postgraduate Certificate of Education or Professional Graduate Certificate of Education

**Placement:** The education provided by placement providers, where student teachers are given the opportunity to practise teaching and receive mentoring

**Placement provider:** A school that offers student teachers placement opportunities within the partnership

**QTS:** Qualified Teacher Status

**School Direct:** a salaried, school-based route into teaching, offering an alternative to the full-time, university-led course

**SCITT:** School-Centred Initial Teacher Training

**Tutor:** A nominated individual at the partnership responsible for supporting student teachers during centre-based training and carrying out any summative assessment(s) during placements

*Source:* Adapted from Ofsted (2021).

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the 20 very busy women who gave generously of their time to take part in interviews for this study. We are indebted to our friend and colleague Maria Scalise for her significant contribution to the project. We are grateful to Suzanne Brown and John Woodhouse for feedback on the first draft of this book and to the University of Leicester College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (CSSAH) for funding the project. Our thanks are due, too, to CSSAH for allowing Joan Woodhouse a period of study leave to draft this book and to Dr Wei Zhang, who stepped in to cover Joan's role as programme director of the MSc in Educational Leadership during her study leave. Your support is very much appreciated.

We would like to thank the editor of the *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal* for agreeing to allow us to re-use, in Chapter 5, participant quotes originally cited in Woodhouse et al. (2022).

In addition, Table 3, 'Summary of participant details: the 2019–2020 (COVID-19) cohort', is adapted from the original version of the table: Table 3.1 'Biographical details of the participants in the study', Woodhouse (2024, p. 48), reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group. We are grateful to Katy Marsh-Davies and Cathy Burnett for allowing us to re-use, in Chapters 5 and 6, participant quotes, originally cited in Chapter 3 of their edited book (Marsh-Davies & Cathy Burnett, (Eds.), 2024).

Finally, our thanks to Siva Shiny and Yemaya Marsden at Emerald, for their support in producing this book.

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# THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT MOTHERS IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

## INTRODUCTION

This book offers fresh, contemporary insights into the experiences and perceptions of women who combine parenthood and initial teacher education (ITE). Feminist research over decades consistently reports the struggles faced by women who combine teaching and motherhood (see, for example, Brown, 2023; Coleman, 2002; Komiti & Moorosi, 2020; Smith, 2011, 2016). A smaller body of research suggests that these challenges are also experienced by women following ITE programmes (see, for example, Griffiths, 2002; Lynch & Casey, 2024; Savage, 2023). Our book builds on this base to add new, up-to-date perspectives, taking into account women's experiences both before and during COVID-19 restrictions.

We draw in this book on interview data from a two-year-long study (2018–2020), in which two cohorts of student teacher mothers (STMs) participated. The 20 women involved were following a one-year ITE programme in the English Midlands. The two cohorts completed the programme during the academic years 2018–2019 and 2019–2020, respectively. Public health measures came legally into force in England in March 2020, from which point anyone who could work from home was required to do so, effecting a dramatic shift in the working patterns of the nation (Kinman & Grant, 2024). Serendipitously, therefore, the data generated from our interviews enabled us to carry out a comparison between STMs' experiences before and during the COVID-19 restrictions, with some insightful, and perhaps surprising, results.

Our study focused on (i) the women's perceptions of the particular challenges they encountered in managing their dual role as student teachers and mothers and (ii) the factors they identified as key in sustaining them through the course. Drawing on first-hand accounts of the challenges and affordances of combining ITE and motherhood, our findings might helpfully inform some aspects of the policy and practice of ITE provision in a post-COVID-19 world. Insights are also gleaned into the women's home lives, indicating that while there is evidence of moves towards an equitable sharing of childcare and housework tasks with husbands or male partners, women in heterosexual relationships appear to continue to assume primary control of the domestic and familial domain.

We begin here by providing the background to, and broader context for, our research. We discuss the wider context of women, employment and education in the United Kingdom, including in the teaching profession. We outline the current ITE landscape in England, and the position of STMs within it. Finally, we review the research literature documenting the particular experiences of STMs, and the impact of COVID-19.

## WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT: THE UK CONTEXT

As a result of 'legislative, cultural and societal changes driven by brave women pioneers and campaigners', the United Kingdom is now 'a dramatically more equal place for women' (The Fawcett Society, 2016, p. 1). Greater equity is evident, both in the wider labour market and in higher education (HE). (For a timeline of key policy shifts and historical moments shaping women's relationship with HE and the labour market in England, see Table 1). Between October and December 2023, 16.06 million women in the United Kingdom aged 16 and over were in employment (Francis-Divine & Hutton, 2024), and figures published by Universities UK (UUK) in 2021 suggest that there were 2,413,155 students at UUK member institutions, of which 56.9% were female. Despite these advances, labour market gaps between men and women persist in the United Kingdom in terms of employment status, hourly pay, and working hours (Andrew et al., 2021), as we discuss below.

### The Gender Pay Gap

Some 75.6% of women with dependent children in the United Kingdom were in paid employment between April and June 2021 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022). Yet the UK gender pay gap has widened, with the

**Table 1. Women, HE and the Labour Market in England: A Timeline.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Development</b>
1848	Queen's College in Harley Street becomes the first institution in the United Kingdom where girls and young women could study for qualifications (Queen's College, London, 2024)
1849	The Ladies' College in Bedford Square became the first higher education college for women in the UK (Ronson, 2019)
1867	The North of England Council for the Promotion of the Higher Education of Women was formed by Anne Jemima Clough (University of Oxford, 2024)
1868	The first women to access a UK university education (the 'London Nine') were admitted to sit the first 'general examination for women' at the University of London (Carter, 2018)
1869	Girton College, Cambridge, became the first residential institution offering university-level education for women (Girton College, 2024)
1869	Seven women (known as the 'Edinburgh seven') were admitted to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh. The women, were, however, prevented from graduating, and their degrees were awarded posthumously 150 years later ( <i>The Guardian</i> , 2019)
1870	The Married Women's Property Act 1870 (and an associated law in 1882) gave married women the right to own their own earnings, inheritance and property (Wenneker, 2021)
1871	The National Union for the Improvement of the Education of Women of all Classes was founded (Gillard, 2018)
1878	The University of London became the first UK university to open full degrees to women (University of London, 2024)
1878	The Maria Grey Training College was founded as the first teacher training college for women in the United Kingdom (Gillard, 2018)
1886	Holloway College for Women was founded (Gillard, 2018)
1888	The Match Girls' Strike involved around 1,500 women taking industrial action against dangerous working conditions and poor pay (Historic UK, 2024)
1906	The National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) was established by Mary MacArthur as the first trade union for women (Historic England, 2024)
1914– 1918	World War One saw women's employment rates rise from 23.6% to 46.7% (Braybon, 1989)
1918	The Representation of the People Act, 1918, was introduced. This meant that some women over 30 were granted the right to vote in parliamentary elections (Day, 2018)
1920	The Sex Discrimination Removal Act was introduced, allowing women access to various professions, including those concerned with law and accountancy (Rossi, 2019)
1939– 1945	World War Two saw a rise in women's employment. By mid-1943, 80%–90% of women were working on the land, in factories or in the forces (Prime Minister's Office & Ministry of Defence, 2015)

*(Continued)*

**Table 1. (Continued)**

Year	Development
1944	The 1944 Education Act was introduced, offering free education for all and ending the marriage bar for women teachers (legislation.gov.uk, 2024a)
1945	Ellen Wilkinson becomes the first female Minister of Education in Britain (Women's History Network, 2012)
1948	University of Cambridge admits women to degree programmes (Newnham College, 2023)
1948	Lillian Penson became the first female Vice-Chancellor of a university in the United Kingdom and in the Commonwealth (University of London, 2023)
1965	The Union of Women Teachers (UWT) was formed (NASUWT, 2018)
1970	The introduction of the Equal Pay Act gave women the right to equal pay in the workplace. The 1968 strike by women working as Ford factory workers in Dagenham is said to have paved the way for this piece of legislation (Choudhry, 2020)
1975	The Sex Discrimination Act was introduced, making it illegal to discriminate against women in education and the workplace (legislation.gov.uk, 2024b)
1986	Statutory Maternity Pay regulations were introduced (legislation.gov.uk, 2024c)
1998	HE tuition fees of £1,000 were introduced (Hubble & Bolton, 2018)
2002	The Paternity Leave and Adoption Regulations 2002 were introduced, meaning that fathers became entitled to two weeks paid paternity leave (legislation.gov.uk, 2024d)
2006	Tuition fees were raised to £3,000 per year (Belfield et al., 2017)
2009	A Higher Education Policy Institute study found that women aged 17–20 'outnumbered and outperformed' men in UK HE (Khan, 2009)
2010	The Equality Act 2010 was introduced to protect people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. Protected characteristics include sex, pregnancy and maternity as well as marriage and civil partnership (legislation.gov.uk, 2024e)
2012	The tuition fee cap was raised to £9,000 per year (Belfield et al., 2017)
2014	Shared Parental Leave Regulations were introduced, meaning that parents can share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay during the first year a child is born or adopted (legislation.gov.uk, 2024f)
2017	Annual gender pay gap reporting became statutory for companies with 250 or more employees (legislation.gov.uk, 2024g)

pay penalty facing women more than doubling from the start to the later stages of their careers (PwC, 2024). One of the most-cited reasons for the gender pay gap is motherhood (Rose et al., 2023), also referred to as the 'motherhood penalty' (see, for example, Carr, 2023). Research evidence suggests that mothers in the labour market are likely to encounter an array of

challenges influencing their pay, career aspirations, the amount of support they experience in the workplace, and their interactions with their superiors (Total Jobs & the Fawcett Society, 2023).

In the United Kingdom, the motherhood penalty is a ‘major contributor to the gender pay gap [offsetting] the impact of large educational gains made by women in the past 25 years’ (Jones et al., 2023, pp. 765–766). Women are still seven times more likely to be economically inactive compared to men, due to their responsibilities for dependent children (TUC, 2023). Women with two children earn 26% less than their child-free peers (Rose et al., 2023). Their male counterparts, on the other hand, ‘see a bonus – men with at least two children are paid 22% more than those without’ (Rose et al., 2023, p. 4), and fathers persistently earn at least a third more than mothers (Rose et al., 2023).

Even if women earn a higher wage than their male partners before child-birth, their employment falls by 13% during the early years of parenthood and remains there for at least a decade (Andrew et al., 2021). One reason for this is that mothers tend to be over-represented in part-time work and insecure, poor-quality jobs, characterised by low control and high demands (Andrew et al., 2021, p. 765). Furthermore, the motherhood pay penalty, due to part-time working and leaves of absence from the labour market to bear and raise children, can be detected in women’s pension wealth. The People’s Pension (2024) reports that ‘the average female pensioner is £7,000 a year poorer than her male equivalent’, an inequity that can be seen in part as ‘a product of unequal attitudes to parenting’. Moreover, the motherhood pay penalty has been found to be more acute for Black, Asian, and other minoritised women (Rose et al., 2023). The gap in earnings is exacerbated by the unpaid household labour and childcare in which women with children engage, as we explore below.

### Unpaid Work and the Policy Environment

It is quite apparent that men and women with dependent children spend their time differently. Mothers are consistently shown to engage in more unpaid childcare than fathers (ONS, 2022). Total Jobs and the Fawcett Society (2023) report that, having re-joined the workforce, 72% of mothers had had to take unpaid leave due to childcare responsibilities. Unpaid domestic labour is also strongly gendered, with women doing 1.8 more hours of unpaid household work per day than men (Andrew et al., 2021; ONS, 2022). These gender gaps in unpaid work have, as Andrew et al. (2021, p. 2) note, ‘substantial consequences for inequalities in material living standards’.

The gendered division of labour is reinforced and sustained by family-oriented policies which are ostensibly gender neutral (Andrew et al., 2021), and supposedly intended to be supportive of parents, such as parental leave, childcare availability and child benefits. In practice, the lack of affordable childcare and the costs associated with parenting in the United Kingdom have profound implications for mothers. There is reference in the English press to a ‘childcare crisis’ (see, for example, Skopeliti, 2023). Seeking to understand more about this ‘crisis’, Pregnant Then Screwed (2023), a charity committed to ending the motherhood penalty, conducted a survey of 5,870 respondents. Findings indicated that 76% of the surveyed mothers who pay for childcare believe it does not make financial sense for them to work, with some working mothers having to rely on debt to cover the costs of childcare. Similarly, a joint study conducted by Total Jobs and the Fawcett Society (2023, p. 17) reported that one in four mothers with one child ‘would like to have another child but cannot afford to’.

The gender inequalities explored in this sub-section are also apparent in the teaching profession, as we discuss below.

### The Teaching Profession

School workforce data for England (Department for Education (DfE), 2024a) continue to show that although women dominate the teaching workforce numerically, comprising 76% of the profession in 2022–2023, they are still less likely than their male colleagues to occupy positions of senior leadership. Alongside gendered disparities in career progression, inequalities in teachers’ pay (also known as the gender pay gap) are reported. Typically, men still earn more than women in the teaching profession, and the gulf between male and female earnings becomes wider, as positions become more senior (Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) et al., 2021).

Moreover, part-time working has been shown to have an adverse impact on both pay and career progression of teachers. Despite reports that the proportion of leaders working part-time rose between 2010 and 2020, part-time teachers are significantly less likely to be promoted to leadership positions when compared to their full-time colleagues (DfE, 2022, p. 15). Those working on reduced, part-time contracts in teaching are most likely to be women in their late 30s and early 40s (Sharp et al., 2019). Life history research conducted by Brown (2023, p. 11) illustrates how part-time working is often adopted by women as an attempt to reconcile the competing demands of work and caring responsibilities, yet for some ‘this pattern of working had not fully

delivered the solution they were hoping for'. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that, as Sheppard (2023) reports, women aged between 30 and 39 are the largest cohort leaving the teaching workforce every year, comprising 27% of all teachers leaving the profession. This age group corresponds to the life stage in which women in the United Kingdom are most likely to be new mothers or navigating childcare responsibilities for young children. In short, this attrition-trend may reflect the impact of motherhood on women teachers' careers.

We turn next to ITE, and the experiences of a relatively under-researched group of women, STMs.

## ITE IN ENGLAND

Most primary and secondary schools in England require new entrants to the profession to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The main teaching qualification leading to QTS in England is the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).<sup>1</sup> All of the participants in our study were following a one-year, PGCE programme. Routes to PGCE include university-led or school-led programmes.<sup>2</sup> The policies of successive governments, starting with the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government established in 2010, have gradually shifted ITE from higher education institutions (HEIs) towards an increasingly school-led system in England (DfE, 2016; Roberts et al., 2023). This shift has been reflected in increased numbers of student teachers electing to follow school-led routes, in preference to university-led provision (see DfE, 2023).<sup>3</sup> Our sample included women following both university-led and school-led routes. All participants were working in conjunction with the same university, in the English Midlands.

- 
- 1 The PGCE is the main qualification leading to QTS in England, offering 60 credits towards a master's degree. Students with a bachelor's degree are eligible to apply for the programme. The full-time programme lasts for 180 days, of which 120 are spent in school-based practice, spread over at least two schools. The remaining 60 days include academic study, with input provided by a university. It is also possible to achieve QTS by completing the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education, which is similar in structure and content to the PGCE but does not offer master's level credits.
  - 2 School-led programmes can be offered by individual schools or groups of schools. School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) takes place in local schools and has a practical emphasis, drawing on university support for academic input. Programmes can also be operated by companies or charities, such as 'Teach First'. 'School Direct' offers a salaried as well as a non-salaried route, in which student teachers learn 'on the job'.
  - 3 For a comprehensive description of the various providers and routes into teaching in England, please see the DfE website 'Get Into Teaching' (DfE, 2024c).

The majority of teachers and student teachers in the United Kingdom are female. Women comprise 76% of the teaching workforce (DfE, 2023) and 68% of all new entrants to postgraduate ITE courses (DfE, 2024b). At the time of our research interviews (2018–2020), data regarding the parenting status of current or prospective ITE students were not routinely collected by ITE providers or HEIs (Woodhouse & Guihen, 2022; Woodhouse et al., 2022), whereas data relating to student gender, ethnicity and disability had been systematically gathered and monitored for some years. We knew that most student teachers in the United Kingdom were women, but without data on student parents, it was difficult to say with any certainty how many student teachers were mothers. As student parents were not included in the equity monitoring statistics, little, if any, account was taken at an institutional level, of the challenges faced by this non-traditional, and often marginalised, group of students. Consequently, the specific support needs of STMs had been largely overlooked, despite the increased emphasis in UK HE on inclusivity and widening participation (Connell-Smith & Hubble, 2018). This oversight was a significant omission, posing a potential risk to the retention of STMs (Murtagh, 2017; Todd, 2023).

Since the completion of our study, however, there have been some changes. In 2023, the UK Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) introduced a section in their application form to allow applicants to disclose parental responsibilities. On the UCAS website, students are reassured that ‘sharing – or choosing not to share – that you have parental responsibility will never have a negative impact on your application for university or college. The purpose of inviting you to share this information is simply to enable your university or college to support you’ (UCAS, 2025). Another positive step forward has been the inclusion of parental status on the Office for Students’ Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) in 2024. This inclusion acknowledges that students with parental responsibility experience ‘sector-wide risks that may affect a student’s opportunity to access and succeed in higher education’ (Office for Students, 2025). Providers are expected to use the EORR to identify student groups who are at risk and actively work towards reducing barriers such students may experience to participation and success. Faculty support can have a positive impact on student mothers’ well-being, academic success and retention (see, for example, Dickson & Tennant, 2018). A confidential system whereby students can disclose their parental responsibilities means that institutions can ‘consider life experience, contributions to family and community, and educational achievements in context’ (Andrewartha et al., 2023, p. 169) and connect students with ‘appropriate support and enrichment activities to match their needs’ (Andrewartha et al., 2023, p. 169).