

# Executive summary

## The context

On the surface government data demonstrates a small improvement in female employment, standing at 71.8%<sup>3</sup>. This is the highest percentage since records began in 1971. However, on closer examination there are still significant issues for mothers in the job market. Just 64% of mothers with a youngest dependent child under 4 are in employment. This is significantly lower than the UK average employment rate of 76.1% and the UK average for fathers of children the same age, which is 93%. Mothers with a youngest dependent child aged 3-4 years of age have the lowest employment rate of all adults.

Taking a career break can mean it's difficult to re-enter the job market. 34% of our research respondents have been unemployed for 10 years or more and 28% have been unemployed for 5-9 years.

These employment rates cannot be explained by mothers simply choosing to stay at home to raise a family. 82.2% of mothers with children under 2 stated they were economically inactive because they were looking after the family or home but this figure drops as their children get older and sits at just 44.5% of inactive mothers whose youngest child was 16-18. The ONS states that 1.1m mothers want to work.

## Our findings

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Our research shows that outdated skills and knowledge have a significant impact on mothers' ability to re-enter the world of work into 'good work'.

Over half of mothers worry about their skills dating while on a career break (52%) and this rises to 72% of mothers in London. Millennial mothers expressed the strongest concern about outdated skills, double that of mothers aged 41-50.

Their worries are founded. 21% of mothers stated that outdated skills/knowledge had stopped them getting a job. This rises to almost half of mothers in London (49%). 28% stated that outdated skills/knowledge had put them off applying for a role.

This issue also impacts their potential to re-enter work at the same seniority level.

1 in 5 mothers cited a lack of up to date skills/knowledge as a factor in taking a more junior role, which rises to 1 in 4 for 18-30 year olds.

Adult learning is a clear solution to these challenges but our research shows that 48% of respondents had not engaged in formal learning in the last 3 years and 31% of respondents had not engaged in formal learning in the last 10 years. Mothers aged 18-30 were far more likely to have engaged in adult learning within the last 3 years (55% compared to just 37% of mothers aged 51 and over).

While mothers returning from a career break are struggling in today's labour market they will become increasingly marginalised and discriminated against in tomorrow's world due to the growing speed of innovation, technological change and globalisation. Right now it's estimated that the 'half-life' of a professional skill is around five years and in 2017 experts were predicting that by 2020 more than one-third of the skills we need will have changed.

So why aren't mothers engaging in formal learning?

Our research shows they face significant barriers and many of these are common across all age ranges.

36% state they don't have the time to study. Many mothers also feel that they don't have the headspace to study (23% of respondents).

Confidence also plays a significant role across all age ranges with 20% stating confidence barriers are holding them back. They don't think they are capable of learning.

There are also some unique barriers for mothers in different age brackets.

36% state they can't afford the fees, with younger mothers struggling far more than older mothers (42% of 18-30 year-olds compared to 29% of mothers over 51).

28% of mothers aged 51 and over stated they felt too old to learn (compared to just 10% of mothers aged 18-30).

Younger mothers felt their mental health was holding them back with 22% stating mental health/anxiety as a barrier. Just 7% of mothers 51 and over said the same.

There is a large evidence base linking learning to a range of employment benefits, particularly for learning that is skills-focused. This includes helping those out of work to get a job, increase their lifetime earnings and improve their job satisfaction. Adult learning also fosters a greater level of emotional wellbeing and positive changes in mental health, which is significant given the issues mothers face around confidence and mental health.

It's clear from our research that we need to do more to support mothers to lean into learning.

Our research shows that if we simply invest in supporting mothers that are out of work to upskill we could see a £8.1bn return on investment.

## Our recommendations

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### Government

- **Increasing investment in adult skills provision.** We must have more investment to reverse the decline in adult learning participation rates. The budget available for adult skills (not accounting for apprenticeships) is falling year on year and there has been a 50% drop in funding for adult learning since 2010.
- **Introduce ‘back to work’ bursaries.** We recommend that the Government invest in a trial of ‘back to work bursaries’ to provide mothers who are out of work with the financial means to invest in upskilling.
- **A radical reform of some apprenticeships to offer 100% distance learning.** The vast majority of apprenticeships are full-time and workplace-based. This is extremely problematic for mothers. We have provided 100% online vocational training for almost 5 years and we know it can be done. We recommend testing online apprenticeships for digital roles, which would also benefit those living in more rural areas of the UK.
- **Easier access for innovative, independent learning providers.** The Government must ensure adult learning budgets can be more easily spent with independent and innovative learning providers who currently struggle with the bureaucracy involved in accessing funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.
- **More research into the link between maternal unemployment/ economic inactivity and structural unemployment.** When researching this report we struggled to find further evidence exploring this issue. We recommend the Government Equalities Office conducts an examination of maternal unemployment and skills and pulls together best practice from around the world to explore innovative solutions.

### Employers

- **Provide a training bursary to all women going off on maternity leave.** Providing a training bursary for mothers to invest in adult learning enables them to rebuild confidence and refresh skills while they are away from the workplace.
- **Consider the needs of mothers when designing and delivering training programmes.** Avoid in-person training days that run from 9-5, or running evening sessions, which make it difficult to fit training around caring responsibilities. Also, consider your part-time workers when providing classroom-based training as they may not work on set days.
- **Provide flexible working options to mothers undergoing training.** It’s pointless to offer learning opportunities without offering some element of flexibility for mothers to fit this learning into their life. This is particularly true of women that are working for you full-time. Whether you enable them to have more flexibility in their role in general for the duration of the training, or whether you reduce their workload to free up study during work is something that should be discussed and agreed together.
- **Add an accredited or transferable skills-based course component to women returnership programmes.** Not all participants are provided with employment on graduation from these programmes. To counter any potential negative impact of a returnership programme we recommend building an accredited, skills-based training course into the returnership programme where learning can be translated and transferred to the wider job market should participants not be hired.

### Learning Providers

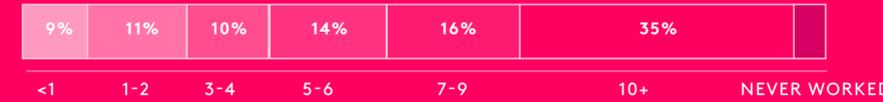
- **Take the needs of mothers into account when designing learning opportunities.** We recommend building in co-design processes to gather feedback to ensure you are not locking mothers out of learning.
- **Provide free, mobile-friendly, short courses to encourage mothers onto the learning ladder.** This helps them overcome their main barriers of cost and time and encourages them to continue learning.
- **Build a culture of inclusivity.** Negative stereotypes about mothers can be damaging in the learning sphere, just as they can be damaging in the workplace. It’s important to address this with marketing, sales and delivery teams to build a culture of inclusivity for mothers.

# FROM CAREER BREAK TO CAREER BROKEN

ONS DATA ON THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MOTHERS



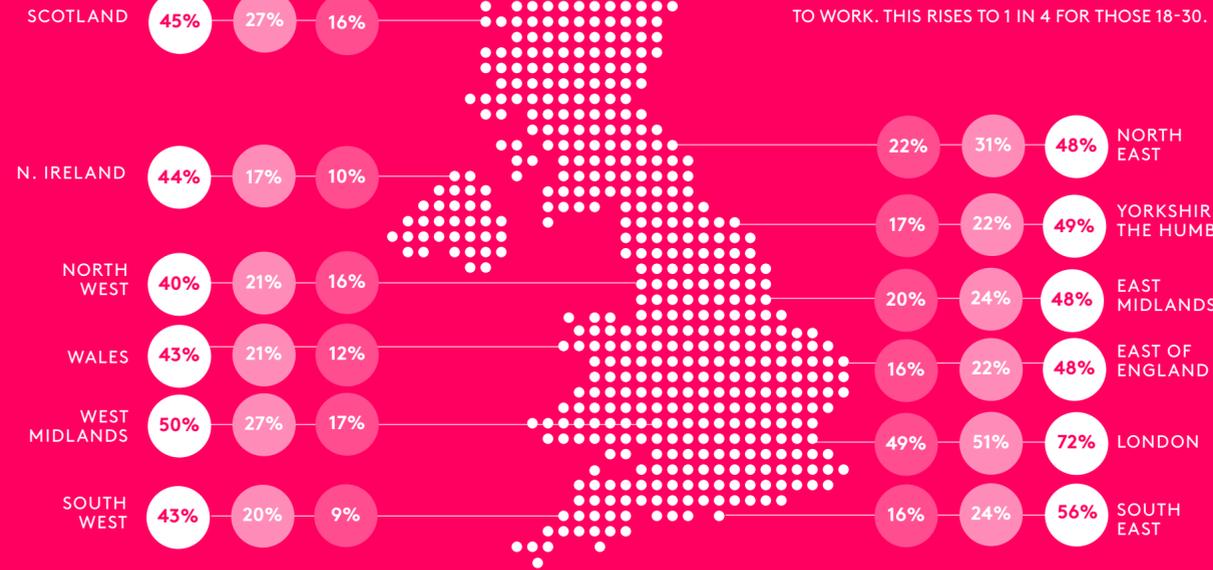
LENGTH OUT OF THE WORKFORCE? (YEARS)



OUTDATED INDUSTRY SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE ARE NEGATIVELY IMPACTING MOTHERS IN THEIR CAREERS

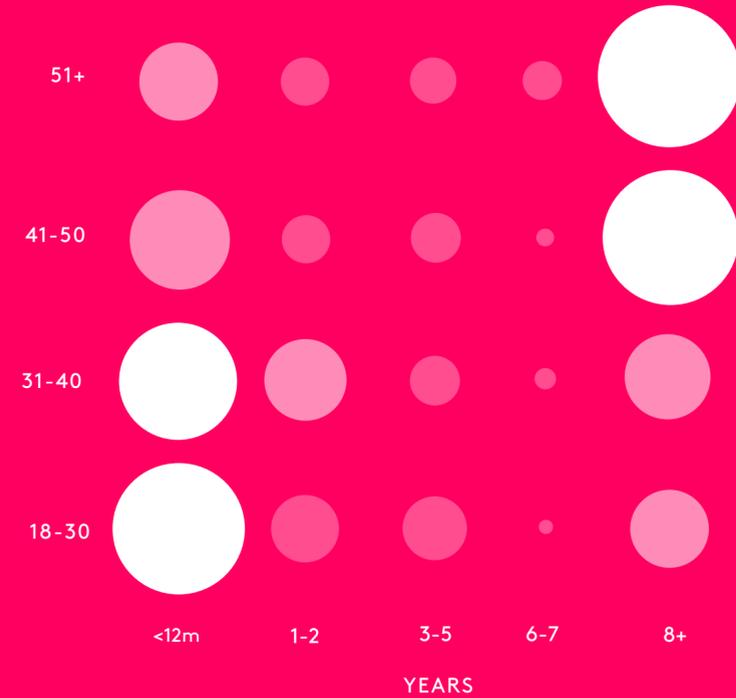


FOR 1 IN 5 MOTHERS THIS ISSUE WAS A FACTOR IN THEM TAKING A MORE JUNIOR ROLE ON RETURN TO WORK. THIS RISES TO 1 IN 4 FOR THOSE 18-30.

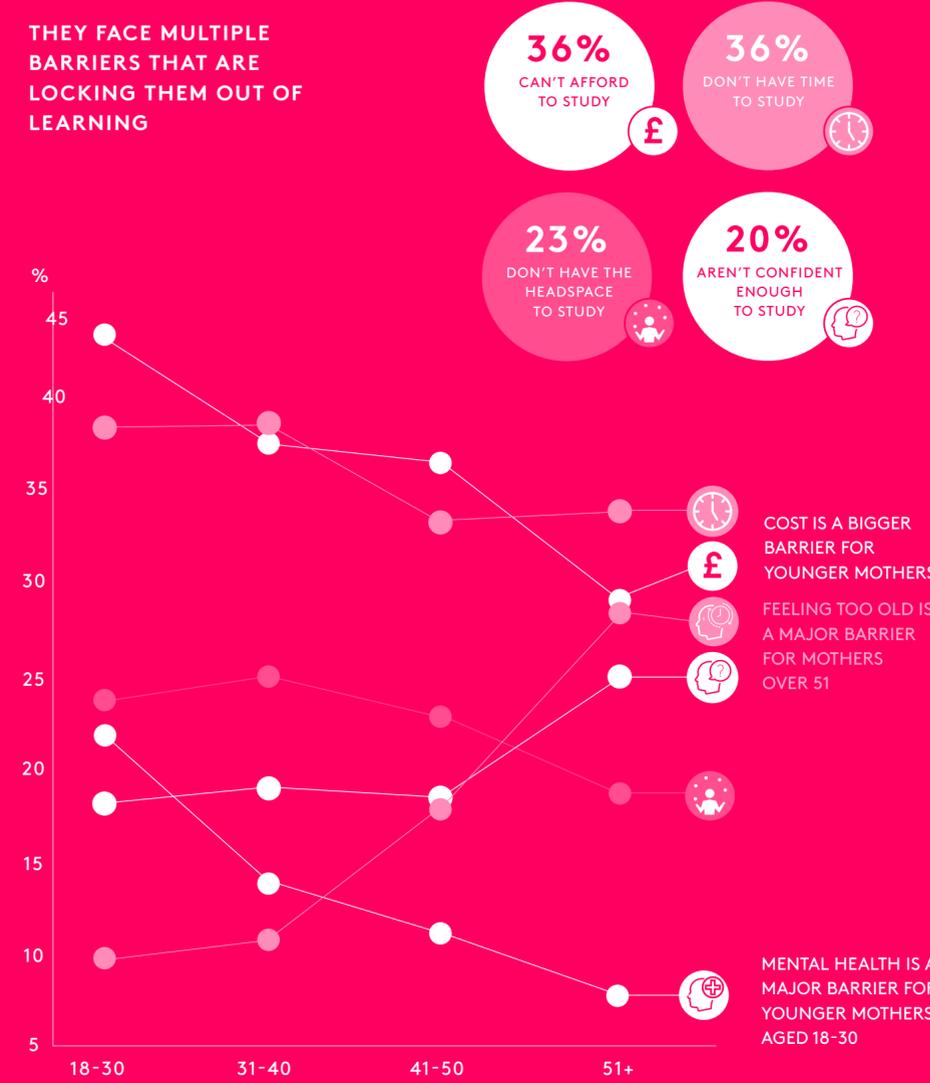


# LOCKED OUT OF LEARNING

MOTHERS AREN'T PARTICIPATING IN ADULT LEARNING



THEY FACE MULTIPLE BARRIERS THAT ARE LOCKING THEM OUT OF LEARNING



# THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING

EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS



OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN THAT COMPLETED AN ADULT LEARNING COURSE

EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT LEARNING DELIVERS THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS



EMOTIONAL WELLBEING BENEFITS

LIFE SATISFACTION

