

# Citymothers Member Survey

## ‘Less Talk, More Action’

### Foreword by Dr Thérèse Coffey, MP

I am very pleased to have been asked to write a foreword to this Citymothers Member Survey. The Survey provides the perspectives of hundreds of mothers working in the City, balancing their careers and their families. It offers a valuable illustration of how companies can improve their practices when it comes to maternity.

I and another Conservative MP, Mary Macleod, recently published the report of our Executive Women in the Workplace Inquiry entitled “Building the Executive Pipeline of Talent”. Our report outlined the strong business case for companies to improve their pipelines and recommended specific means of doing so.

The findings of this Survey resonate strongly with our report. The priorities which Citymothers members propose are varied, demonstrating that different companies have different strengths and weaknesses in their approaches to maternity. There are common themes, however, such as the disparity between talk and action. We identified this problem and recommended leadership from the very top down with effective measurement and targets so that words get converted into practice.

Other recurrent points raised by women in this Survey chime with our conclusions, such as improved career break and return-to-work schemes, cheaper childcare, as well as more coaching and mentorship. Flexible working is another key enabler for parents with young children and can even improve productivity. The perception of 32% of flexible workers responding to this Survey that their desired career paths are unachievable should give companies pause for thought about wasting their talent. In our report we suggested normalising flexible working to ensure it is a non-gender issue and I am happy to see this idea supported by a number of members’ comments.

Leaving aside the difference which company policies can make, ultimately women must take responsibility for their own careers. Respondents to this Survey seemed to agree: the majority said they either were not proactive or could do more to achieve their career goals. We suggested taking steps such as actively seeking out sponsors, networking, and critical, stretching assignments.

The final question of the Survey has a heartening response. The majority of Citymothers say they are managing their careers and families well, though for many it is work in progress. I think this could apply to women in the workplace more generally. While recognising there is more to do, we should be optimistic about women’s maternity and career prospects now and for the future.’

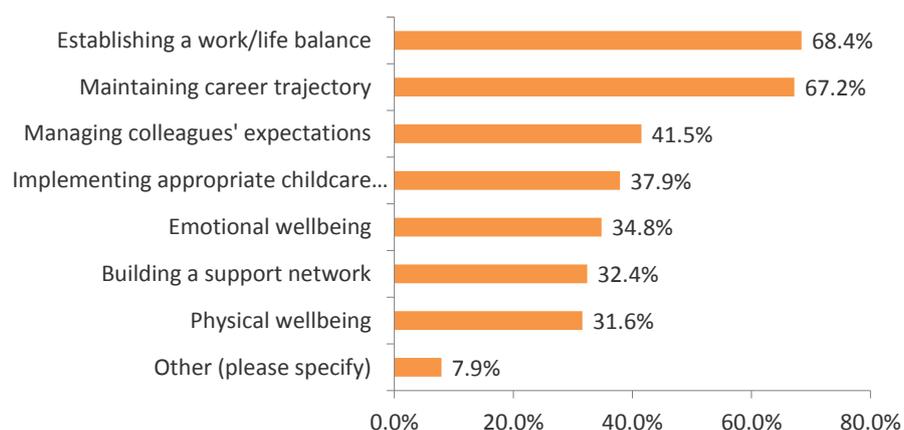
*Dr Thérèse Coffey is the Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal and Parliamentary Private Secretary to Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP, Minister of State for Business and Enterprise and Minister of State for Energy. She and Mary Macleod MP co-chair the Executive Women in the Workplace Inquiry by the Conservative Women’s Forum which published recently its report. For the full report, please see [www.executivewomenintheworkplace.wordpress.com](http://www.executivewomenintheworkplace.wordpress.com).*

## Key findings

- Although a remarkable 77% of respondents have a flexible working arrangement in place, 45% of these felt their path to career progress would be slower as a result, whilst 32% felt it would be unachievable as long as this arrangement was in place.
- ‘Establishing a work/life balance’ and ‘maintaining career trajectory’ the standout challenges for survey respondents
- Only 12.5% said their employer had taken a ‘proactive’ role in supporting their maternity transition
- When asked what one thing their employer could do to support them better, feedback included offering maternity coaching; access to an onsite / local subsidised nursery; greater acceptance of flexible working; a need for line managers to support and implement company policies; more open lines of communication; more defined paths to career progression.
- ‘Parental guilt’ was the single biggest challenge identified by the working mothers who responded to the survey
- The majority of members (57%) who responded said they would continue to work and pursue their career goals even if finances weren’t a consideration
- 48% felt they needed to be more proactive in their careers to achieve their ambitions, whilst 84% said they believed networking had the potential to advance their career
- Only 2% of respondents said their experience of managing a City career and children was ‘very positive’; over 50% felt it was a ‘work in progress’.

## Citymothers Member Survey - July 2013

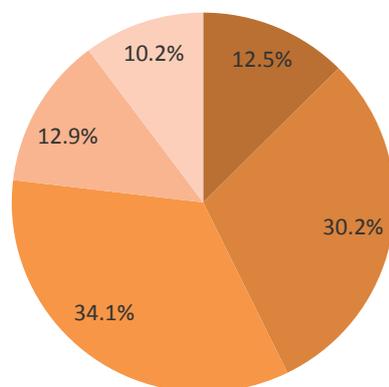
### 1) What obstacles, if any, have you encountered in your maternity transition?



Selection of open text responses to 'Other (please specify)':

- *Adapting to the idea of working hard with not much financial gain (after cost of childcare).*
- *My inner critic/perfectionist streak and well-meaning comments from family and friends of the "how/why do you do it" variety which make me permanently question that myself.*
- *Major obstacle has been finding alternative childcare arrangements when child is ill and can't go to nursery*
- *Not being given sufficient 'high profile' opportunities and then this being cited as a reason for a lower performance rating/not being given promotion.*
- *Work Grievance: My maternity cover was offered my role resulting in me being offered a "project role" which would be "easier" for me.*
- *Balancing my own levels of expectations of myself in relation to my work with my own expectations of myself in relation to being a mother*
- *Team had no prior experience of dealing with part time working and it is not being managed well*
- *Finding the team structure had changed on my return, my colleague was now my line manager and my role had significantly changed!*
- *Loss of confidence, doubts whether you can have a career and be a mother*
- *Coping with sleep deprivation, reverse handover of home life tasks to my husband*

## 2) How would you describe your employer's approach to your maternity transition?



- Proactive – I was offered dedicated resources and coaching to help manage the transition through maternity leave
- Supportive – A good level of support was made available
- Neutral – A basic level of support was made available
- Negative – I didn't feel my employer supported my maternity transition
- Other (please specify)

Selection of open text responses to 'Other (please specify)':

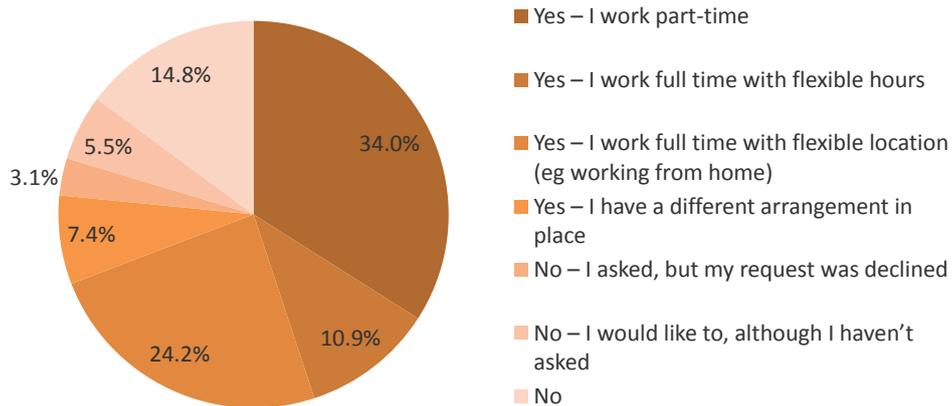
- *Proactive scheme - however only seems a facade as all women returning after maternity leave in the department were made redundant including a pregnant lady*
- *Neutral in the sense that I don't think my employer felt they have to support me. It is up to me to prove I am - still - committed to my job*
- *My role disappeared / was given away during mat leave both times*
- *I had my child before I started my career*
- *I was made redundant during my maternity leave*
- *I moved from freelancing during maternity period to permanent*
- *I was demoted whilst on mat leave and ultimately left the organisation.*
- *I decided to resign as I felt there was no alternative*
- *I am six months' pregnant but we haven't discussed it much yet.*

### 3) What is the one thing your company could do to support you better?

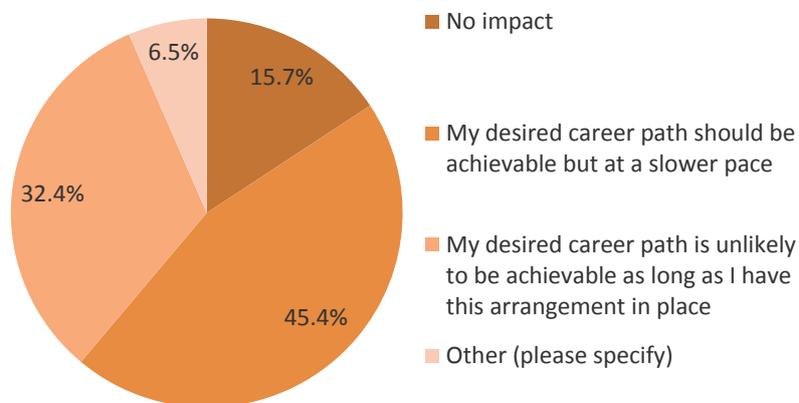
Selection of open text responses:

- *Better promotion opportunities for part timers.*
- *Maternity return coaching as an automatic offering.*
- *Not make you feel that because you're now a mother you're not going to give it 100%*
- *Appropriate policies for senior women which are actually understood and followed by HR*
- *Provide an emergency childcare scheme*
- *Less talk, more action*
- *Promote/ normalise/ support flexible working arrangements*
- *Assure me that my career progression will not be hindered by my part time working.*
- *Ensure managers of returners from maternity are properly educated/trained.*
- *By not seeing having a family as a lack of commitment to my job.*
- *Be proactive and offer to discuss flexible working*
- *Provide childcare on premises*
- *There should be more support and understanding on an immediate team basis.*
- *Have more women in senior positions who have had children. The men in the office all have wives at home so don't understand the difficulties women face in the workplace.*
- *More opportunities to demonstrate skills/readiness for promotion, work on strategic projects and influence seniors.*
- *Increase awareness and make it mandatory for managers to get training on maternity leave and requirements.*
- *I would have liked to have heard about other internal opportunities when I was on maternity leave*
- *Make flexible or agile working be part of the wider culture so it is not seen as "only a working mum thing".*
- *Engage with me! My return from mat leave has been very much a case of leave me to get on with it.*
- *Provide crèche facilities on site*
- *Not assume availability 24/7*
- *Offer bespoke coaching/training with respect to managing career progression.*
- *Actually implement the flexible working policy and allow working from home more often, or other flexible arrangements.*
- *We have excellent maternity programs before/during/after maternity. The issue us with some managers and colleagues that don't understand/ support and further work needs to be done around this*
- *Lay out a career path*
- *Pro-active engagement during maternity transition*
- *Provide better information on what options are available when returning to work in terms of part-time and flexible working, job share and roles available that are more suited to the above.*
- *Have more women at senior level. The culture has to change.*
- *Some level of coaching would have been helpful.*
- *Talk to me more*
- *The company is highly supportive of flex work arrangements. However, that doesn't always trickle down to mid and senior management. They could do more education about the benefits of work / life balance and flex working arrangements. Less time doesn't mean less proactivity and value to the company.*
- *Not expect work to be done habitually out of hours*
- *Not punish employees when they take maternity.*
- *Join the 21st century. Appreciate the value of flexible working instead of viewing it as a lazy choice. Value the person returning and treat them the same as when they were full time.*
- *Encourage and support career progression for women who wish to work flexibly for a period to raise a family but who are still committed to their careers.*
- *Practice what they preach - all the guidelines issued by HR make it sound like a great place for working mothers, but individual managers have the authority to disregard these practices*
- *Transition out onto maternity leave and back again re career trajectory. In reality my career has stopped for 18 months for each child, if not more.*
- *Have a proper process for re-integration, not leave someone unattended for months without asking for feedback, checking in on them.*
- *Clarity of career progression*
- *Improve quality of IT to assist in remote working.*
- *A more flexible attitude - the policies are there, but not always the will.*
- *Better access to maternity coaching*

**4) Do you currently have a flexible working arrangement in place?**



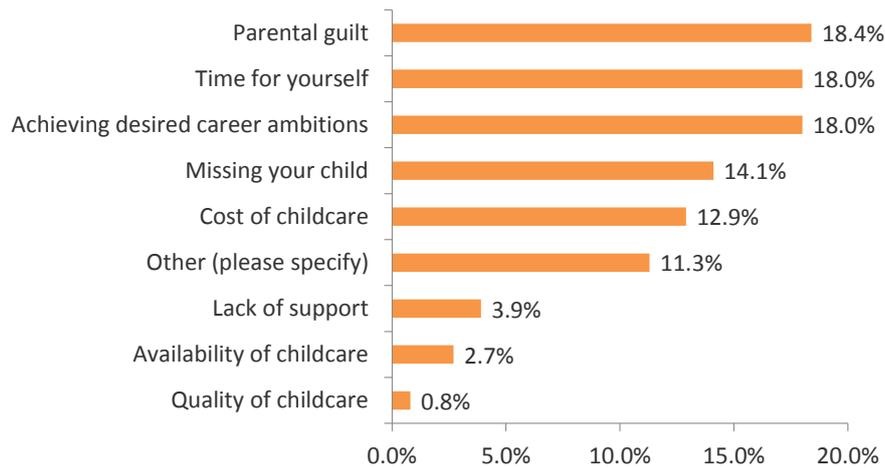
**5) If you have a flexible working arrangement in place, what impact do you think it will have on your desired career progression?**



Selection of open text responses to 'Other (please specify)'

- *It is early to say. Even though my career impact might not be impacted (hopefully), other important areas, like compensation might be impacted. This is very subjective though.*
- *I am a lawyer but have transitioned (very happily) to a non fee-earning position. However, if I had wanted to continue along the career path to partner, this would have been 'unlikely to be achievable' with the part time arrangement.*
- *After having my children, I achieved my desired seniority level and status/regard, within 5 years*
- *I would likely not get promoted if I went part time / WFH 1 day*
- *No opportunity for progression*
- *It will make it harder to move into other roles as will have to prove they could be done on a part time basis*
- *Managing my time/location has improved the way I manage my team (up and down) - my career has benefited and I am looking for promotion sooner than originally planned*

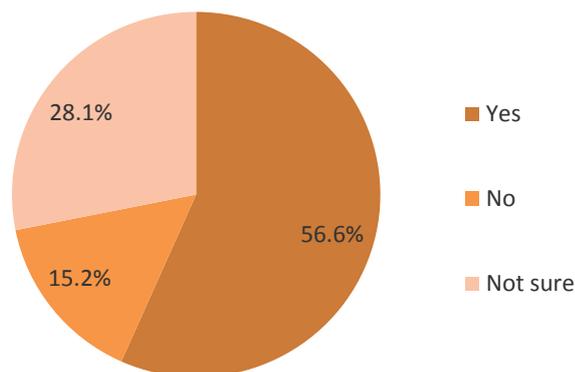
**6) What is your biggest challenge as a working mother? Select one:**



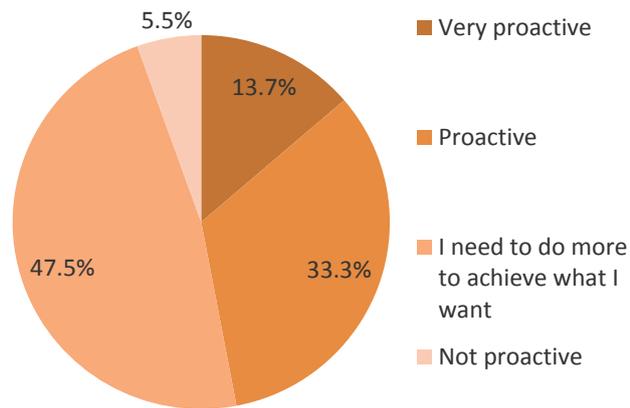
Selection of open text responses to 'Other (please specify)'

- *General guilt - i.e. a mixture of parental guilt and work guilt, not being able to do either role well enough!*
- *Balancing desired career ambitions with getting quality time with son*
- *Finding a work life balance*
- *Time management - having enough time for home and work!*
- *Exhaustion, from hours worked*
- *Fitting it all in*
- *All of the above! Biggest challenge is ensuring a loving and supportive environment for my daughter to grow up in. Biggest personal challenge is feeling sidelined in the office.*
- *Having the time to attend to children work and personal matters (eg personal financial matters, housework, etc)*
- *Balancing the desire to want to move career forward, but not being able to due to flexible work arrangements and also wanting to spend more time with my kids*
- *It is impossible to pick one as the point about being a working mother is that you are constantly balancing/dealing with a number of big issues/things in your life and the emotional conflicts that entails.*
- *Trying to achieve 5 day's work during 3 days in the office*
- *Recognition that you are not a slacker just because you can't be in the office 24/7*
- *Children missing me*

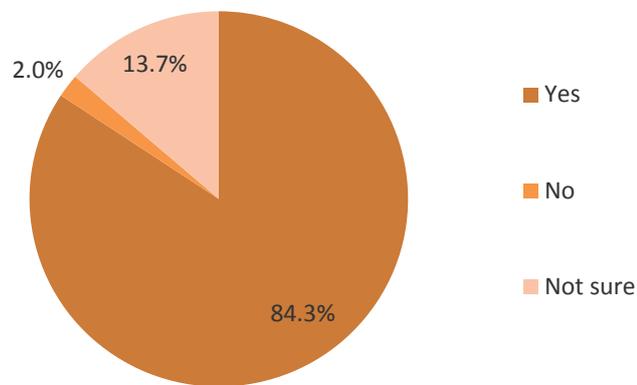
**7) If finances weren't a consideration, would you continue to work and pursue your career goals?**



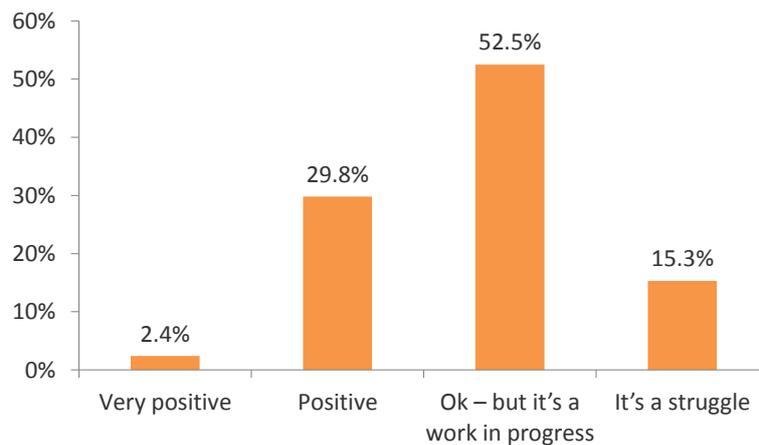
8) How proactive are you in implementing your career goals? (For example, identifying a sponsor; building connections; communicating your ambitions)



9) Do you think networking has the potential to advance your career?



10) Overall, how would you rate your experience to date of managing a career and a family?



## **About Citymothers**

Citymothers ([www.citymothers.co.uk](http://www.citymothers.co.uk)) is the only London networking forum for women in 'City' professions managing careers and children. Citymothers has over 1000 members, representing a broad range of City professions at senior-level including law, accountancy, investment banking, asset management, wealth management and management consultancy. The purpose of the network is to provide peer support to those balancing careers and families; to help members maintain career trajectory during and after the maternity transition; and in doing so to contribute to the development of the female talent pipeline and progression towards the boardroom. Citymothers was founded by Louisa Symington-Mills in November 2012. Louisa is a financial analyst working in the City of London.

Please contact [louisa@citymothers.co.uk](mailto:louisa@citymothers.co.uk) for more information about the Network and our July 2013 survey.