

Report No: 13

Juggling childcare and work

The challenges facing mothers-performers in Scotland

Aleksandra Webb

December 2023



**UWS-OXFAM
PARTNERSHIP**



The UWS–Oxfam Partnership: ‘For a more equitable and sustainable Scotland’

The UWS–Oxfam Partnership is a formally established relationship between the two organisations, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding. The Partnership emerged in 2011 as a result of prior collaborative work between UWS academics and Oxfam Scotland and its community partner organisations, revolving around the development of Oxfam’s anti-poverty advocacy and campaigning in Scotland. The Partnership has comprised:

- A research and knowledge exchange, linking UWS academics with Oxfam Scotland and community organisations in collaborative projects;
- The Policy Forum which brings all of these partners together with a broad range of further stakeholders to discuss key questions and to inform understanding and engagement with existing and emergent issues;
- A series of Collaborative Research Reports.

About the author

Aleksandra Webb is Lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of the West of Scotland’s School of Business and Creative Industries.

About the editors

Hartwig Pautz is Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of the West of Scotland.

Jamie Livingstone is Head of Oxfam Scotland.

Chloe Maclean is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of the West of Scotland.

Author acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the UWS–Oxfam Partnership for supporting this research, Niclas Hell for his contribution towards the literature review, and Creative Scotland, PiPA and BECTU for their time and helpful insights. I would also like to thank Chloe Maclean, Hartwig Pautz, Jamie Livingstone and Lewis Ryder-Jones for their feedback and comments on the drafts of this report, and UWS Printing Services. Finally, I would like to thank the research participants for their generous contribution of time. These participants are courageous and resilient mothers who candidly shared their experiences and views on managing childcare responsibilities in the face of the challenging context of their work.

Contents

Foreword	4
Executive summary	5
Introduction	7
Literature review	9
Methodology	12
Findings	14
Theme 1: Expensive and inflexible childcare.....	14
Theme 2: Family-friendly workplace policies and practices.....	16
Theme 3: The realities of working and caring for children.....	18
Summary.....	20
Key learning points for policy and practice	21
References.....	23

Foreword

We at Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (PiPA) are pleased to endorse this important report which draws closely on the first-hand experience of mothers who are performers. It paints a picture that is painfully familiar, of an industry that is often not informed enough or sufficiently equipped to support the needs of the mothers it employs, including its freelancers. And of unaffordable childcare services that are simply not flexible enough to meet the needs of mothers whose working patterns can be unpredictable and who necessarily are performing in the evenings and at weekends.

The report's wider conclusions around how to develop childcare provision that meets the needs of parents employed in atypical, non-standard and often insecure jobs are timely and vital, including a common-sense call to co-design solutions with parents themselves.

We welcome the particular focus on the performing arts and look forward to continuing to work with Creative Scotland, the Federation of Scottish Theatre and others across the industry to create and deliver employment culture and practice that welcomes and includes parents and carers from every background.



Sarah Jackson OBE,
Chair of Trustees and Carers in Performing Arts



Executive summary

Childcare responsibilities are amongst the most commonly identified drivers of low female participation in the labour market and are also often responsible for stalling the careers of women across occupational contexts and economic sectors. Childcare costs and childcare availability impact mothers the most as they still shoulder the majority of childcare responsibilities. To a large extent, the experiences of 'mothers-performers' – i.e. those whose job (fully or partly) involves performing on stages, in concert halls, on radio, or in front of the camera – are similar to those of mothers working in other occupational contexts. However, the difficulties experienced by mothers-performers seem to be intensified by highly atypical work arrangements, often in the form of self-employment, and with working hours which are often fundamentally incompatible with the standard operating hours of childcare provision. Such incompatibility is a key barrier for mothers in returning to work and maintaining their careers.

This report discusses the impact of childcare responsibilities on the work, careers, and livelihoods of mothers-performers living and working in Scotland. It proposes a range of policy learning points which it is hoped will contribute to the Scottish policy debate in relation to the need for affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare provision.

The lived experience of mothers, as elicited through ten in-depth interviews with mothers-performers undertaken in 2022, highlights multiple access barriers to suitably flexible and affordable childcare. The report also shines a light on the fragility of female artistic careers in the context of systemic difficulties with childcare availability. Experiences conveyed by mothers working in the performing arts and entertainment sector not only demonstrate the shortcomings of the existing childcare system, but also how little flexibility exists in the working patterns within this sector. This lack of flexibility makes it often near impossible to reconcile work with the typical operating hours of childcare provision.

While the work pattern of mothers-performers may be an extreme example of an atypical employment arrangement, it provides useful insights into the realities of employment for many other individuals working in an increasingly casualised labour market. This report can therefore generate important learning points which are relevant to other sectors and employment contexts which also operate outside 'traditional hours'.

Key findings

- Managing work and childcare is difficult for mothers-performers as they tend to have irregular work patterns, often with intense schedules of long-hours, frequent travel or absences from home, and unpredictable income.
- Work and the return to work after childbirth are dependent on flexible and affordable childcare. Mothers-performers struggle to find suitable childcare solutions particularly when they lack personal networks through which unpaid childcare can be provided.
- Existing childcare provision through nurseries is inflexible and incompatible with work patterns in the performing arts and entertainment sector. There is also little suitable 'wrap-around' childcare outside of normal school hours, such as breakfast or after-school clubs. As nursery opening hours rarely align with mothers-performers' work schedules, the statutory state-funded 'free' hours of childcare do not fully benefit them.
- Many mothers-performers 'double pay' for childcare. This can include paying regular nursery fees, as well as the cost of temporary childcare arrangements during periods of performing away from home, and costs for 'childcare top-ups' such as the childminders needed to extend childcare beyond nursery or school hours.
- Employers can be unaware or inconsiderate of mothers-performers' needs, and it seems as if a 'culture of silence' around motherhood and childcare responsibilities prevails in the sector.
- Little support is available to help mothers-performers returning to work and to support them to stay in work. Facilities such as creches or breastfeeding rooms at workplaces are insufficient, and family-friendly workplace policies and practices are limited.

Key learning points for policy and practice

The mothers-performers interviewed for this report have provided valuable insights on the challenges they face in relation to accessing childcare and aligning it with their work patterns. These suggests that action is needed to develop workable and lasting support solutions for mothers working in the sector, as well as parents in paid employment more widely.

Below are seven learning points for policy and practice, with details provided later in the report.

1. Increased investment is needed to deliver universal, high-quality, wrap-around childcare in ways that make it more affordable for parents to return to paid work and to sustain it.
2. Improved access is needed to flexible, wrap-around childcare, informed by greater recognition of the needs of parents working in non-standard forms of paid employment.
3. To maximise their impact, childcare solutions should be co-designed and evaluated with parents, including those working within non-standard forms of paid employment.
4. Family-friendly working practices, such as more flexible working hours and access to workplace childcare facilities, need to be promoted and championed, particularly within sectors characterised by non-standard forms of paid employment, such as the performing arts and entertainment sector.
5. The caring responsibilities undertaken by those in paid employment, including non-standard forms, need to be made more visible and valued within workplaces to help unlock the changes needed to better support those who juggle paid work with unpaid care work for children and others.
6. Robust metrics are needed to drive and transparently track progress in enhancing support to those with childcare responsibilities working in the performing arts and entertainment sector.
7. A new National Outcome to value and invest in care should be introduced within Scotland's National Performance Framework and include robust National Indicators to transparently track the progress achieved to improve childcare provision nationally.

Introduction

In high-income countries, female labour market participation rates have considerably increased since the 1960s (Avellar & Smock, 2004). In the United Kingdom (UK), women between 16 and 64 years make up 52.7 per cent of the entire workforce and contribute significantly to economic productivity (UK Government, 2023). However, the current UK female labour market participation rate of 72.3 per cent remains lower than the average of 75.7 per cent, and 6.7 percentage points lower than the male rate of 79 per cent (House of Commons, 2023). In Scotland, the female employment rate reached a record high of 75.6 per cent in December 2022 (ONS, 2022). On the whole, the gender employment gap across the UK has consistently narrowed since 1970s (Statista, 2023).

Problematically, despite this trend, employment does not grant as much financial security to women as it does to men. Analysis suggests that of the one in ten people who are trapped in persistent low pay in Scotland, some 72 per cent are women (JRF, 2023). In Scotland, 75 per cent of the part-time workforce is female (Close the Gap, 2022). As Close the Gap reports, a great proportion of part-time work is found in the low-paid sectors such as cleaning, catering, administration, retail, and care. Women typically earn less than men, both in absolute terms and for the same or comparable type of work, leading to a gender pay gap of 10 per cent in Scotland (Close the Gap, 2022). Therefore, the positive trajectory of female labour market participation in Scotland masks pervasive problems around stereotype-based gender discrimination, occupational segregation, inequality, and precarity of female employment characterised by underemployment, low pay, low job quality and low job security (EHRC, 2011; STUC, 2016; Close the Gap, 2018, 2022; Engender, 2017).

In Scotland's creative industries – a sector employing 90,000 workers (3.5 per cent of total employment in Scotland) and contributing more than £5 billion to the Scottish economy every year – 34.9 per cent of women work part-time, compared to 14.1 per cent of men (Generation Equal, 2021). This is connected to challenges women face in reconciling paid work and their career aspirations with unpaid care work, and with childcare in particular (e.g. PiPA, 2019; Berridge, 2021; PiPA, 2022). Women in the Scottish creative industry sectors earn on average £20,954 (gross annual full-time pay). The gross annual pay for full-time male workers in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector stood at £23,300 which suggests a full-time median gender pay gap of 4.1 per cent (Generation Equal, 2021). Importantly, many females will face further financial challenges as nearly 30 per cent of them are self-employed – this is a factor which often means income insecurity for the individual (e.g. Rusch-Drutz, 2004; Scharf, 2016; Webb, 2016; Generation Equal, 2021).

While progress has been made to increase female representation across many areas of work and public life in Scotland, the literature continues to document gender inequalities across the span of women's working lives. Regardless of age, for a great proportion of women worldwide, care responsibilities for children, older family members and friends result in economic inactivity (understood as not being in paid employment) and can – and often do – lead to poverty (Eurofound, 2022). Childcare specifically is the most significant work and career-related barrier reported by parents in artistic and creative professions (Creative Scotland, 2016; PiPA, 2019; Berridge, 2021; PiPA, 2022). Generally, the literature shows that childcare responsibilities and childcare costs are common barriers to paid work and career progression of both parents, but in particular mothers who still conduct the majority of childcare. The COVID-19 pandemic further illuminated how childcare responsibilities still disproportionately fall on mothers working across all sectors and roles (Carli, 2020; United Nations, 2020), including in arts and creative sectors (Cohen & Ginsbourg, 2021; IAC, 2020; PiPA, 2022). In that sense, the COVID-19 pandemic showed how little has changed with respect to the gendered organisation of domestic work and family life (Cantillon et al., 2023).

Aims of this report

The challenges of juggling care responsibilities with work affect women far more than men. These challenges take different forms and have different intensities, depending on the sector in which individuals work, and the specific workplace. For example, some work may be done remotely while other workplaces allow very little flexibility with regards to when and where work is undertaken. This is particularly true for the performing arts and entertainment sector, where employment might be perceived as 'flexible' but where, in fact, work is very often required to be done outside of 'traditional office hours' and across different sites and locations.

While some employment in performing arts organisations, such as within ballet companies, operas and orchestras, offers full-time roles, a great majority of performers work in a self-employed 'freelance' capacity without secure long-term contracts. As many as 70 per cent of those employed in the sector work freelance (DCMS, 2022). Freelancers who work from project-to-project can experience both extremely busy and very quiet periods of work (e.g. McRobbie, 2015; Scharff, 2016; Webb, 2016; Webb, 2021). The irregular nature of project work translates into irregular income. Freelancers also are responsible for continuously sourcing and securing future work projects themselves. During periods of non-work, performing artists must upkeep their practice to remain 'performance-ready'. Lastly, performing work is sometimes carried out in places far from home. It can involve long hours with significant travel that requires staying in hotels for extended periods of time. In combination, all of this means that many parents in artistic professions – and, given the unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities, women in particular – are heavily affected by the incompatibility of their atypical working hours with the standard operating hours of childcare providers. For this reason, and because of the high cost of childcare, many women with childcare responsibilities are forced to turn down work or miss out on important career opportunities (PiPA, 2022).

Despite the Scottish performing arts sector's significant socio-economic contributions (Scottish Government, 2019; Langston, 2022), little research has been conducted on the experiences of female workers with childcare responsibilities. This report aims to address this gap by focusing on the group of 'mothers-performers', defined as mothers whose job (fully or partly) involves performing on stages, in concert halls, on radio, or in front of the camera. The report will highlight the specific situation of mothers-performers in Scotland, given the non-standard working hours, precarious employment and financial insecurities in this sector. Doing so is critical if better support is to be made available to these workers. However, the insights generated from the experiences of mothers working within the performing arts sectors are also likely to be applicable to mothers who work in other kinds of atypical employment.

This report

- uses qualitative evidence from the lived experience of mothers-performers to better understand the impact of childcare on their work, careers and livelihoods;
- illustrates the complexities, tensions, dilemmas and sacrifices related to the organisation of childcare and work;
- highlights the performing arts sector as an extreme example of atypical employment arrangements and non-standard working hours which characterise increasingly casualised labour markets across many sectors;
- provides key learning points for policy and practice to support mothers-performers and thereby contributes to the debate about how those in insecure employment juggling paid work and care responsibilities can be prevented from facing personal and financial wellbeing problems.

Mothers in non-traditional, or atypical work patterns, provide a good case study to be considered by policy-makers and childcare providers in Scotland with a view to making childcare fairer and more equitable for everyone. Their work situation is worth considering, particularly in the context of evaluating the roll-out of the recent expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) (Audit Scotland, 2023). The insights generated by this report should inform further childcare expansion and service improvement plans for younger children, as pledged by the Scottish Government, and to be accomplished by 2026 (Scottish Government, 2023).

After a short literature review, the research methodology will be outlined. This will be followed by findings, concluding remarks, and key learning points. The latter hope to stimulate a re-thinking of existing childcare policies with a view to reducing access barriers and inequalities across all sectors. The key learnings also propose specific ideas to enhance support mechanisms for mothers working across the performing arts and entertainment sector.

Literature review

To contextualise the research, this section outlines a range of key problems experienced by working mothers as reported in the academic literature, reports and surveys. In the first instance, challenges facing mothers more generally are described. This is followed by a review of data on mothers working in the arts, entertainment, and creative industries. The section finishes with a short summary of childcare support available to mothers in Scotland.

The situation of working mothers

A number of studies have mapped out the gap in work participation rates in the UK between women and men and between mothers and non-mothers (e.g. Waldfogel, 1995; Machin & Waldfogel, 1994; Avellar & Smock, 2004; McMunn et al., 2012). Overall, working mothers tend to earn less than other women and considerably less than men. Some of the factors explaining the gender pay gap are lower qualification levels, less work experience, and more frequent employment breaks (Weichselbaumer et al., 2005; Staff & Mortimer, 2012). In the past, the gender pay gap was also problematised in relation to the impact of marriage (Khan, 2004), race (Borjas, 1983) and socioeconomic segregation (Miller, 1987). While marriage, race and socioeconomic factors still matter, more recent research reports that women from all occupational backgrounds continue to experience underemployment, gender-based disparities in wages, fractured employment arrangements, and fewer opportunities for promotion and career development (Eurofound, 2022; ILO, 2017/2022). In 2019, 24 per cent of economically inactive women in the European Union stated that care-related issues were the main reason for their inactivity (Eurofound, 2022).

In 2021, the UK employment rate for mothers with dependent children stood at 75.6 per cent while the employment rate for fathers was at 92.1 per cent (ONS, 2022). Mothers in the UK spend more than double the time on care than fathers. Men instead spend more time at work (Gracia & Esping-Andersen, 2015). The disproportionately high level of unpaid childcare carried out by women affects their ability to enter paid employment and their overall long-term participation in the labour market. As mothers spend more time with children and less time in paid work, they experience a 'wage penalty' (Anderson et al., 2002) and much more limited career opportunities, not only in comparison to men but also to women without children (Williams & Cooper, 2004). In fact, employers have tended to pay mothers lower starting wages and to give them fewer recruitment and developmental opportunities (e.g. Correll et al., 2007). Williams and Cooper (2004) explained this situation by highlighting workplace promotion systems that reward presenteeism and long working hours – both are more difficult for working mothers.

At the same time, mothers' domestic work and unpaid caring responsibilities remain largely 'undervalued, invisible and ignored' in the UK (UNISON, 2022), Scotland (STUC, 2016; Close the Gap, 2018; SWBG, 2022) and internationally (United Nations, 2020; Eurofound, 2022). In fact, globally, Oxfam has demonstrated that 65 per cent of women's working hours are unpaid every week and excluded from official measures of economic activity such as gross domestic product (GDP). This is despite unpaid care accounting for 45 per cent of all adults' weekly working hours (Oxfam GB, 2023).

Childcare responsibilities seem to exacerbate many problems experienced by women in paid employment or those seeking paid employment. Even though part-time work is associated with less training and development opportunities, lower pay, and poorer job quality, women are driven towards it to help them balance work and family. At the same time, the cultural and social value shift towards understandings of motherhood (and parenthood) as a solely individual or household responsibility (English, 2022) makes mothers' return to work highly dependent on the availability of affordable childcare and access to flexible work arrangements. A lack of affordable childcare can disproportionately affect women's professional progression and visibility (Follows & Kreager, 2016). Close the Gap (2018) and Engender (2017) maintain that a crisis in availability of well-paid and good quality part-time work further complicates the situation of mothers, especially when flexible work arrangements are still not always recognised as a necessity but rather seen as a mere lifestyle choice. For the moment, such flexible arrangements remain largely at the discretion of employers. In the meantime, working mothers must find ways to organise their work around the availability of informal and formal childcare.

Many mothers delay their return to work after their child is born or reduce their working hours for a variety of reasons. For some mothers, breastfeeding is the first and primary factor for delaying the return to work (Skafida,

2012; Kim et al., 2018). Not surprisingly, statistics show that few women in full-time employment breastfeed their infants (Hawkins et al., 2007). While some research suggests that on-site nurseries, where mothers can feed their infants and spend their breaks with them, are associated with increased productivity and happiness amongst mothers (Connelly et al., 2004), such opportunities are not widely available in the UK. Where they are, they are usually limited to very large employers (Simpson, 2016). At the same time, even with the expanded state-funded childcare support (UK Government, 2017; Scottish Government, 2018), accessing nursery childcare remains unaffordable for many families, and remains insufficient to meet all mothers' needs (Cosslett, 2022; Jarvis et al., 2023; Pregnant then Screwed, 2022).

Scotland's uptake of flexible work arrangements ranks fifth out of twelve UK regions (CIPD, 2022). Options such as 'working from home' have become more popular since the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, requests for flexible hours (e.g. part-time or flexi-time) have dropped (CIPD, 2022). However, not all work can be performed remotely from home and, importantly, working from home does not remove the need for childcare. Lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic showed how difficult it is to juggle work and childcare, especially for mothers, as nurseries and schools closed and as social interaction with support networks became very limited. Although the full gender impact of isolation during the height of the pandemic has not been fully assessed yet, findings so far have shone further light on how childcare responsibilities continue to disproportionately fall on mothers (Carli, 2020; United Nations, 2020). In that sense, the COVID-19 pandemic showed how little has changed with respect to the gendered organisation of domestic work and family life within heterosexual households, despite a stated desire amongst couples for a more even split between men and women in who undertakes unpaid care and domestic roles in the household (Cantillon et al., 2023).

Mothers in the arts, entertainment and creative sectors

Specific hardships faced by parents, and particularly mothers, working in the creative industry sector more generally, have been highlighted in the academic literature and in industry reports. Many point out to the precarious and often low-paid nature of employment in the sector and to the unpredictable pay cycles creating financial uncertainty and difficulties for performing artists (e.g. Rusch-Drutz, 2004; Webb, 2016) and film and TV workers (Raising Films, 2018). A culture of demanding schedules with exhaustingly long and antisocial hours frequently spent away from home has been reported in the film and TV industry (Berridge, 2021) and in the worlds of theatre (PiPA, 2019) and music (Scharff, 2016; STUC, 2016; PiPA, 2022). Often, those who work in these sectors are self-employed freelancers and therefore lack stable long-term work opportunities, maternity benefits, and reliable childcare. The latter is often reported, by parents in artistic and creative professions, as the most significant work and career-related barrier (Creative Scotland, 2016; PiPA, 2019; Berridge, 2021; PiPA, 2022).

All of these struggles exist against the backdrop of a discourse that emphasises the supposed important socio-economic roles of the creative industries – namely that they create employment and wealth in post-industrial economies and are a lever for urban regeneration (Howkins, 2001; Florida, 2003; Foord, 2008). Creative industries (CIs) can be defined as those 'supplying goods and services that we broadly associate with cultural, artistic, or simply entertainment value' (Caves, 2000: 1), and that 'have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent' (DCMS, 1998: 3). This term includes a range of heterogenous sub-sectors which differ substantially in size and characteristics: advertising; architecture; the art and antiques market; crafts; design; designer fashion; film and video; interactive leisure software; music; the performing arts; publishing; software and computer games; and television and radio. In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall contribution of these industries to the UK economy was estimated as £116bn in gross value added and with over two million jobs (PEC, 2022). Importantly, 33 per cent of those employed in these industries are freelance workers, and in some sub-sectors – such as in music, performing arts and visual arts – the number of freelancers grows to 70 per cent (DCMS, 2022).

In Scotland, the creative industries have also been identified as a growth sector, and one that makes a significant socio-economic contribution (Scottish Government, 2019). A study from 2019 reports that these sectors employ about 90,000 workers (3.5 per cent of total employment in Scotland) and contribute more than £5 billion to the Scottish economy every year (Generation Equal, 2021). Women comprise a smaller portion (35.8 per cent) of the workforce than men. A higher proportion (34.9 per cent) of women in Scotland's creative industries works part-time (compared to 14.1 per cent of men). Of all women working in the sector, 29.4 per cent are self-employed. The gross annual pay for full-time male workers in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector stood at £23,300 – for full-time female workers it was only £20,954. The full-time median gender pay gap in the sector was reported to be at 4.1 per cent, suggesting a narrower gender pay gap in this sector in comparison to the Scottish average (Generation Equal, 2021).

Just like women in non-standard work arrangements in other sectors, women in the arts sector face limited availability of flexible and affordable childcare and little flexibility in work arrangements that would allow them to address both sets of responsibilities (Public Health Scotland, 2020). Non-standard working hours and freelance employment are prevalent in the performing arts sector and can contribute to lives characterised by precariousness (McRobbie, 2015; Webb, 2016; Webb, 2021). In combination, this significantly compromises mothers' opportunities for developing their careers. In particular, those mothers with a limited personal support network struggle and are often forced to turn down work opportunities, take career breaks, or prematurely end their careers (Webb, 2016).

The shortcomings of childcare provision for the performing arts and life entertainment sector's working parents were raised as an urgent issue before the COVID-19 pandemic (Raising Films, 2018; Scharff, 2016). The pandemic then severely impacted the performing arts and life entertainment sectors (Webb, 2021). Lost income, financial instability, job insecurity and deterioration in mental and physical health were the most commonly mentioned challenges experience by the Scottish creative industry workforce (Creative Scotland, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has also further exacerbated the gendered problem of reconciling paid work with childcare needs (Cohen & Ginsbourg, 2021; IAC, 2020; PiPA, 2022). While the inequalities in parenting remain problematic, some positive initiatives can be observed more recently, such as Creative Scotland's 'Radical Childcare Project' (Creative Scotland, 2022) and the Parents & Carers in the Performing Arts (PiPA) 'Best Practice Charter' that champions the uptake of supportive human resources approaches to the problem, as well as equality, diversity and inclusion focused policies (PiPA, 2023). These initiatives concentrate on supporting parents and employers through innovative actions, fair policies and workplace improvement practices so that a more supportive work culture can develop.

Childcare support

Parents in Scotland are currently entitled to up to 1,140 hours per year of statutory childcare, free at the point of use. The Early Learning and Care (ELC) expansion policy, introduced by the Scottish Government in August 2021 after a delay of one year, supports parents with up to 30 hours of childcare per week during school term time in approved facilities (Audit Scotland, 2023; Scottish Government, 2018). The ELC expansion policy is directed at pre-school children, i.e. all three- and four-year-olds. Some younger children may be eligible too, depending on local authority approach and socio-economic status of the family. Audit Scotland's 2023 assessment of the service expansion highlighted the financial commitment made by the Scottish Government to improve the overall childcare infrastructure to meet the demand for the expanded service, while pointing out challenges around workforce recruitment and retention, questions about the sustainability of childcare providers, and problems with evidence-based decision-making (Audit Scotland, 2023).

While plans are being formulated by the Scottish Government to evaluate the impact of the expansion policy on children and families in more depth, with plans for further expansion of the policy also being made, recent research and media headlines suggest that the childcare system across Scotland and beyond is increasingly unaffordable and in severe crisis (Audit Scotland, 2023; Cosslett, 2022; Jarvie et al., 2023; Pregnant then Screwed, 2022). In comparison to other OECD countries, the cost of childcare in Scotland and the UK is very high, with the UK having one of the most expensive systems (OECD, 2022) – twelve per cent of parental average earnings are spent on childcare in the UK. In Scotland, some suggest that the average annual cost of full-time nursery for a child under two equals 35.5 per cent of average full-time pay (BBC, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis since 2022 have intensified the financial, social and emotional difficulties parents face; this has been particularly felt by women who are single parents (OPFS, 2022).

Methodology

The core of this report is based on data from ten in-depth interviews with mothers-performers living in Scotland (see Table 1 for details). This term was chosen to describe mothers whose job (fully or partly) involves performing on stages, in concert halls, on radio, in front of the camera and in similar contexts. An invitation to participate in this research was published via Creative Scotland's 'opportunities platform' in August and September 2022, shared via social media, personal contacts of the author and others, and through internal communication channels of performing arts unions and other relevant member organisations. In addition, the 'snowballing technique' (Bryman, 2016) was used by asking participants to extend the invitation to other suitable participants from their work and personal networks. The recruitment process proved challenging – in the main because, as carers and workers, mothers have little time to spare for 'being' research participants.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted between August and November 2022. All interviews took place online via video conferencing software. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were analysed thematically using the framework approach (Furber, 2010). The themes identify key challenges commonly experienced by mothers-performers and help to make sense of collectively shared and complex realities found in individual experiences of motherhood and work. The three key themes that emerged were: 'expensive and inflexible childcare'; 'limited family-friendly workplace policies and practices'; and 'returning to work/career development'. These themes are discussed in the next section and are supported by direct quotes from the interviews.

The project was approved by the ethics committee of the School of Business and Creative Industries at UWS and aligns with Oxfam GB's code of conduct. All participants were briefed about the purpose of the research, provided with an information sheet, and were asked to sign a consent form. All interviewees were anonymised – with their names used in this report changed – and any data that could have made the identification of individuals possible was removed.

At the time of the interviews, all participants were in their 30s and 40s, of self-ascribed white ethnic origin, at different stages in their careers, and had children ranging from a few months' old to high-school age. Some had worked in the performing arts and entertainment sector for two decades, and some had only recently started to work professionally. Among the interviewees were musicians, singers and songwriters, musical theatre performers, actresses, performance graduates, music teachers and community artists, broadcasters, presenters and producers. The most represented art form was music, with female musicians working across classical, jazz, folk and popular music genres. Most of the interviewees worked as freelancers and were holding different jobs at the same time. For example, many interviewees combined live performance work with teaching at schools, colleges, universities and in private settings.

Most participants were married or in civil partnership; there was one single mother and one who had earlier experience of being a single mother at a stage in her life. Six mothers were from households with both parents working in performance or entertainment sectors. Only some participants stated they had a local network of family and friends they could draw on for help with childcare. Some also had elderly parents who needed care support themselves. Collectively, they had used all available childcare options: childminders, nannies, au-pairs and baby-sitters, public and private nurseries, and free kinship care provided by family and friends.

Table 1: Interviewee details (anonymised)

Interviewee 1: Lorna
Performance graduate, two children

Interviewee 2: Betty
TV and broadcasting roles, two children

Interviewee 3: Elsa
Actress, one child, single mother

Interviewee 4: Mandy
Musician, two children

Interviewee 5: Val
Musician, two children

Interviewee 6: Lena
Musical theatre performer, two children

Interviewee 7: Shona
Musician, one child

Interviewee 8: Mila
TV/Film production roles, one child, with experience of being a single mother

Interviewee 9: Mira
Singer-songwriter, two children

Interviewee 10: Sarah
Musician, three children

Findings

In the following, the experiences of female performers with parental responsibilities will be illustrated through excerpts from interviews with participants. The sections below narrate, in three themes, common aspects of the ways in which having children impacted mothers-performers' ability to engage with paid work and develop their careers.

Theme 1: Expensive and inflexible childcare

Interviewees said they had made what some called 'professional sacrifices' to accommodate the needs of their children. Decisions to make these sacrifices were significantly influenced by the cost, availability and flexibility of childcare provision which this section discusses in more detail.

The high cost of childcare

All interviewees found childcare, in whatever form, to be expensive. They spoke about average daily nursery costs of £60, while a childminder would cost them about £10 per hour. Interviewees estimated that they paid between £10,000 and £12,500 per child for childcare annually. Considering that childcare responsibilities make it more difficult to find paid performance work due to 'unsocial' working hours and given the lack of available childcare options, these costs were significant. While childcare costs may decrease when children enter school, afternoon and evening hours may still need to be 'covered': 'Once the children start school – it's fantastic! But you still need to organise childcare from three o'clock', as Sarah, who had a stable work contract in place, explained.

Most interviewees said that they had to use breakfast and after school clubs which they found expensive and logistically challenging as not all schools offer these. In some instances, the cost of childcare influenced the interviewees' return-to-work decision. Betty said that her income would not justify paying for extra childcare hours. Even when she considered herself to have a 'decent' personal annual income of £30,000, she found that 'all my money went on childcare.' To her, it seemed more 'cost effective' to stay at home with her two children.

Many interviewees felt frustrated by this situation, especially when they found that less expensive public nurseries were oversubscribed, and more costly private nurseries had to be used instead. Mila summed up her frustration in this way:

'Mothers have to go to work after one, two, four, nine... months, and then it's just hectic... and it's so expensive to get kids to private nursery. Then you have to work more to pay for this nursery, and you are more separated from your child. It's just bonkers!'

Because of the cost, all interviewees welcomed the Scottish Government's expansion of childcare in 2022 as having made a significant financial difference to them. Sarah, who had not had the same level of support for her older children, recalled the extra 'free childcare' with a sense of relief:

'My middle child, when he turned three, he got three days a week full time for free. On the other two days he did private nursery, which was quite expensive. I think it's fifty-two pounds for a day, but that's all we paid for him.'

But while the quantity of childcare provision mattered to interviewees, so too did the quality of childcare. Reflecting on her experience with paying a childminder to pursue a work project, Mandy said:

'I'm paying for the childminder to come to be with my baby. I know there were people I could find nearby, but she was just brilliant ... So, for my peace of mind, I'm paying her petrol, plus the extra hours for her to travel. It's not cheap, in the first place, because she is really good and experienced. I probably end up paying her more than half of what I earn.'

As performance work often requires workers to travel to – and sometimes stay in – a different location, some young children may accompany their mother who then organises temporary childcare. To minimise the cost, but also to overcome issues around the availability of such short-term and ad hoc childcare, mothers-performers often organise informal unpaid childcare. This can include bringing along the other parent, a member of family, or a friend. For example, Sarah asked a friend living in the US to look after her child: 'I paid her flights to come over to help. We were touring, and he was only fifteen months old... too young to leave him behind'. The majority of interviewees relied on their parents, but not all had a local support network. Those who did not have this, spoke about bringing their children to rehearsals and concerts where informal and unorganised 'backstage childcare' would be practised, relying on colleagues and venue staff to look after their children.

Inflexibilities in the childcare system

Many interviewees highlighted that making use of the entitlement to free childcare for children over three, as guaranteed by the Scottish Government, could prove frustrating. The problem lies in the fact that nursery childcare rarely aligns with interviewees' 'after hours' or weekend work schedules. In practice this means that many mothers-performers lose their funded childcare hours. Lena said that 'we were offered silly hours which you can't work around', and Val found that 'there's no nursery that's open, you know, until ten o'clock or midnight! The problem for us is that our work isn't [happening] at the same time as the nurseries are working.' Sarah described how she paid a babysitter in addition to the full-time nursery so that her children would be collected from nursery and be looked after until she returned home in the late evening. What mothers-performers needed was, as Shona said, 'childcare that fits around the work of artists, rather than us being bound into a childcare model that does not fit our lives.'

Where interviewees paid for childcare, they spoke about their frustration over having to pay twice. For example, Shona's young child was not yet eligible for free hours. She recalled situations when she paid for temporary childcare whilst being on tour accompanied by her child. At the same time, she continued paying regular fees to her nursery even as her child did not actually attend: 'You have to pay, whether the children are in there or not.'

While nurseries certainly require a regular income to operate successfully, participants provided insights into the financial and logistical implications of the standard model of childcare provision, including what they described as the 'unfair' pre-payment model. As Val said:

'You're on tour and you're paying one hundred and twenty pounds a week for ten days that you're not using. Then you've got the kid there with you, and you're trying to juggle them or try to find childcare while you're on tour. You are paying double.'

This situation is most problematic for freelancing mothers-performers who often do not know their precise work schedules more than a few weeks in advance so that planning childcare is made more difficult. In addition, they are most affected by project cancellations and ad hoc work opportunities which are difficult to reject given the competitive nature of the sector. Both these issues impact their income and increase financial pressures while further complicating childcare arrangements. Even those mothers on comparatively stable and long-term contracts with a reputable employer experience irregular and changeable work patterns. Occasionally, after a busy spell of work away from their place of residence, mothers-performers choose not to send children to nursery so that they can spend some time with them. During such periods, nursery childcare for children younger than three still needs to be paid.

Interviewees mentioned another aspect around the lack of flexibility. Currently, childcare-related financial support is tied to an approved childcare provider. However, interviewees emphasised they needed more freedom in deciding what childcare provider is best for their circumstances. Shona suggested that they should receive a financial equivalent to the free childcare entitlement when, for example, childcare was provided by a member of the household. She explained that this would mean that, when she is away on tour, her partner, working in the same sector, could be a paid carer:

'For me that would mean that I could give something to my partner for looking after our child completely by himself. Because I'm going to be away it means that he can still earn something for the week because he won't be able to go out and do his work.'

In summary, childcare provision operating according to a 'normal' nine-to-five schedule in combination with a rigid pre-payment structure is seen to disadvantage the interviewees. The limited availability of flexible and accommodating childcare provision means that mothers-performers risk 'double-paying' for childcare. In practice, this results in having to rely on informal unpaid help from friends and family, organise other paid childcare, or opt out from work. Neither public nor private nurseries are found, by interviewees, to offer much flexibility. The few exceptions were described, by Sarah, as 'real saviours!'. She added: 'I still use it one day a week, because they are brilliant, but I think that's really rare.' If flexibility is found, then it is usually in urban areas and with private childcare provider which, however, are often more expensive than local authority nurseries. Because of the incompatibility of work with childcare, arranging 'childcare on top of childcare', as Sarah described it, appears to be among the few workable solutions that allow mothers-performers to pursue their profession.

Theme 2: Family-friendly workplace policies and practices

As shown, mothers-performers struggle to organise their work around often very inflexible nursery hours and after school clubs. This situation is worsened by the absence of workplace provisions for childcare and other family-friendly practices, and by detrimental attitudes towards motherhood in the sector. The latter was described by interviewees as a 'culture of silence'. These issues will be discussed in turn.

Insufficient flexible work options and workplace facilities

Interviewees reported that their work, while often precarious and ad hoc, offered little flexibility with regards to working hours, working part-time, or undertaking the work as a job-share. One mother, Mira, reported her experience of trying to balance an intense full-time job that consisted of long days of filming and required a four-hour commute with caring for her young child. Although her child was at nursery full-time, the 'traditional' opening hours between 8am and 6pm made work difficult to balance. She asked her manager whether a more flexible work arrangement was possible:

'When I asked, "Can I go flexi hours?", the response was "No". "Can I just do four days?". "No, it's full time." It was very black and white, and full time meant you being there at ten o'clock, working straight through until the show finishes late in the evening. No lunch, no breaks. I was exhausted!'

While freelance work rarely offers predictable working hours, even work patterns of mothers in full-time and comparatively stable employment often seem to fail to accommodate parental needs due to the established work culture in the sector. Sarah explained how her long working hours resulted in her using more paid childcare and how she felt that employers could undertake greater efforts to be more family-friendly:

'This industry likes to start work midway through the morning, and that makes it really tough for parents. That's okay for office staff because they go home at 5.30pm. But if you're a musician? I've tried to say this time and time again, but I'm in a minority having children.'

Workplaces were reported to offer little in the way of family-friendly facilities and policies, and managers were said to lack understanding of the complexity of the issue. One interviewee described how her employer initiated a change in working practices in the name of promoting a 'family-friendly' work schedule for performers working far away from their home. While weekend work was reduced, additional slots of evening work mid-week were added. Calling this change 'disastrous' because it meant having to find evening childcare, Sarah said 'I actually almost quit my job. It was awful.'

Overall, interviewees describe their sector as doing little proactively to make work patterns more compatible with childcare needs. Instead, the sector expects mothers to 'be able to just turn up and do the work', as Shona put it. Given that much of the sector's employment is ad hoc and short-term, and given the competitive nature of the sector's job market, some interviewees said that they shy away from initiating a conversation about flexible work in fear of being seen as 'difficult' or 'troublesome'. They said they worried about not getting a job as a result of raising these issues. Shona commented that 'you're not able to talk about it, to be honest. I don't want to appear like a weak link. I don't want to appear as a liability on the tour, or on the stage.'

There appears to be, according to many interviewees, a 'culture of silence' when it comes to the issue of childcare. Certainly, employers were described as lacking interest in discussing it: 'I haven't had that discussion with anybody! That's never been a subject of a discussion', said Mila who added that she would not ask for flexible or shorter hours of work until she had reached a higher and more secure position in her workplace. When asked why the sector appears to be so unaccommodating, she said:

'It was always male dominated. There was never even an attempt of making it more family friendly. Not intentionally, necessarily, but it's just because nobody really thinks about "if we employ a mother who's got a child, how are they going to cope as a family?".'

Speaking as a mother who works in film and TV production, where twelve hours shifts over a minimum of five days a week with overnight stays are the norm, Mila expects change to come from the industry itself rather than through the provision of more flexible childcare:

'If they really want mothers in the industry, they should make it so a mother can take her child into school and pick it up at five o'clock, and have dinner with family, and she doesn't need to stay overnight on location but can come back home. That's the only way. If they want to make it mother-friendly, the working hours cannot be 6am to 6pm or even longer.'

In addition to a lack of flexible work patterns, some participants spoke about how workplace facilities such as on-site creches or breastfeeding rooms were lacking. Val shared experiences around the absence of breastfeeding facilities and about what seemed to her like little awareness of the needs of mothers on the part of the employer. Once, she said, she was performing at a venue while she was breastfeeding. The stage was four floors down from her dressing room:

'When I took a break from the rehearsal, my boobs were like basketballs, so I had to run upstairs. There is no time for a cup of tea or a drink of water. Then it's playing again, and then the same again at dinner time. You get an hour and a half free and that's enough time to get food, if you have nothing else to do. But if you have to pump milk or feed a baby, or even phone the babysitter, or use Facetime [the app] to read a story, you have to skip dinner.'

Given such experiences, it may be no wonder that many interviewees questioned the idea of a return to work after childbirth: 'How do you go back to work and still feed your child when your child is miles away from your work – how can you do this?', asked Mira.

'Emotional roller-coaster' and 'mum's guilt'

Interviewees suggested that many barriers and difficulties experienced by mothers-performers stem from prevailing old-fashioned attitudes, damaging gender stereotypes, and a problematic workplace culture. They said that motherhood is little talked about in the arts sector and that they perceive themselves as being in a very small minority. But interviewees found the culture of silence most concerning. For example, Val said that

'people made assumptions that I wouldn't be able to work and so they didn't ask if I was available. That's the main thing I noticed. There was one manager who sent an email to some of my colleagues. I got to see it, and it was saying "Who are we going to get for the next tour because Val is out of action for the foreseeable future?". He never even asked me when the baby was due.'

Some of the participants thought that such attitudes are slowly changing due to a new generation of woman being more willing to raise issues around motherhood and artistic careers, both at the workplace and in public. Yet they were also acutely aware of persisting career inequalities in the sector and how they experienced their careers stalling because of motherhood. At the same time, they felt distressed about needing to make choices between career and children. The return to work after childbirth was described

as an 'emotional roller-coaster', exacerbated by feeling guilty about leaving children under the care of others whilst pursuing work and career opportunities. Mandy said 'there's mum's guilt as well. You feel really bad, like... "Oh, gosh! I should be with them today... I shouldn't be doing this thing".' To cope with the tension between 'mum's guilt' and, as Lena put it, 'feeling guilty about having career aspirations', interviewees spoke about 'trying to see things in the long term.' Val said that

'I feel guilty about leaving them at nursery or using my parents too much. But it's all worthwhile in the long term. If I keep going, life will be better for them. A happy mother is a better mother! At the moment, I would be very unhappy if I had to stop my work.'

Theme 3: The realities of working and caring for children

Interviewees frequently spoke about trying to reconcile their childcare responsibilities with work and career. They spoke about the difficulties around returning to work and balancing work with childcare, and how the COVID-19 pandemic changed their lives at least temporarily.

Returning to work and balancing work with childcare

Most of the interviewees said that after childbirth they tried to quickly get back into paid employment for pressing financial reasons but also because they worried about the competitiveness of the sector and about being 'forgotten' by former employers and collaborators. Mandy returned to performing when her baby was only three months old, and Val did so even earlier. In particular, the freelancers among the interviewees felt compelled to return quickly because they were often not entitled to regular Statutory Maternity Pay (paid by employers) and were uncertain whether they would qualify for Maternity Allowance (paid by the government) or, indeed, were not even aware of their support entitlements. Rules around Maternity Allowance can be especially complicated as the recipient needs to be employed or self-employed for 26 weeks in the 66 weeks before childbirth and have earned at least £30 a week for at least 13 of those weeks (UK Government, 2023).

By returning to work soon after childbirth, some interviewees said they had put significant pressure on themselves whilst also depriving themselves of sufficient time for post-birth recovery and to be with their family.

Lena described how her attempts to return to performing are complicated by the issue of childcare:

'When I see an audition, my first thought is worry. Can I get childcare? And there are many, many, many jobs that I can't even apply for, because I just can't get childcare. Then once I get a job, it's "How can I find the time to be able to practice?".'

While interviewees suggested that returning to paid work in the performance sector is harder for women with a longer career break, even those who could draw on substantial professional experience and a wide professional network before having children found returning to work challenging. Some worried that having children would influence perceptions of those making employment decisions with regards to the availability, reliability, commitment, and ability of mothers-performers. Val worried that 'people would say, "Oh, she has two kids and now she's not as good. Let's not book her".'

While performance work often offers interesting and fulfilling opportunities, it can bring about a somewhat chaotic and precarious lifestyle. Some participants said that the unpredictability of work patterns and finances associated with employment in the sector had mattered little to them before they became mothers. However, motherhood marked a significant change in their circumstances. Val explained the impact of motherhood on how she envisaged her working life:

'Before I had children, I loved freelancing. Every week was different. I did like that a lot! But I think what I would like now is the security of being able to go to a bank and say, "Here is my salary". Now we need to get a bigger mortgage, and I have the childcare to pay for every week, whether I'm working or not.'

Interviewees reported that having children negatively impacted the ability to maintain professional activities and networks so important for the development of careers and brought with it the difficult task of finding appropriate childcare that aligned with irregular and sometimes unpredictable working schedules. For some, this had proved impossible in the past. For example, Mila said that 'artistic jobs don't offer you a routine at all. The only reason why I can do this job now is because my child is older.' In the interim, some participants suspended their career aspirations and found employment in what they described as a 'normal' working environment. 'I got a nine-till-five job so that I could manage childcare demands and family finances and to have more stability', Mila said. Other participants described how they had to limit their professional activities by not taking on work during the evenings, at the weekends and during school holidays, and by declining interesting and tempting, but impromptu and last-minute, requests because of the cost and availability of childcare.

Experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, at its height in 2020 and 2021, was a specific challenge to workers in the arts and entertainment sectors because of the cancellation of live events. Some interviewees reported that the pandemic resulted in serious financial pressures as they did not receive any or only limited government support. Unlike employees, freelance workers did not qualify for the UK Government's 'Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme', commonly known as the 'furlough scheme', which paid up to 80 per cent of salaries to those whose employers halted operations due to COVID-19 restrictions. For example, Val recalled significant financial strain as all her freelance project work dried up and only online teaching remained. With a new-born baby around, this proved challenging: 'I went back to teaching online because otherwise we would have had no money. I had to do it! It was hard.'

Other interviewees, such as mother-of-three Sarah, recalled how the pandemic lockdowns drastically reduced her childcare costs. Benefiting first from the furlough scheme and latterly by practicing and performing online only, she reported saving both on the cost of travel and childcare. She says that the family 'saved about five thousand pounds just in half a year!', adding: 'I was so pleased that we were locked down. I don't know how we would have survived it otherwise.'

Some interviewees described the pandemic as 'a blessing' because it offered a much-needed respite to mothers-performers – they could not work and were now able to spend time with their family without feeling guilty about missing out on opportunities. Mandy said that the pandemic

'slowed things down and gave us a lot more time together as a family. When all the lockdowns happened, we just stopped for a while, and I was a bit like "This is nice! It's just nice to relax for a while".'

For Shona, this period of not being able to work due to restrictions around COVID-19 was an important factor for her successful pregnancy. The pandemic meant that she did not worry about not doing enough for her career development so that she was able to take care of her own health and wellbeing and later look after her baby. Shona said: 'I was able to breastfeed because we were home, and that felt great.'

Summary

Findings presented in this report align with existing research about mothers, work and childcare. They show that in many ways, the experiences of mothers-performers are similar to those of mothers working in other contexts. Balancing care with work and career aspirations is difficult and means daily logistical struggles. There is no doubt that expensive and inflexible childcare, which is incompatible with non-standard work patterns within the sector, impacts on personal and financial wellbeing. In addition, underdeveloped family-friendly workplace policies and practices contribute to the challenges and barriers faced by mothers-performers who wish to remain in their chosen career path or to return to it after a career break.

Theme 1: Expensive and inflexible childcare

The interviews show that managing work and childcare is difficult because mothers-performers tend to work in non-standard employment where chaotic ad hoc arrangements and unpredictable work schedules appear to be the norm. Anti-social and long working hours are often accompanied by travel requirements. Employment in this sector does not always generate good pay and, given that employment is often precarious, it does not usually allow predictable pay. These factors complicate the setting-up of reliable childcare arrangements, in particular because childcare in public and private nurseries is rarely available outside 'normal' daytime hours. Mothers must therefore rely on friends and family for support or pay childminders to cover evening or weekend childcare needs.

Childcare providers in Scotland largely operate according to hours that benefit those in traditional 'nine-till-five' employment. As the interviews show, jobs in the performing arts and entertainment sector do not usually align with this model. This means, in practice, that funded childcare hours are not always available to mothers-performers. This is a situation that mothers consider as unfair as they see themselves losing out on support entitlements which are available to others. Also, what interviewees spoke about as 'double pay' – when parents need to pay regular nursery fees and then additional childcare 'top-ups' when, for example, they are working away from home or when they need to extend childcare beyond nursery or school hours – is a significant financial problem.

Theme 2: Family-friendly workplace policies and practices

The interviews exposed shortcomings in relation to family-friendly work policies and flexible work practices available to mothers-performers. The reasons for this may be found in how motherhood is commonly seen in the sector. Interviewees described employers as being unaware of – or worse, disinterested in – mothers' needs. There appears to be a 'culture of silence' over motherhood and childcare. This results in there being little support to mothers who wish to return to work, in terms of access to appropriate facilities at work sites and in terms of offering shorter and more flexible working hours which may align better with the availability of childcare provision. Such measures appear to be rarely considered as a necessary lifeline for mothers-performers. Interviews suggest the sector's slow uptake of family supporting practices might stem from male dominance in managing roles and from a culture that is centred on an unquestionable commitment to the individual's career.

Theme 3: The realities of working and caring for children

The interviewees paint a picture of dilemmas and tensions when they speak about motherhood, childcare and work within the performing arts and entertainment sector. They reported that the incompatibility of childcare and the nature of their work is the greatest obstacle to returning to work and to career progression. As a result, interviewees suggested that mothers-performers must carefully weigh up whether returning to work in the sector is financially beneficial, considering the high cost of childcare during evenings and on weekends.

While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in often significant financial constraints due to the absence of live performance work, it was also a moment of pause which illuminated the complex challenges facing mothers working in the sector, including how much juggling they are required to do in 'normal times'.

Key learning points for policy and practice

The mothers-performers interviewed for this report have provided valuable insights on the challenges they face in relation to accessing childcare, as well as the organisation of their work pattern. These suggests that action is needed to develop workable and lasting support solutions for mothers working in the sector (including those in technical and support roles), as well as parents in paid employment more widely. The following learning points seek to stimulate a re-thinking of policies and practice and focus on the reduction of childcare-related barriers faced by parents who undertake paid employment, particularly those in atypical employment. Given the difficulties mothers-performers experience, the learning points are focussed both on how childcare is provided and on how employers need to adapt to better accommodate the childcare needs of their workers.

1. Increased investment is needed to deliver universal, high-quality, wrap-around childcare in ways that make it more affordable for parents to return to paid work and to sustain it.

The longer mothers stay economically inactive, the harder it is for them to return to work, especially in professions requiring a high level of specialist skills and continuous practice to maintain excellence. Affordable childcare is a necessary foundation for economic activity, and early support for mothers is crucial in helping them to return to work. As such, the Scottish Government should commit additional funding to expand universally available, funded childcare provision to one- and two-year olds, while ensuring increased funding for the delivery of wrap-around school age childcare (including pre- and after-school childcare such as breakfast clubs) to provide much-needed flexibility for parents employed in roles with non-standard work patterns.

2. Improved access is needed to flexible, wrap-around childcare, including greater recognition of the needs of parents working in non-standard forms of paid employment.

The needs of mothers in irregular work patterns which do not easily align with nurseries' 'traditional' opening hours seem overlooked within existing policy and practice. The existing model of childcare should be re-thought to address the realities of non-standard forms of paid employment. These require more flexible childcare provision. The Scottish Government should incentivise childcare providers to provide flexible solutions that help support all mothers to remain economically active. This should include making access to childcare equitable and available to those working atypical hours (e.g. working in the evenings, at night, and on weekends). Freelance status should also be looked at as a case for additional support that is required when income varies and return to work tends to happen earlier than for employed mothers.

3. To maximise their impact, childcare solutions should be co-designed and evaluated with parents, including those working within non-standard forms of paid employment.

The Scottish Government should commit to a process of co-design to improve, and not just expand, state-funded childcare provision. The Scottish Government's Early Learning and Childcare Directorate-led roundtables and working groups should therefore include mothers, fathers, guardians, relevant trade unions, the sector's employers (national and small performing organisation and venues), Creative Scotland, Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts (PiPA), the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), local authorities, childcare providers (public and private), and the Scottish Childminding Association (SCA) representing childminders and nannies. Particular efforts should be made to meaningfully consult with parents working in non-standard forms of paid employment to ensure provision better meets their needs. This process of co-design should also encompass participative monitoring and evaluation of impact.

4. Family-friendly working practices, such as more flexible working hours and access to childcare facilities, need to be promoted and championed, particularly within sectors characterised by non-standard forms of paid employment, such as in the performance and entertainment sector.

Creative Scotland, as the national arts and creative industries agency, should work closely with Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts (PiPA), the arts and creative sectors' unions (Musician Union, Equity, BECTU), the Federation of Scottish Theatre, and individual employers to find ways to actively promote changes in work patterns and workplace practices to reflect the needs of mothers and parents. Flexible work patterns, shorter hours and job shares are all potential solutions to the problem.

5. The caring responsibilities undertaken by those in paid employment, including non-standard forms, need to be made more visible and valued within workplaces to help unlock the changes needed to better support those who juggle paid work with unpaid care work for children and others.

There is a clearly identified need to boost understanding amongst employers of the challenges facing workers who juggle childcare responsibilities. Crucially, work needs to be done to help arts organisations to be supportive employers. It is recommended that Creative Scotland use its position of influence to encourage (for example, by signing PIPA's Employer Charter), but also to appraise and reward positive support initiatives. Furthermore, to foster the development of better workplace policy and practice, relevant stakeholders should organise training on how to improve work sites to better support working mothers. Support initiatives should be implemented sector-wide; these could include the provision of creches on sites of work, childcare hubs, breastfeeding facilities, or other support for mothers both working and auditioning for work.

6. Robust metrics are needed to drive and transparently track progress in enhancing support to those with childcare responsibilities working in the performing arts and entertainment sector.

Robust and transparent monitoring of policies and practices within the performing arts and entertainment sector will be crucial to evaluating what works best. It will be important for identifying which support initiatives have the biggest potential in helping to change the sector's culture, while preventing career breaks, and reducing the outflow of female artists to different industries. Once evaluated, the outcome of support initiatives can guide evidence-based funding decisions for new initiatives in the sector, and inform other activities focused on improving policies and practices relevant to fair work, the roll-out of family-friendly practices, and the wider promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion within these workplaces and sites of work.

7. A new National Outcome to value and invest in care should be introduced within Scotland's National Performance Framework and include robust National Indicators to transparently track the progress achieved to improve childcare provision nationally.

The barriers facing mothers working in the performing arts and entertainment sector are indicative of the challenges facing all those with unpaid caring responsibilities in Scotland, whether for children or those with additional support needs due to illness, disability or age. Therefore, while sectoral change is needed within the performing arts and entertainment, transformative change is likely to require concerted national action to better value and invest in all forms of care in Scotland. This would be supported by the introduction of a dedicated National Outcome to value and invest in care within Scotland's National Performance Framework, with robust indicators to track progress (Maclean et al., 2021; A Scotland that Cares, 2023). These indicators should link to appropriate data sets that capture the experiences of those with childcare responsibilities who work in non-standard forms of employment, such as the performing arts and entertainment sector.

References

- A Scotland that Cares. (2023). Campaign for a new National Outcome on Care. Available at: <https://www.ascotlandthatcares.org>. [accessed 23/11/2023]
- Anderson, D. J., Binder, M. and Krause, K. (2002). The motherhood wage penalty: Which mothers pay it and why? *American Economic Review*, 92(2), 354–358.
- Avellar, S., and Smock, P. J. (2003). Has the price of motherhood declined over time? A cross cohort comparison of the motherhood wage penalty. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(3), 597–607.
- Audit Scotland. (2023). *Early learning and childcare: Progress on delivery of the 1,140 hours expansion*. Available at: <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/publications/early-learning-and-childcare-progress-on-delivery-of-the-1140-hours-expansion>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- BBC. (2023). Childcare: Full-time nursery for under-tuos nearly £15k a year, says report. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-64865602>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Berridge, S. (2021). Mothers' subjective experiences of negotiating caring responsibilities with work in the Scottish film and television industries. Liddy, S. and O'Brien, A. (eds.). *Media Work, Mothers and Motherhood: Negotiating the International Audio-Visual Industry*. Routledge Studies in Media and Cultural Industries, 8. London: Routledge, 145–159.
- Borjas, G. J. (1983). The measurement of race and gender wage differentials: Evidence from the federal sector. *ILR Review*, 37(1), 79–91.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Carli, L. (2020): Women, Gender equality and COVID-19. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 35(7/8), 647–655.
- Cantillon, S., Hilton Boon, M. and Teasdale, N. (2023). Covid-19 and the Centrality of Care. Available at: <https://www.caledonianblogs.net/wise/2023/03/29/covid-19-and-the-centrality-of-care/>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Caves, R. (2000). *Creative industries: Contracts between art and commerce*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press.
- CIPD. (2022). UK regions ranked by flexible working uptake. Available at <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/uk-regions-flexible-working-uptake>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Close the Gap. (2018) *Women, Work and Poverty: What you need to know*. Close the Gap: Glasgow. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/1---Women-work-and-poverty-what-you-need-to-know.pdf>. [accessed 1/9/2023].
- Close the Gap. (2022) Working Paper. Gender Pay Gap Statistics. Close the Gap: Glasgow. Available at: www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/1---Women-work-and-poverty-what-you-need-to-know.pdf. [accessed 30/8/2023].
- Cohen, S. and Ginsborg, J. (2021). The experiences of mid-career and seasoned orchestral musicians in the UK during the first COVID-19 lockdown. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 645967.
- Connelly, R., DeGraff, D.S. and Willis, R.A. (2004). *Kids at work: The value of employer-sponsored on-site childcare centers*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Correll, S.J., Benard, S. and Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5), 1297–1338.
- Cosslett, R. C. (2022). 'Why should I pay for you to have a child?' This is the state of the debate on childcare right now. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/18/pay-child-uk-childcare>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

- Creative Scotland. (2021). COVID-19 Scottish Creative Sectors Survey. Available at: <https://www.creativescotland.com/resources/professional-resources/research/creative-scotland-research/covid-19-scottish-creative-sectors-survey>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Creative Scotland. (2016). *Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion in the Screen Sector: A report on the findings of the Screen Equalities Survey*. Creative Scotland: Edinburgh. Available at: https://www.creativescotland.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/35020/ScreenEqualitiesSurveyMay2016.pdf. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Creative Scotland. (2022). Radical Childcare. https://www.creativescotland.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/89144/Radical-Childcare-Report.pdf. [accessed on 13/11/2022].
- DCMS. (2022). Sector economic statistics. Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-sector-economic-estimates-employment-july-2021-june-2022>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- DCMS. (1998) Creative industries mapping document. Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). London: DCMS. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-mapping-documents-1998>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Engender. (2017). *Gender Matters Roadmap - towards women's equality in Scotland*. Available at <https://gendermatters.engender.org.uk/content/resources/Gender-Matters-Roadmap---towards-womens-equality-in-Scotland.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- English, C. (2022). Emotional labour and the childcare crisis in neoliberal Britain. Arnold-Forster A. and Moulds A. (eds). *Feelings and Work in Modern History: Emotional Labour and Emotions about Labour*, Bloomsbury: London, 234-254.
- EHRC. (2011). *Sex and Power Scotland 2011*. Equality and Human Rights Commission: Glasgow. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/sex-and-power-2011>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Eurofound. (2022). *COVID-19 pandemic and the gender divide at work and home*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2022/covid-19-pandemic-and-the-gender-divide-at-work-and-home>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Florida, R. (2003). Cities and the creative class. *City & Community*, 2(1), 3-19.
- Follows, S., Kreager, A. and Gomes, E. (2016). *Cut out of the Picture. A Study of Gender Inequality Amongst Film Directors in the UK Film Industry*. London: Directors UK.
- Foord, J. (2008). Strategies for creative industries: An international review. *Creative Industries Journal*, 1(2), 91-113.
- Furber, C. (2010). Framework analysis: A method for analysing qualitative data. *African Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*, 4(2), 97-100.
- Generation Equal. (2021). Gender Inequality in the creative arts. Available at: <https://www.generationequal.scot/arts-and-creative-industries-what-we-already-know>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Gracia, P. and Esping-Andersen, G. (2015). Fathers' childcare time and mothers' paid work: A cross-national study of Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom. *Family Science*, 6(1), 270-281.
- Howkins, J. (2001). *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. London: Allen Lane.
- Hawkins, S.S., Griffiths, L.J., Dezateux, C., Law, C. and Millennium Cohort Study Child Health Group. (2007). The impact of maternal employment on breast-feeding duration in the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *Public Health Nutrition*, 10(9), 891-896.
- House of Commons. (2023). *Women and the UK economy*. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06838/SN06838.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- ILO. (2017/2022). *The gender gap in employment: What's holding women back?* Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

Jarvie, M., Shorto, S., Kunwar Deer, L. and Goddard, E. (2023). *Childcare Survey 2023*. Coram: London. Available at: <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare-survey-2023-report-landing-page>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

JRF. (2023). *Poverty in Scotland 2023*. State of the Nation report. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-scotland-2023#:~:text=This%20year's%20State%20of%20the,working%20for%20people%20in%20Scotland.&text=With%20the%20Scottish%20Government%20still,is%20more%20vital%20than%20ever>. [accessed 13/10/2023]

Khan, A. (2004). Why are married women working more? Some macroeconomic explanations, *Business Review, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia*, Issue Q4, 16-25. Available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/fip/fedpbr/y2004iq4p16-25.html>. [accessed 6/9/2023].

Kim, J.H., Shin, J.C. and Donovan, S.M. (2019). Effectiveness of workplace lactation interventions on breastfeeding outcomes in the United States: an updated systematic review. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(1), 100-113.

Langston, S. (2022). The arts in Scotland: a hidden economic driver. *The Herald*. 30th December 2022. Available at: <https://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/23215290.arts-scotland-hidden-economic-driver>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

Machin, S. and Waldfogel, J. (1994). *The decline of the male breadwinner: changing shares of husbands' and wives' earnings in family incomes*. STICERD Working Paper, No. 103. London: School of Economics. Available at: <https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/CASE/NEW/PUBLICATIONS/abstract/?index=1595>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

McMunn, A., Kelly, Y., Cable, N. and Bartley, M. (2012). Maternal employment and child socio-emotional behaviour in the UK: longitudinal evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *Journal of Epidemiology Community Health*, 66(7), e19. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21224241>. [accessed 30/8/2023].

Macleay, C.; Pautz, H.; Gibb, S. and Hay, N. (2021). *Towards a Scotland that cares. A new National Outcome on care for the National Performance Framework*, UWS-Oxfam Partnership Collaborative Research Series, Report No. 10. Available at: <http://uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NPF-Report.pdf>. [accessed 10/8/2023].

McRobbie, A. (2015). Reflections on precarious work in the cultural sector. Lange, B., Kalandides, A., Stöber, B. and Wellmann, I. (eds.). *Governance der Kreativwirtschaft*. Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 123-138.

Miller, P.W. (1987). The wage effect of the occupational segregation of women in Britain. *The Economic Journal*, 97(388), 885-896.

OECD. (2022). *Family Database. Childcare support*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3-4-Childcare-support.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

OPFS. (2022). *Living without a lifeline*. One Parent Families Scotland. Available at: <https://opfs.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policy-research/living-without-a-lifeline>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

ONS. (2022). *Families and the labour market UK: 2021*. Office for National Statistics. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

Oxfam GB. (2023). *Radical Pathways Beyond GDP: Why and how we need to pursue feminist and decolonial alternatives urgently*. Oxfam report. Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/almost-two-thirds-of-womens-working-hours-excluded-from-gdp-globally/>. [accessed 13/10/2023]

PEC. (2022). *National Statistic on the Creative Industries*. <https://pec.ac.uk/news/national-statistics-on-the-creative-industries> [accessed 13/10/2023]

PiPA. (2023). *Parents in Performing Arts Charter Programme for Employers*. Parents and Carers in Performing Arts. Available at: <https://pipacampaign.org/charter-programme>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

PiPA. (2019). *Balancing act. PiPA's survey into the impact of caring responsibilities on career progression in the performing arts*. Parents and Carers in Performing Arts. Available at: <https://pipacampaign.org/uploads/ckeditor/BA-Final.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

- PIPA. (2022). *A bittersweet symphony. The experience of working lives and caring duties in classical music*. Parents in Performing Arts. Available at: <https://pipacampaign.org/uploads/misc/pipa-bittersweet-symphony-report-2022.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Pregnant then Screwed. (2022). Survey results. Available at: <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/one-in-four-parents-say-that-they-have-had-to-cut-down-on-heat-food-clothing-to-pay-for-childcare>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Public Health Scotland. (2020). *Child poverty in Scotland: priority groups – lone-parent families*. Public Health Scotland: Edinburgh. Available at: <https://www.healthscotland.scot/media/3134/child-poverty-in-scotland-priority-groups-lone-parent-families-summary.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Raising Films. (2018). *Making it possible: Voices of Parents & Carers in the UK Film and TV Industry*. Available at: <https://www.raisingfilms.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Making-It-Possible-Full-Report-Results.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Rusch-Drutz, C. (2004). Stage Mothers: A qualitative analysis of women's work experiences as mothers in Toronto Theatre. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 6(2), 90–101.
- Scharff, C. (2018). Inequalities in the classical music industry: The role of subjectivity in constructions of the 'ideal' classical musician. Dromey, C. and Haferkorn, J. (eds.). *The classical music industry*. Routledge: New York, 96–111.
- Scottish Government. (2018). *Early learning and childcare providers: delivery support plan*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/delivery-support-plan-early-learning-childcare-providers>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Scottish Government. (2019). *Creative industries: policy statement*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/policy-statement-creative-industries/pages/2>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Scottish Government. (2022). *Early learning and childcare – parents' views and use: survey findings 2022*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/parents-views-use-early-learning-childcare-scotland-2022/pages/6>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Scottish Government. (2023). *Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership – A fresh start*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-opportunity-community-new-leadership-fresh-start/documents>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Simpson, C. (2016). *Childcare and employers*. Available at: <https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/info-for-practitioners/articles/childcare-and-employers>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- Skaflida, V. (2012). Juggling work and motherhood: the impact of employment and maternity leave on breastfeeding duration: a survival analysis on Growing Up in Scotland data. *Maternal and child health journal*, 16(2), 519–527.
- Staff, J. and Mortimer, J.T. (2012). Explaining the motherhood wage penalty during the early occupational career. *Demography*, 49(1), 1–21.
- Statista. (2023). UK employment rate 1971–2023, by gender. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/280120/employment-rate-in-the-uk-by-gender/#:~:text=In%20the%20second%20quarter%20of,women%20it%20was%2072.1%20percent>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- STUC. (2016). *Barriers, hopes and opportunities for women's work, careers and employment*. Scottish Trade Union Congress. Available at: <https://stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/Research-papers/Womenandwork/Womeninworkoverview.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- SWBG. (2022). *Women, Work and Wealth in Scotland's changing economy 2022*. Scottish Women's Budget Group. Available at: <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/Women-Work-Wealth-in-a-changing-economy-report.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].
- UK Government. (2017). 30 hours free childcare. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/30-hours-free-childcare-launches>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

UK Government. (2022). Gender pay gap report and data. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmrc-and-valuation-office-agency-gender-pay-gap-report-and-data-2022/hmrc-gender-pay-gap-report-2022>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

UK Government. (2023). Maternity Allowance. Eligibility. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/maternity-allowance/eligibility>. [accessed 9/8/2023]

UNISON. (2022). Christina McAnea's speech at the National Women's Conference. Available at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2023/02/women-are-at-the-heart-of-unisons-industrial-action>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

United Nations. (2020). UN Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. 9 April. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

Waldfogel, J. (1995). The price of motherhood: family status and women's pay in a young British cohort. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 47(4), 584-610.

Webb, A. (2016). *Challenges Experienced by Women Working in Music and the Performing Arts sectors*. Scottish Trades Unions Congress. Available at: <https://stuc.org.uk/files/Women%20and%20Work%202016/Women%20in%20Music%20&%20Performing%20Arts.compressed.pdf>. [accessed 9/8/2023].

Webb, A. (2021). Digitalising Live Performance: A Pathway for Post-Pandemic Recovery in the Performing Arts. Larsen, C., Kippen, J., Schmid, A. and Panzaru, C. (eds.). *Transformations of Regional and Local Labour Markets Across Europe in Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Times*. Challenges for Regional and Local Observatories. Munich: Rainer Hampp Verlag, 333-356.

Weichselbaumer, D. and Winter-Ebmer, R. (2005). A meta-analysis of the international gender wage gap. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 19(3), 479-511.

Williams, J.C. and Cooper, H.C. (2004). The public policy of motherhood. *Journal of Social Issues*, 60(4), 849-865.



**UWS-OXFAM
PARTNERSHIP**

