### Maternity Leave and Returning to Work, Expectation vs Reality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation #1 Work all of the 10 keeping in touch (KIT) days</th>
<th>Expectation #2 I will be able to get back into my work straight away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By law, employees can work up to 10 days during their maternity leave and these days are called ‘keeping in touch (KIT)’ days. There was no obligation to work any time during maternity leave, however the opportunity to keep in touch with colleagues and to keep abreast of client and workplace issues seemed appealing to ease the transition back to work.</td>
<td>Aiming to work all of the 10 KIT days was slightly overambitious due to difficulties arranging childcare (family do not live close by) teamed with the logistical issues of feeding. Taking these issues into consideration, a more realistic 5 KIT days were undertaken which were deliberately staggered towards the end making it more relevant for my return to work and were planned to coincide with IEMA topic webinars (in particular those which were EIA related), internal CPDs and pre-arranged audits. By maintaining a minimal but regular presence during maternity leave allowed a smoother reintroduction into the team which I would personally recommend should your circumstances allow it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women make up nearly half of the workforce in the UK and more than 80% will become mothers during their working life\(^1\). Returning to work after having a baby is a transition and is part of a process that begins as soon an employee becomes pregnant.

Returning to work after maternity leave can be a big adjustment. Having recently returned to work after taking a year’s maternity leave it has been easier than expected in some ways and more challenging in others. Having a baby is a significant change and has drastically altered my life priorities in a way that you simply cannot plan for until it is upon you! Returning to work is daunting but is made easier by good colleagues and a supportive company.

As an EIA Practitioner it is our responsibility to be aware of the current legislative and technical processes and communicate those to our colleagues and within our work. Below I have outlined a few misconceptions I had about keeping in touch during maternity leave and my return to work and have identified a few key tips to make returning to work easier.

### Expectation #1 Work all of the 10 keeping in touch (KIT) days

By law, employees can work up to 10 days during their maternity leave and these days are called ‘keeping in touch (KIT)’ days. There was no obligation to work any time during maternity leave, however the opportunity to keep in touch with colleagues and to keep abreast of client and workplace issues seemed appealing to ease the transition back to work.

Aiming to work all of the 10 KIT days was slightly overambitious due to difficulties arranging childcare (family do not live close by) teamed with the logistical issues of feeding. Taking these issues into consideration, a more realistic 5 KIT days were undertaken which were deliberately staggered towards the end making it more relevant for my return to work and were planned to coincide with IEMA topic webinars (in particular those which were EIA related), internal CPDs and pre-arranged audits.

By maintaining a minimal but regular presence during maternity leave allowed a smoother reintroduction into the team which I would personally recommend should your circumstances allow it.

### Expectation #2 I will be able to get back into my work straight away

Whilst the KIT days were beneficial and my job role remained the same, this is not the case for some employees who take Additional Maternity Leave (the second 26 weeks of maternity leave) as the employer can demonstrate that it is not reasonably practicable to have kept that job open to you therefore a new job must be offered.

I was under the assumption that I could pick up where I left off. However, in reality even though my roles and responsibilities remained the same I felt like I have started a new job. Confidence issues and self-doubt impacted on productivity for the first two weeks.
It was important to communicate this to my colleagues who arranged internal meetings to discuss projects and provided me with extra time to undertake a number of tasks which as a result refreshed skills, rebuilt relationships and confidence. Baby brain is real!

**Expectation #3 Thought more would have changed**

After such a significant change in my own life I was expecting that the workplace would have completely changed and that my technical knowledge would have somehow diminished. In reality and although we work in a fast-changing discipline my EIA skill set was still where it needs to be and getting back into the groove was not as much of an issue as I had anticipated. In fact, when returning to work after a baby on a part time basis it feels that your efficiency improves and productivity increases, with all the multi-tasking and time management skills gained over a year of maternity leave.

To make an employee’s return to work easier after a period of maternity leave, I recommend the following:

- Plan KIT days to coincide with training and development courses, IEMA EIA webinars, CPDs or meetings
- Create a ‘back to work plan’ which will manage a smooth return to work and will create a phased start that refreshes skills and rebuilds confidence.
- Consider flexible working upon returning to work to help balance family and work commitments.

*Ruth Jones, Senior Environmental Consultant, Campbell Reith Hill LLP, April 2019.*

1Returning to work – A guide for employers (NCT)

---

For access to more EIA articles, case studies and hundreds of non-technical summaries of Environmental Statements visit: http://www.iema.net/eia-quality-mark/