

## Jennie Doyle

Parents and Carers  
Spotlight Profile



School of Geography PhD Candidate and Teaching Assistant

### **What is your role at Queen Mary?**

I am an ERSC funded PhD student doing a 3 year fully funded PhD in the School of Geography. My research combines the areas of migration and inheritance by looking at the patterns and plans of inheritance for Indian migrants in the UK and how that links to intergenerational kinship and caregiving. Before this I did my MRes in Cities and Culture at Queen Mary.

In addition, I am part of a team who deliver the Post Graduate Research Frameworks training sessions for other PhD students.

I am also a Teaching Assistant in the School of Geography and have recently been providing TA support on a first-year undergraduate module.

### **What is your experience of having caring responsibilities at Queen Mary?**

I started my PhD almost 4 months pregnant, so my parental caring responsibilities have been interwoven with my PhD experience at Queen Mary. Whilst this was an unexpected pregnancy it was very welcomed after a long previous history of miscarriage.

Having a baby during a PhD, and parenting during a global pandemic, has made a significant difference to my experience of my time at Queen Mary. I took maternity leave for 6 months, within the ESRC guidelines the 6 months are fully funded and I decided to return after this period mainly because I was concerned that having only done 6 months of my PhD I wanted to get back to it. Throughout this period my supervisors were very supportive although it was a very different experience having a child as a student as opposed to when I was teaching. One thing that was frustrating was that because I was classed as a student

my partner was unable to take the opportunities of shared parental leave.

The return to work on my PhD was enabled by supportive colleagues and being able to change my working hours to suit 3 days a week of childcare. Whilst more childcare might have made my working life slightly less stressful the expense is unaffordable. This means that for 3 days a week I throw myself into everything to do with PhD for up to 12 hours a day and then the other 4 days I spend as a parent. This is a good balance for me although meetings on other days can be a little tricky and are usually organised for during nap times, but this can add an additional layer of stress.

However, on the other hand being a parent provides a level of balance, I feel supported by other PhD students who are also parents and it develops a greater sense of not being completely on your own.

### **Why did you want to do a parent/carer spotlight profile? Why do you think visibility is important?**

I think it is important to highlight to people that it is completely possible to become a parent whilst also doing a PhD. I met a fellow PhD student who planned their family around their PhD because they felt that taking maternity leave and the possibilities of working flexibly that is offers would be more beneficial to having a family than their previous job.

I also think that there is an idea that you need to delay parenthood until after you have finished studying. If you are young enough this can make a lot of sense, but my experience is that having children during your studies, either planned or unplanned, can bring many benefits to your studies. I am more efficient because I want to spend time with my child.

As a student well above the 'average' age of PhD students – I could easily be a parent to the undergrads in my seminars I feel it is important to remind people that they can undertake further study/employment at a

university at any age and stage in their lives. I am surrounded by PhDs from such a range of ages and backgrounds that it shows that it can be undertaken at any age.

**Do you have any informal/formal flexible working arrangements?**

I, mainly, compress my hours into 3 days a week to suit childcare arrangements. However, I do also work at the weekend whenever is necessary.

**How could Queen Mary better support its community of parents and/or carers?**

What would be amazing would be if the flexible and virtual approaches to seminars/meetings etc. continues after the pandemic. There are many more events open to me, for example in the evenings, because I can take part from home whilst also fulfilling my childcare responsibilities.

I have a two-hour commute to Queen Mary so as a PhD student I chose carefully which events to go to, particularly evening ones to enable my partner to also work and commute.

When I asked once to skype into something it seemed like a challenging request but now it is the norm. It would be incredibly helpful if this continued after the current situation. A significant commute is quite common and there needs to be greater acknowledge of this and support for virtual involvement.

There is also room for development in terms of acknowledging that a lot of PhD students and TAs are also parents and/or carers and to have open conversations with them about how best to support them.

**Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences, life, studies, or work?**

I returned to education, via an MRes and PhD at Queen Mary, later in life having had a very fulfilling career in secondary education. Both my, and fellow PhDs experience suggest that there is a wealth of skills, experience and knowledge within the study body which is not being explored to its full potential. There needs to be great opportunity to provide opportunities for people to use their skills to the benefit of Queen Mary.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7882 5519  
Email: [hr-equality@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:hr-equality@qmul.ac.uk)

[qmul.ac.uk](http://qmul.ac.uk)

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