

▼ ONLINE HEAD & STAND

BO... 1 Researcher parents are paying a high price for conference
travel
2 – here’s how to fix it. Alternatively: ‘Researcher parents are
paying a high price for conference travel – here’s how to fix
it // j l i like that one!

BO... 3 Three scientist mothers call for a change in how conference
childcare costs are
4 reimbursed, drawing on their personal experiences.
BO... 5 By Laura Carter, Laura Wolz & Laura J. Pallett

▼ HEADING

BO... 1 How to modernize policies for childcare and travel
BO... 2 Three scientist mothers call for a change in how conference
childcare costs are reimbursed, based on their personal
experiences.
BO... 3 By Laura Carter, Laura Wolz & Laura J. Pallett

▼ ONLINE CAPTIONS

BO... 1 ONLINE CAPTIONS
BO... 2 1.
BO... 3 2.
BO... 4

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▼ BODY

BO... 1 “How did you manage to get to a conference
2 for three days?” This was the first question we
3 asked each other after meeting at a workshop
4 hosted by our funding agency. Our answers
5 were similar: careful planning, and negotiation
6 with partners, institutions and, more often
7 than we like, our own parents. We shared sto-
8 ries of presenting a poster with a young baby
9 babbling away in a sling (L.J.P.), roaming the
10 streets of Paris at 4 a.m. to get a baby to sleep
11 ahead of a presentation the following day. Do you mean a few
hours later here, or the day after? Can we say ‘in the
afternoon’ or ‘in the morning’, if that’s accurate?
12 (L.W.) and navigating international research
13 visits with no financial support for family

14 travel expenses (L.C.).

BO... 15 A common experience was that the other
16 researchers thought that work travel with chil-
17 dren somehow meant trying to take our kids
18 on holiday, when in fact we were desperately
19 juggling caring and careers. Travel is crucial
20 to career development in science: we need to
21 participate in conferences, field trips, collabo-
22 ration visits, workshops, meetings, interviews,
23 PhD vivas and more. These forums help to
24 communicate discoveries, form collabora-
25 tions, make contacts with funding agencies
26 and journal editors, and attract new members
27 to our laboratories.

BO... 28 But for every trip, the additional workload
29 for carers is high and extra childcare needs to
30 be found. Although partners or family mem-
31 bers can sometimes help, alternative childcare
32 arrangements often need to be made. This fre-
33 quently imposes a financial burden that is not
34 covered by grants or research organizations.
35 Ultimately, it means that as academics with
36 caring responsibilities for young families,
37 we face inequitable hurdles to fully attend
38 and participate in activities that require us to
39 spend time away from home.

BO... 40 We are all based in the United Kingdom,
41 where many research funders (such as UK
42 Research and Innovation or the Royal Soci-
43 ety) have adapted Should that be 'adopted'? policies to
reimburse the
44 costs of extra childcare, family travel or caring
45 responsibilities (if the costs are incurred for
46 working outside normal working patterns).
47 These acknowledge that costs for dependants
48 should not be parents' financial liability. But in
49 reality, we still rely on the employing research
50 organization to dictate what exactly can be

51 claimed as an expense. We don't think these

Page break

52 steps go far enough. Carers need organiza-
53 tions to update and align internal financial
54 reimbursement policies – a step we think is
55 overdue at many UK [redacted] Just in the UK or internationally too? [redacted]
institutions.

BO...

56 We applaud the initiatives that some organi-
57 zations have put in place to help parents, such
58 as those of the British Society for Immunology
59 (BSI), which in 2019 [redacted] Year and nursery not checked, can you
[redacted] provide a source for fact-checking? [redacted] introduced a nursery at
60 its annual congress, but more needs to be
61 done. On the surface, an on-site nursery might
62 seem like a great offering, but only an average
63 of two carers accessed it each day, says BSI's
64 chief executive Doug Brown, who is based in
65 Bishop's Stortford [redacted] OK to add the location? // jl i think it's
[redacted] very irrelevant, even if style. do we have to have? [redacted] (we
contacted Brown for
66 comment). For many people, placing young
67 children into external childcare facilities with
68 unknown carers isn't going to work, so alterna-
69 tive means of support must be considered. In
70 response to this low uptake, the BSI has since
71 paved the way by offering flexible grants to
72 help cover the costs of care arrangements.
73 We encourage other research organizations,
74 institutions and learned societies to follow
75 suit. Furthermore, employers. funders [redacted] Who is we in 'we need
[redacted] to consider'? the authors, parent-researchers, organizations,
[redacted] conference organizers, funders? [redacted] and
76 organizations need to consider how best to
77 reduce the financial burden of bringing young
78 children to conferences as well as how best
79 to cater for carers' participation in smaller
80 events, such as workshops, research visits,
81 invited seminars, interviews or PhD vivas.

CR... 82 **Flexible and inclusive grants**

BO... 83 In our experience, existing policies that aim to
84 help with some of the logistics of childcare are
85 not delivering the much-needed support they
86 set out to achieve. And extra funding opportu-
87 nities, to help solve the issue flexibly, are often
88 restricted to permanent faculty members, are
89 available only to members of some learned
90 societies (which have membership fees) or are
91 reliant on existing grant funding.

BO... 92 Another experience we all share is chang-
93 ing personal circumstances. One of us is still
94 working with a grant that was written, costed
95 and awarded before she had children, and so
96 did not budget for the extra financial burden
97 of travelling with dependants. As a result,
98 expense claims are regularly much higher
99 than initially anticipated, reducing funds avail-
100 able to cover, for example, staff development,
101 research consumables and equipment. Given
102 that many researchers have caring responsibil-
103 ities

(<https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10189/Hidden-in-Plain-Sight/pdf/HiddenInPlainSight-Report-FINAL-8Aug2018.pdf>) Should this be an inline link, or was this just for fact-checking purposes?

and that this responsibility falls mainly to
104 those at early stages of their academic career,
105 when the attrition rate is at its highest, the cur-
106 rent 'support' system is not sustainable – nor
107 is it effective.

BO... 108 Above all, those working in science policy
109 must **Who is we in 'we need to accelerate'? Institutions and funders?** accelerate change to deliver initiatives
110 that genuinely support those in need and that
111 do not further burden an already overworked
112 community. Opportunities need to be flexible,
113 adaptable, comprehensive and transparent.

114 To elaborate:

BO...

115 • Flexible – family-conscious grants must

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116 allow for extra funding requests to cover
117 care costs, including expenses for a regis-
118 tered childminder or, when necessary, travel
119 costs for dependants or those who care for
120 them. Researchers would need to justify their
121 requests, but the application forms should
122 reflect the fact that personal circumstances
123 differ, and approval should not be dictated by
124 what the funder or employing institution con-
125 siders appropriate. Having more trust from
126 funding providers will help to cut through red
127 tape and protect parent researchers time.

BO...

128 • Adaptable – I've tried to make the sentences consistent
for these. funders should provide
129 opportunities for grant holders to apply ret-
130 rospectively for extra care and travel arrange-
131 ments if their situation changes.

BO...

132 • Comprehensive – family-friendly funding
133 policies should be available for all early-career
134 staff members (such as postdoctoral research
135 assistants, PhD students or junior lecturers)
136 who do not have existing grant funding.

BO...

137 • Transparent – organizations should con-
138 sistently implement funders' policies that
139 support childcare responsibilities to ensure
140 equity for all scientists.

BO...

141 Whether travel is considered to be a posi-
142 tive aspect of science or not, it is an absolute
143 necessity for many reasons. The issue of man-
144 aging travel with parental responsibilities has
145 been highlighted for years and, despite some
146 progress, researchers still face many hurdles.
147 We call on universities, funders and learned
148 societies to invest appropriately in those with
149 care responsibilities. Current frameworks are
150 not flexible or equitable enough, and are ulti-

151 mately failing those trying to maintain a sense
152 of balance between caring and career.
AU... 153 Laura Carter is an environmental chemist at
154 the University of Leeds, UK. Laura Wolz is an
155 astrophysicist at the University of Manchester,
156 UK. Laura J. Pallett is an immunologist at
157 University College London.

METADATA

BO... 1 METADATA
BO... 2 Subject terms
BO... 3 Careers
BO... 4 Lab life
BO... 5 Research management
BO... 6
BO... 7 Related links
BO... 8 Being a parent is a hidden scientific superpower
9 – here’s why
BO... 10 [https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00776-4)
11 00776-4
BO... 12
BO... 13 Could roving researchers help address the chal-
14 lenge of taking parental leave?
BO... 15 [https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00354-8)
16 00354-8
BO... 17
BO... 18 Shrouded in secrecy: how science is harmed by
19 the bullying and harassment rumour mill
BO... 20 [https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00986-w)
21 00986-w
BO... 22
BO... 23
BO... 24 Any relevant Masterclasses or collections to
25 highlight?
BO... 26
BO... 27 Collection: Life in the lab [https://www.nature.](https://www.nature.com/collections/aegjiigchf/)
28 [com/collections/aegjiigchf/](https://www.nature.com/collections/aegjiigchf/)

BO... 30 Do the authors have any competing interests to
31 checking <update please

BO... 32 no cois

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BO... 34 Include disclaimer?

BO... 35 This is an article from the Nature Careers Com-
36 munity, a place for Nature readers to share their
37 professional experiences and advice. Guest posts
38 are encouraged. <<link to: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03369-8>]
39