



Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Equality at work: paternity and shared parental leave, HC 502

Tuesday 25 March 2025

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Members present: Sarah Owen (Chair); Alex Brewer; David Burton-Sampson; Rosie Duffield; Kirith Entwistle; Catherine Fookes; Samantha Niblett; Shivani Raja.

Questions 59 - 76

Witnesses

I: Jonny Briggs, Inclusion and Resource Director, Aviva; Claire McCartney, Policy and Practice Manager (Resourcing and Inclusion), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD); and Nikki Pound, Policy Officer (Women's Equality), Trade Union Congress (TUC).

Written evidence from witnesses:

CIPD [[SPL0019](#)]

TUC [[SPL0051](#)]



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jonny Briggs, Claire McCartney, Nikki Pound.

Chair: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Women and Equalities Committee. Today we are looking at equality at work, paternity leave and shared parental leave. I am really grateful that we have some very patient witnesses, so thank you very much for waiting while we voted. We have Jonny Briggs, inclusion and resourcing director at Aviva; Claire McCartney, policy and practice manager at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; and Nikki Pound, policy officer, women's equality, at the Trade Union Congress. Thank you very much for your patience and for being here today for this incredibly important inquiry. I am going to ask Catherine to start.

Q59 **Catherine Fookes:** Thank you very much for coming and for bearing with us. Nikki, if I may come to you first, the UK's rate for statutory parental pay is less than half the national living wage. What should the Government be aiming to achieve on statutory pay in their proposed review of the system?

Nikki Pound: Whenever we do research, whether that is speaking directly to our members or polling families, we find the financial struggle that the statutory rates place on families is very significant. More recent research that we have done has found that half of families struggle financially when dads or partners take paternity leave, and half felt that they were unable to take the leave that they needed to support their families.

We know that the UK ranks in the lower half of the 42 OECD countries for full-time rate equivalent paid maternity leave and is the fourth lowest ranked European country when it comes to a mother's entitlement to paid leave when you also take parental leave into account. Again, how maternity allowance interacts with universal credit also means that women who are claiming universal credit and maternity allowance can often be up to £6,000 a year worse off than someone claiming universal credit and statutory maternity pay, so it is definitely one of the biggest barriers.

The review should be considering charting a path to improving the statutory rates, because the rates need to encourage and facilitate taking the leave, whereas at the moment they are acting as a barrier. Realistically, that means that they need to reflect the cost of living and the cost of supporting a family. We definitely do not want to see maternity rights diminished in any way.

As a general policy, we would want to see a path charted towards improving statutory rates of pay towards 80% of the real living wage. We would also want to look in the longer term at how we can extend the protected period of maternity pay and a protected period of paternity leave, and then at broader parental leave entitlements where there is



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some sort of protected period working towards 80%, 90% and then 100% remuneration. We appreciate that that is a long-term goal, but if we are saying that the real living wage is what people need to live on and to afford the cost of living, then that is something we should be aiming for.

Q60 Catherine Fookes: Thank you very much. Would anyone else like to comment on that?

Claire McCartney: At CIPD, we would not recommend reducing the rate of maternity pay because—as Nikki has just said—it is one of the least generous in the OECD. The focus of the review should not be about reducing or taking away entitlement; it should be about looking holistically and seeing how all these things interact and how we can create a system that provides adequate support for working parents and supports labour market participation, progression, fairness and choice.

We would support the Government increasing paternity leave to six weeks at or near the full rate of pay; that would make a big difference. It is something that we have consulted with our members on, and quite a high proportion, 48%, would support that. Actually, the difference between SMEs and larger organisations is not massive. So 54% of larger organisations and 41% of SMEs support that, although we will probably go on to talk about some of the challenges for SMEs.

But we also recognise that we are in a difficult economic climate, and we need to be pragmatic about achieving change. One idea might be to phase the introduction of extended paternity leave and evaluate the difference that that has in terms of take-up across different groups, the benefits of it and the overall costs. It might, perhaps, start with something like four weeks and move to six weeks, or it might be about phasing the increase in payment. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation have also suggested capping the payment for high earners—which we would support as well—to enable greater support for working parents at different income levels.

Q61 Catherine Fookes: Just to make sure I understand what both of you said earlier about not wanting to take money away from one to give to another, should the Government consider introducing a cap on maternity pay in the first six weeks or not? Nikki, are you saying no?

Nikki Pound: No, absolutely not. Obviously, you get the 90% remuneration in those first six weeks, but we know that maternity pay itself is quite low, and we know that many women struggle when they take maternity leave right from the start anyway. It is really important to remember that the purpose of maternity leave is not just about caring for the child; it is also about recovery and health and wellbeing. That is why we would not want to see maternity rights diminished in any way. I know we will come on to it when we talk about shared parental leave, but that is why we would prefer individual rights for both parents rather than the



maternal transfer model, so that women are not returning to work too early and are not under financial stress to do so.

Q62 Catherine Fookes: Jonny, besides increasing rates of pay, what steps should the Government be considering to increase the take-up of paid parental leave among lower-income and working-class fathers for example? Is there a case for making a period of paternity leave compulsory?

Jonny Briggs: I can only reflect on what we do at Aviva, which is quite different, and I will probably come on to talk a bit about that. One of the things we have found is that both parents are taking pretty close to 26 weeks off. The men take slightly less than that; women take the full 26 weeks. We have had that for seven years. We have found that role modelling is the part that has made the difference, and that takes time.

Aviva is always going to be slightly ahead in terms of what you have as statutory, so it would not be right for me to comment on different organisations, because different organisations are in different places. But what we have found brilliant is that we have had people coming back into the workplace who have changed the landscape, particularly around the way that fathers are behaving and their active role in parenting, which we did not have before this.

Q63 Catherine Fookes: Claire and Nikki, would either of you like to comment on the question?

Claire McCartney: Some of the broader things may not necessarily be for the Government; they are also for employers to think about in supporting working parents. As we were waiting in the corridor, we were having a conversation about flexible working, and the importance of that for working parents is really pivotal. Obviously, we have seen a lot of movement around hybrid and remote working. I do not believe we have had the same movement for people who are in frontline non-office roles. One of our calls, which is more towards the Government, is to potentially create a challenge fund so that organisations, particularly SMEs in some of those more challenging sectors with frontline staff, can trial and pilot different ways of working, because they probably need a bit of time and the resource to be able to do that. Flexible working can make a big difference.

Being transparent with parents about the policies that you have to support them, making those clear on your website, if you have one, or communicating those can make a really big difference, as can encouraging role models. Elliott Rae talks about parenting out loud, and it makes a big difference within an organisation when people at different levels are perhaps taking parental leave or talking about their work-life balance.



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Educating line managers is pivotal around parental leave policies and some of the wider things that you can do within an organisation to support working parents.

There is also a piece around supporting parents to return to work effectively through things like flexible working, employee support groups and coaching. Jonny, I know you provide coaching at Aviva, which can be really beneficial.

Some of those wider elements are important. Some are things that the Government might be able to influence, while others are more about employer good practice. I guess it is about trying to share that good practice, potentially through hearing from good employers and about case studies across sectors and SMEs.

Q64 **Catherine Fookes:** Does anyone think that paid paternity leave should be compulsory?

Nikki Pound: There are so many different types of leave and it is very complicated.

Catherine Fookes: Absolutely.

Nikki Pound: I guess that is what we were saying when we were sat outside: the complications and the different types of leave and how they interact is a big barrier. Simplifying the whole system would really make a difference to families and employers so that they know how each entitlement interacts and how to administer them.

One thing we would like to see alongside the statutory pay rates—whether that is paternity, maternity or parental leave—is a move towards having equal, individual, standalone entitlements so that it is clear what you are entitled to; it is not about transferring from the mother and that sort of thing. That will really help simplify the system.

In terms of paternity leave, there is definitely a case for extending it beyond two weeks to support shifting the culture, and then encouraging people to take on more in terms of parental leave and those longer-term impacts. One thing is that leave and pay needs to be a day one right, because if you cannot access the pay, or if you cannot access shared parental leave and it is not a day one right, that is a huge barrier.

We will consult in more detail with our affiliates, but in terms of a compulsory element that says when you need to take the leave, we would be a little cautious around being too prescriptive. That is not to say that the general trend would not necessarily be that most people take it in those early days, but building on the recent changes to paternity leave gives families a bit of choice around how they want to break that leave up. For us, one of the things the system needs to do is give families a genuine choice about how and when they manage those caring responsibilities in that early period and going forward.



We would like to see the entitlements extended, while incentivising take-up by having a use-it-or-lose-it approach and, obviously, more generous pay rates, building on that flexibility of recent changes, and looking at things like employment status and the eligibility criteria, because we know that that particularly impacts a lot of low-paid and self-employed families. Again, the complexity of the different entitlements is a huge barrier for everyone trying to figure out how this works. Some of those things could help to shift the culture in the interim and then in the long term as well.

Q65 Rosie Duffield: Apologies for being late; we have on-and-off votes, and I am going to have to go again in a minute. Jonny, could you explain to us what Aviva's enhanced parental pay offer is and how you arrived at that rate?

Jonny Briggs: We have had equal parental leave for seven years—I am just adding another terminology. The idea is that parents will be paid for six months, albeit you are entitled to take 12 months. Over 3,300 people have now taken that, and we have that in all our markets. It really stands out in some markets where that is not the norm, in particular Canada, but we also have it in the UK and Ireland.

We have found that the average for mothers is 26 weeks; they take the full 26 weeks off. When we introduced it for men, it was 21 weeks for the first year, and then we got it up close to 25 weeks. Before coming here, I checked, and in the past 12 months it has actually gone down slightly, to 22 weeks. We are constantly trying to find ways to make sure that fathers take the full 26 weeks because, to us, that is the big thing that can work in terms of role modelling.

It takes a long time, but we appreciate we are extremely lucky having this. What it has enabled us to do is change the culture around the way that families are starting. It is not two weeks off, and then that is it, and therefore the mother just retains it; it is now six months. We ask senior individuals, in particular, when they return to the organisation, to tell the story of how much they got out of it, what they now do differently, and how their role as a parent has probably slightly changed from the role they might have recognised from either their own upbringing or from other people who were parents before this.

As I say, we have had that for seven years, and our view is it is an investment. What we get back from this is genuinely outstanding employee engagement. I cannot say it is because of that leave; there are a lot of things that go into it, but it is not a coincidence that we have exceptional engagement. Equally, we have really good retention which, at the moment, is what you want. So it is a whole package that goes together.

The other thing is that our environment is quite competitive, and this stands out as part of our employee value proposition, which is terminology for what attracts somebody to come and work for us. It



makes a difference. People are not joining us because of that, but they are joining us because they can look and see that we have policies and a culture that they want to be part of, so they will stay. We talk quite openly to other organisations about how we feel we benefit because that has been part of our brand as an employer.

Q66 Rosie Duffield: To Nikki first, what should the balance be between increasing the rate of statutory pay and encouraging more employers to offer enhanced parental pay?

Nikki Pound: We know it is a long-term process to get to where the TUC would like statutory rates to be, but the balance is that statutory entitlements must raise the minimum floor. If we know that the pay is half of what is needed to live, then we absolutely have to raise the minimum floor.

It is also about supporting employers of different sizes—I am sure we will come on to that. Obviously, that statutory rate increase will increase the ability of smaller employers to offer better entitlements, so that people in those firms are able to take statutory leave, which will have a huge impact on lower-paid workers. We also need to look at how we can bring in self-employed workers.

Obviously, there is a huge role for then working with employers to encourage and build on those enhanced leave and pay entitlements. We have seen some really great examples of that through unions working with employers on enhanced parental policies.

We do an equality audit that looks at collective bargaining agreements that our affiliates have negotiated in the workplace, and our most recent one was helpfully published last year. I am just going to go through a couple of examples. Of the 449 maternity collective agreements, 92% were in some way better than the statutory entitlement. Most commonly, it was increasing the number of weeks on full pay, followed by maybe a reduced rate of pay but topped up by the statutory element. Some examples of that are the FBU's negotiated agreement at the West Midlands Fire Service, which provides 52 weeks of maternity pay at full pay. We also saw some good examples across our rail system, with 39 to 40 weeks at full pay. Obviously, there is the Aviva 26 weeks at full pay from day one. That is a common thing as well—making sure leave and pay are accessible. Similarly, on paternity leave, we had about 430 agreements, 86% built on the statutory entitlement. Again, that was extending the number of weeks that fathers and partners could take on full pay, which was really positive to see.

Most of the collective agreements are then mirrored for adoption leave and pay so that families going through that process have equal rights. What we did see was enhanced shared parental leave: over half of the agreements that we had were in some way better than the statutory entitlement, but much more limited, and I am sure we will come on to that.



So there absolutely is a role for those enhanced collective agreements that can build on what is there. But everyone has to have some sort of basic minimum, and we know that the minimum is not working. That is demonstrated through the gender pay gap, and through the amount of dads and partners who just cannot take the leave, so we definitely need to see some improvements.

Q67 **Rosie Duffield:** Does anyone else want to comment on that?

Claire McCartney: We have already heard about the great practice that Jonny has shared around Aviva's approach, and we would really encourage organisations to learn from that and do what they can. But to Nikki's point, we know that larger organisations are certainly more likely to be in a position to enhance pay than SMEs. We have data at the CIPD. Last summer, we conducted a survey of 2,000-plus employers that shows that around 40% enhanced their paternity leave pay to some extent; 42% enhanced their maternity leave pay; and fewer—26%—although that is higher than I thought actually, enhanced SPL pay. As you would expect, across all those, it is larger organisations that are significantly more likely to be able to do that. Yet, we know, of course, that SMEs account for around three quarters of employment in the UK. That, for us, is why statutory provision enhancement is so important, because we cannot rely on smaller businesses to provide that support.

Also, in terms of income, we were talking to the Equal Parenting Project—I think Dr Sarah Forbes gave evidence at a previous session—and the lowest five income deciles make up less than 10% of the total claims for paternity pay. Similarly, for shared parental leave, a significant majority of claims are from the top five income deciles, so the statutory rate of pay for paternity and shared parental leave simply is not accessible for those low-income parents.

Q68 **Rosie Duffield:** What impact will the Employment Rights Bill have on the union's ability to negotiate better enhanced parental pay, Nikki?

Nikki Pound: As you would expect, I am very positive about the Employment Rights Bill. We have seen real wins in the workplace for workers where unions have been able to bargain with employers. It is about working with employers and negotiating with them; it is not about enforcing, in that sense.

Having more collectively agreed enhanced policies will directly flow from the Employment Rights Bill. We know that the Bill is going to give trade unions better access to workplaces. That is particularly important for the private sector, because a lot of our union density is in the public sector, so there will be a huge impact there. The statutory recognition process being made easier should facilitate those negotiations between employers and worker representatives.

There is also the introduction of statutory rights for equality reps. At the moment, equality reps do not have the same kind of footing as a health



and safety rep or a union learn rep, but equality reps have real expertise in these issues and are often the ones who are pushing for these things in the workplace. Them having statutory rights, which means they will have paid facility time, will enable them to dedicate more time to this. Being able to bargain formally in the workplace will help drive equality issues, including parental and carers' rights.

Removing the qualifying period for paternity and unpaid parental leave will obviously help and is very welcome. We would like to see that extended to shared parental leave. We would also like to see day one rights to the pay, because, again, if you cannot afford to take the leave, that is a problem.

As we have said, the strengthening of flexible working rights is a huge part of changing the overall culture of the workplace and gives parents that ongoing flexibility. Again, we are pleased to see that in the Bill, but we would like it to go a bit further in considering the role that an advertising duty could play, where employers look at the flexibility that they can offer in a role up front and put that in the job advert. When parents are looking to change jobs or thinking about how they might both be able to manage responsibilities, they could look at that, rather than feeling they have to ask in the interview or that, somehow, they are going to be refused it down the line.

Obviously, the gender pay gap action plans are a really key area as well. They will mean that, in thinking about how you would close your organisational gender pay gap, you will have to think about policies around parental leave, carer's leave, the recruitment and retention of parents in the workplace, and progression opportunities. Those are all factors that we would hope a good action plan would at least consider, and then you can start thinking about how that all interacts. So, yes, there is lots of good stuff in there.

Q69 Rosie Duffield: That sounds really positive. Thank you. Nikki, the TUC has noticed that employers are less likely to extend enhanced pay to shared parental leave than to maternity, paternity and adoption leave. Do we know why, and what can be done to address this? Maybe the others want to come in on that as well.

Nikki Pound: As I say, our equality audit had some examples of shared parental leave. We had 346 enhanced agreements. Of those, half were in some way better than the statutory scheme, and of the ones that were better, it was mostly around giving the same amount of paid leave as maternity leave so that families were not losing out. That seemed to be the biggest difference in terms of the policy.

What we find from speaking to our members is that awareness and the complicated nature of the system are a real challenge. Beyond pay, the statutory pay element is absolutely the fundamental issue. But even in these enhanced agreements where pay has been improved, particularly in non-unionised workplaces, the complicated nature of the system has an



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impact on employers being proactive in thinking about how to offer policies and also on employees seeking better entitlements. I think the Government's own evaluation found that 15% of the respondents did not even know they were entitled to take the leave, so that is a huge issue.

There is also a cultural factor, in the sense that, from what we hear from members in their workplaces, shared parental leave is still seen as a bit of a nice-to-have if you can afford to do it, whereas maternity leave is seen as being more, "You should and must take this." While paternity leave excludes a lot of people because it is not affordable, there is a sort of acceptance that it is part of that system now, whereas shared parental leave seems a bit like a nice-to-have if you can afford to do it, and that reinforces the care gap.

That is why we think the entitlement should be changed to an individual, non-transferable right, supported with better remuneration, and with less arbitrary eligibility criteria, because that sends a very clear message that this is important and that we want families to share the responsibilities. We included international evidence in our submission that shows that where you have those individual rights, take-up is better and dads and partners tend to take more leave than in the UK.

Q70 Rosie Duffield: Claire and Jonny, do either of you want to comment on that?

Claire McCartney: Yes, to that point, we cited OECD research that shows that the seven countries with the highest male share of parental leave users all have father-specific entitlements to paid leave, so that supports Nikki's point.

It is a bit of a vicious circle really. As we know, there is a much lower awareness of shared parental leave, compared to the other types of parental leave, among employers, but also employees. It is seen as more complicated to facilitate, and therefore it potentially becomes less of a priority for employers to enhance the provision. It is also a longer provision to enhance than, say, perhaps paternity leave, if they are looking at fewer weeks of entitlement.

There are certainly things that we could do—reviewing eligibility, trying to make the system less complicated, improving communication, and all those sorts of things, which we will probably go on to talk about—that might help that situation. But, again, sharing examples of those really good employers that are enhancing shared parental leave, how it works, who it is benefiting, and how it works for their workforce and supports retention and progression is really important.

Jonny Briggs: Not knowing a lot about this, the only comment I would add is that, when I go to speak to others in the market and say, "What is your view?", the only thing that constantly comes back is that it is complicated to them. When you ask what is complicated about it, they do not quite know; I suspect it has a perception of being complicated, even



if it might not be complicated. What has come out from what Nikki and Claire have said, and from speaking to others actually, is that people do not properly understand what the differences are and what they are entitled to.

Nikki Pound: When we last did some research on this in 2023, we did some polling that showed that one of the other things that was a barrier for employees was the maternal transfer model. A lot of partners were saying, "Well, my partner doesn't want to have to give up a portion of their maternity or adoption leave in order for me to take the leave, even though we would love to do that as a family." But, again, the purpose of that leave is different, which is why we would want individual entitlements.

Chair: Thank you, Rosie. Yes, Nikki, that is what we have heard from previous panels as well. Thank you.

Q71 **David Burton-Sampson:** Jonny, less than half of employers who are actually aware of the statutory shared parental leave scheme are satisfied with it. What do you think is driving that dissatisfaction?

Jonny Briggs: Again, I can only tell you what we do in regard to Aviva, because I would not want to speculate on other organisations. I would just emphasise the massive plus you get as an organisation when you do something really well. The only thing I would say is you have a high and a pride in having something that is generous, and we are lucky to have that; it is generous to others. Unfortunately, it probably does not help you particularly, but I would tell you that if you push people in the right direction, there is a massive upside to the investment you put in.

Q72 **David Burton-Sampson:** Thank you. Claire, what are your views on that?

Claire McCartney: We have spoken about it, but I think the main driver of dissatisfaction is the perceived complexity, whether it is complex or not, of the shared parental leave system, so we should try to simplify that for both parents and employers to navigate. Also, it would potentially be helpful to provide some legal support to enable all parties to understand the rights and the processes, as would enhancing statutory pay provision. That would help the uptake.

But there are further things that the Government could potentially do around this. A communication campaign would perhaps be really helpful around all the different types of parental leave, because it is a confusing system. Providing template policies that could be used by HR professionals and managers, particularly in smaller organisations, could be helpful.

We have spoken about case studies, but we could also have promotional materials that people can put in their workplace settings. We think a lot about knowledge workers, and a lot of people actively in the workplace



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might not have access to an intranet, for instance, so we need to make those materials clear to them.

Educating line managers is really important. Often, your line manager is your first port of call in terms of these issues and support for working parents. It is important to make sure they understand what policies you have and where they can go for further information.

One of the other points that we put in our consultation was about Government working across different Departments, like the Department of Health and Social Care, to give expectant parents early information about shared parental leave. For instance, putting some information on a MAT B1 form could be helpful, because that is before people have already decided, "Right, I'm going to take my maternity leave provision." Actually, it may be more beneficial to take shared parental leave. There is a range of practical things that might be helpful.

Q73 David Burton-Sampson: That is great. Obviously, Claire thinks it is really important that the Government do some stuff to promote awareness of the scheme. Nikki or Jonny, do you think it is important that the Government do more, and if so, would you suggest anything else on top of what Claire has suggested?

Nikki Pound: I agree. More information and things like that are really helpful. Fundamentally, though, we know that there are some fundamental things that need to change about the system—the individual rights, the pay rates and things like that. Better resources in the system as it is will go some way, but we will still see that division where people will benefit who can afford to do it, who are in organisations where they have an employer that can offer an enhanced policy or who have a unionised workplace. But in terms of those who are excluded—whether that is because they are in low-paid circumstances so they do not meet the eligibility criteria, or they are self-employed workers or workers on insecure contracts, which means they do not have the length of service—those fundamentals will still be part of the issue.

Q74 David Burton-Sampson: It is interesting when you talk about barriers. Looking at smaller private sector employers, do you think there are barriers to them promoting and driving the take-up of SPL to parents, and if so, what do you think those barriers are?

Nikki Pound: Employees in the smaller private sector workplaces are less likely to be unionised. Again, union reps are very good at knowing the system and being able to say, "Here's our union's advice on what this is." Most of our unions provide their own guidance, based on the legal requirements and the enhanced policies.

It comes back to the statutory entitlement. If small employers can only offer the statutory entitlements—we know that they are not affordable for families to take—you are in this kind of loop of people not being able to



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afford to take it, and employers cannot afford to offer more. That is the real crux of it.

More support is definitely needed. One of the things that we found is that we will sometimes get calls from reps from our affiliates just checking the eligibility criteria where they are in small and medium-sized workplaces, and the employer has turned down requests and said, "Oh, you're not eligible." It is not because the employer is doing it because they want to turn it down; it is just that they genuinely thought the person was not eligible. So people are asking, "Actually, can we check this case?" Again, it is around giving more support and information on the complexities and how to navigate them, and those sorts of resources would help.

The Government's own evaluation found that it is older parents who are professionals in higher-paying employment, probably based in London and working in the public sector, that are more likely to take shared parental leave as it currently stands. That tells you the types of barriers that employees and employers that are not in those categories are facing. Challenging the complexity and giving support around that would definitely help smaller employers as well.

Obviously, with shared parental leave, you have to negotiate with another employer to figure out what portion of the maternity leave is going to be transferred. That adds another layer of complexity for HR teams and whoever is managing that. Again, if you are a smaller employer with much more limited resources, it is just another barrier to being able to implement and offer it effectively and get your head around it.

Q75 David Burton-Sampson: Claire, do you think it is inevitable that any shared parental leave scheme will involve a level of complexity that is just too challenging for small businesses without professional HR departments?

Claire McCartney: Inevitably, it is challenging. We know that larger organisations find it challenging and they have more resource and HR departments. So, yes, for SMEs it is going to be more challenging to perhaps cover the periods of leave internally, and they might not have the resources to support or communicate those policies.

Thinking practically, some things that might help SMEs, as well as simplifying the current system, could be looking at the statutory enhancements and providing some legal support. It would be helpful to have some kind of illustrative toolkit or flowchart to give you an image of the steps that you need to take for shared parental leave, as would communicating some of the existing financial incentives for SMEs, to encourage organisations to promote policies, and providing case studies.

There also needs to be better publicly funded HR support for smaller firms. At the CIPD, this is something we have been looking into. We have run a number of pilots working with local authorities and the British



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Chambers of Commerce, where we have provided a set amount of HR consultancy support. We have a large network of independent HR consultants, so they are giving that support to small and micro-organisations around key HR and good people management areas, which would obviously include these types of areas, such as parental leave. That has been positively evaluated, but there needs to be more support for SMEs in that area.

Q76 David Burton-Sampson: Claire, would it help if the Government considered introducing a streamlined process or even an online platform to ease the administrative burdens?

Claire McCartney: Yes, absolutely. Something like an online platform would be helpful. It might take away some of those administrative burdens, but it would need to sit alongside the other elements. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: Sorry, as you can hear, the Division bell has just gone. We are going to have a series of votes, so we will have to adjourn the sitting.