

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Fathers and the Workplace](#), HC 943

Wednesday 22 March 2017

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 March 2017

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Tracy Brabin; Angela Crawley; Philip Davies; Mrs Flick Drummond; Ben Howlett; Holly Lynch; Jess Phillips.

Questions 1-45

Witnesses

[I:](#) Sarah Jackson, Chief Executive Officer, Working Families; Edward Davies, Policy Director, Centre for Social Justice; Duncan Fisher, Co-Founder and Director, Family Initiative; Professor Tina Miller, Oxford Brookes University.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Working Families and Family Friendly Working Scotland](#)
- [Centre for Social Justice](#)
- [Family Initiative](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sarah Jackson, Edward Davies, Duncan Fisher and Professor Tina Miller.

Chair: Can I start by thanking our witnesses, who have taken the time to prepare for the session today and to come in and talk to us? Thank you for your written submissions as well; they have been incredibly helpful for the work we have done so far. This is our first oral evidence session for our inquiry into fathers in the workplace. We have got a lot to get through, as you can imagine, so we will immediately go to some questioning from Jess.

Q1 **Jess Phillips:** We hear a lot nowadays that fathers want to do more and want more support in the workplace in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities. Can you outline the evidence that substantiates that? I suppose it is your area of expertise, Sarah.

Sarah Jackson: I am Sarah Jackson. I am the chief executive of Working Families. We have three sources of evidence: one is the annual survey we do with working parents, which is called the Modern Families Index; the second is a benchmark we do every year with our employer members; and the third is the calls we take on our free legal service for parents and carers.

If I start with the Modern Families Index, we have now done four indexes. We have seen over the last four years a steadily increasing picture of fathers who want more. They want to be more active as fathers, and they are under a real time squeeze, because they are not getting the balance and the flexibility they want from their employers. This is a survey just of working parents, and we are seeing about a 50:50 split between families where both parents are working full-time, and families where one is full-time and one is part-time or you have a lone-parent family.

Looking at the fathers, we have seen a steadily increasing number who say they would think about childcare before they take on a promotion or a new job. We are now at a point where seven in 10 fathers think about childcare before changing what they are doing. 50% of the fathers are saying, "Actually, I would like to downshift. I would like to have an easier job and less pressure. I would think about taking a pay cut." We are also seeing far more engagement.

I was contrasting it with a study we did about 10 years ago called "Daddy's Home", which we called a life guide for fathers. We tried to find fathers who were engaged at home by going to the school gate to do interviews. It was quite hard, whereas now a lot of the index fathers are dropping off their children in the morning. They do more dropping-off in the morning than mothers do; more mothers pick up in the afternoon than fathers do. There is a real engagement that was not there before.



You see it particularly when you look at younger fathers. They absolutely do not have the role they want. There is an expectation among younger couples that there will be equality at home and equality at work: so he is going to be an active father and she is going to be active in the workforce. They are not getting that. They blame their employer; they feel disengaged and unhappy; they feel unable to talk about their responsibilities at work. This goes pretty evenly, whether they have flexible working or not. One of the important things we need to understand is that flexible working itself is not necessarily an answer. It is a useful tool, but we are talking about workplace culture.

Moving on to the benchmark of our employer members, we have seen over the last several years that the gap is closing. All the flexible working and family support stuff, if you like, was introduced in the 1980s, and it was driven by getting women back into work. It is not surprising that employers have favoured policies that support mothers and, therefore, it is not surprising that policies are perceived as being for mothers—and specifically for mothers of young children.

We are seeing, though, in the benchmark—and the benchmark is, of course, employers who take this seriously and want to be good at it—a closing of the gap. When you are looking at leave, enhanced pay, training, coaching and support networks, it used to be just for women. Now almost as many have those things for men as have them for women.

But when you go to the helpline, you see that men are suffering from the cultural assumptions and expectations that we see in the benchmark. When men ask for flexible working, they are less likely to find it an easy ask, because the employer is basically saying, “There must be a woman at home somewhere to look after your children.”

Q2 **Jess Phillips:** In this index and this data, is the range of working parents across the board in every—

Sarah Jackson: It is across the UK.

Jess Phillips: No, I mean in income.

Sarah Jackson: It tends towards the better-off, because it is an online survey.

Q3 **Jess Phillips:** Are there any particular attitudinal studies or evidence from—I don’t want to say “low paid”—the normal-paid groups in the UK as to their wants or requests, or any evidence of changing patterns in the workplace?

Edward Davies: I am Edward Davies from the Centre for Social Justice. We talked a bit about this in our submission. Essentially, one of the things we found is that the debate generally tends to skew. We are guilty of this as well.

Jess Phillips: Don’t feel guilty.



Edward Davies: Thank you. We tend to think about working too much in terms of quite well-paid office jobs, flexible working, going home with a laptop, who can fill in for whom, and things like that. Whereas, for most normal people that is not how it works; it is about shift work. If I am a cab driver in Derbyshire, I don't get flexible working. There is less specific research on that and less policy focus. One of the things we recommend in our submission is simply that there is more of a focus on that, because that is where you can make the greater difference. When we talk about some of the things that have gone on, the problem is that, frankly, they benefit me—and I don't really need it.

Jess Phillips: Stop with all the guilt.

Edward Davies: Yes, I'm sorry. But there are guys who need it an awful lot more than I do, and they do not get as much focus in the research and in the conversation.

Q4 **Jess Phillips:** What I am asking is whether there is a demand. We will come on to what works for people later, but I am asking more about the demand in every area and the evidence that fathers are changing their work patterns. A taxi driver or a person on shift work could say, "I am going to work from 10 at night until three in the morning, pick my kids up from school and go to work." There is a level of flexibility in that way of working, but is there any evidence that is happening or that it is wanted?

Edward Davies: Yes. Some of the polling we have done around this was specifically on things like antenatal classes: high-earning dads did them a lot more than lower-earning dads, but lower-earning dads benefited from them a lot more. You have this situation where there is stuff out there that simply is not benefiting those who need it—but when they get it, they benefit more from it. The polling statistic we have is that 70% of fathers with a household income over £70,000 went on some kind of antenatal class; under £20,000, the figure is only 30%. When you see what benefit they get from it, it is the guys earning less than £20,000 who benefit an awful lot more from it.

Professor Tina Miller: There are so many explanations for that, as to how young men—and particularly young fathers in disadvantaged groups—are treated or feel they are being treated when they go to those sorts of classes. But any review of the literature shows you that fathers across all social classes and age groups talk about being there. That is a really dominant discourse that is a change. It is a generational shift we are seeing: there is the intention to be there.

Whether that translates into practice really depends on all sorts of things, such as income—can you afford to? Are you on a zero-hours contract with a possible fear of losing your job if you try to translate that into practice? It sounds like we might come to more of that later in terms of what works. But there is a shift in the discourse, the expectation and the language for all fathers, I would say. We find this across the literature.



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It is really a recurrent theme: being there is something that fathers intend and want to do.

Duncan Fisher: Can I add a very different type of evidence? You asked whether there is demand. I recommend the work of Professor Peter Moss, who is in London and has done work internationally on leave-uptake systems. There is a striking feature that suggests there is demand in the rate of change when a policy is changed.

I will give you three examples. In Quebec, they introduced parental leave for fathers, and the uptake went from 22% in 2004—there was already leave then—up to 69% in 2006. In Iceland, they introduced changes in 2000 and the uptake of the leave went up to 95%. It was very generous leave, obviously. In Germany, they made changes in 2007 and the leave went up from 3.3% to 29.3% in five years.

The change is very rapid when the leave is available. I interpret that as evidence that there is latent demand that is frustrated. It is like taking a lid off. You take the lid off and expand people's choices, and they choose differently very quickly.

Q5 Jess Phillips: While policies in this country are not like those—though they are getting to have similarities—is there any evidence about how this desire to be there, these changes and the suggestions to employers might have been received by those employers? Is this being made possible? Taking into account that I know EY would allow you to do it, would it happen with a gas engineer?

Sarah Jackson: Our helpline takes about 3,000 calls a year. If you strip out the 50% that are about maternity, crunching down, about 20% of the calls are about men and fatherhood. About a quarter of those are about flexible working in the sense of either difficulties with requesting it or difficulties around imposed changes to contracts.

It is evident that, first of all, fathers do not really know what their rights are in that space. When they do know, they find it very difficult to access those rights. Also, quite clearly coming through is a picture of men saying, "If I was a woman and I said I needed to be at hospital this afternoon, I would be cut some slack, but because I am a man, I am not." There is an attitudinal blocker. The men who are calling our helpline are not at EY; they are ordinary working men. There is definitely demand, and there is a demand that is being frustrated.

Q6 Jess Phillips: There is evidence that employers are potentially treating mothers differently from fathers—with a negative effect on fathers in this instance.

Sarah Jackson: Yes, and that is for two reasons. One is that you have 30 years' worth of a business case that is based on getting women back into the workforce. It is also the way that discrimination laws work. Employers look at a woman and they are frightened, whereas they look at a man and they are not.



Q7 Jess Phillips: Are there any examples of good employers in this space—not EY—who are looking at flexibility?

Sarah Jackson: There are examples—I feel that I am answering all the questions, but we will get to other ones. We run awards in the UK and in Scotland through Family Friendly Working Scotland, which is a partnership between us and some charities in Scotland. Interestingly, in Scotland it is beyond the EYs. For example, West Dunbartonshire Council is a very ordinary local authority in a fairly deprived part of Scotland. They have really invested in their fathers. They look very much at communication: how to identify fathers and how to make sure they are applying for childcare vouchers and they understand the rights they have, for example.

We are also seeing SMEs in Scotland picking up the baton. Very little is known about SMEs and their practice around fatherhood. Last week, a small marketing company called Pursuit Marketing, which is the best SME for working families in Scotland, was so inspired by hearing about what good employers around fathers were doing that they introduced four weeks of paid paternity leave, with full pay, as of 1 April. There are pockets of good practice, and there are exemplar organisations.

Q8 Jess Phillips: What about the unions? Do you feel that there has been any push from any of the unions around this area of work?

Sarah Jackson: In terms of the work the TUC is doing on precarious work, yes. One of the things I am sure we will talk about this morning is contracts: whether you are an employee, a worker or an agency worker. Men really suffer there.

Q9 Jess Phillips: With regard to attitudinal issues at work, let us take the example of gas engineers or lift fitters—people working in male-dominated workforces. They have reps who are like them. Is there any attitudinal evidence from that group of people as to whether they are fighting for it from their employers? Is this a priority? When it comes to pay, pay changes, or whether we are going to have electronic things in the cabs of the vans, these things get brought up and get pushed. It shows the attitude of the workforce towards those things. I wonder whether some of the unions that have people within those very male-dominated workforces would have an insight into some of the attitudes. I have never been approached to say, “All the people at JLR are pushing for really good parents’ rights.” There is no evidence of that.

Sarah Jackson: The evidence we have from the helpline is that union reps are very good on pay, health and safety and those sorts of things.

Jess Phillips: They are: that is true.

Sarah Jackson: But for flexible working, for men or for women, it is partly about what they have the bandwidth to deal with. But it would be very interesting to talk to the unions about how to support fathers better.



Q10 Jess Phillips: Do you all agree that there is a need for more data and evidence gathering in this area?

Professor Tina Miller: Yes, but it is evidence in smaller scale qualitative studies about the difficulty in, perhaps, a male-dominated environment to be the one to ask and to risk being seen as perhaps a bit effeminate in a certain way. Although there is the discourse of being there, practising that and being able to do that is more difficult—if it involves you making a claim that is going to make you look different from the other guys around you.

Certainly in my own research, which is small-scale qualitative research, some of the fathers spoke about their intentions to share caring equally with their partners. I have interviewed them over time, so I have seen people through from before the birth of their first child. The intentions to share equally did not involve changing work patterns particularly, because everyone makes an assumption that childcare is so easy it can be squeezed into the corners of the day. It is a really important misunderstanding. It is one of the most important findings, because everyone thinks this small baby will come home from the hospital and occupy that amount of space until it grows up and leaves home.

No one can prepare mothers or fathers for the enormity of the change. It is a very difficult time to be making claims on employers for rights and all sorts of things, if you are the bloke in that situation. The easiest thing to do is just to revert to practices that do not require a bit of pushing—because everyone is shell-shocked from getting on with the new baby. We really have to try to enable fathers to take leave and actually make them take up leave. If we are serious about men being involved, that is the only way to get them involved.

Jess Phillips: I agree.

Professor Tina Miller: Mothers and fathers do not make choices about who takes leave on a level playing field; it is gendered, and it is historically unequal. It is all of those things. If we are really serious, we have to say, “This is fathers’ leave.” Men will benefit in all sorts of ways from that, and many men want that. It does make it possible for the fathers who have not realised they want it or find it difficult to try to ask and request that. It is complicated, but it does start from everyone’s assumption that caring for a baby is the easiest thing in the world, because it is what women do. That is where we start; it is the wrong place, basically.

Q11 Tracy Brabin: Sarah, in the findings from the Modern Families Index, you referred to the “fatherhood penalty”. You have been talking about the helpline and the fact that you have had some feedback from fathers themselves. Is it broader than that? What exactly does the “fatherhood penalty” mean?



Sarah Jackson: We have become very accustomed to the motherhood penalty. We know that women make compromises in their work or their career to accommodate family life. Over a lifetime in the workplace, that translates into a significant financial loss to the family—and possibly to the woman if the couple's relationship breaks up, so she faces a poorer or impoverished life as a pensioner. There is also an obvious cost to business, because talent is walking out of the door.

We are beginning to see in the index—and this is the reason we have called it a fatherhood penalty—that young fathers are beginning to ask the same questions and express the same doubts about their future at work that women have already been doing for 30 years. That is not super-evident yet, although there are two things you can point to. Some of the work we do with our employers when we are looking at employee engagement shows that it is the women who are the engaged members of the workforce, not the men. That is because women make their compromises. They make their peace with what they are doing and they buckle down—they have decided what works for them—whereas we are seeing that men generally, and young men in particular, feel dissatisfied or constrained by the expectation of being the breadwinner. They feel they have to stick where they are. We also see it increasingly with organisations saying it is difficult to get their men to step up to be partner or to be the senior manager, because it is going to take too much time.

Women have long understood that there are two currencies that are necessary for family life: one is obviously money, and the other is time. They have been getting the balance between time and money. Men are now beginning to understand that time is an equally important currency for the health of your family and yourself. What we are beginning to see is men saying, "We are going to favour time over money." That is a significant risk for UK plc, although it is potentially a significant benefit for family life, if it does translate into a younger generation of men saying, "We are going to take the hit and we are going to share more equally at home and at work."

Q12 **Tracy Brabin:** Could I broaden that out to the rest of the panel? What is the "fatherhood penalty"?

Duncan Fisher: Yes—I know what it is because I have had it. Fathers can do what mothers do, which is step out of the full-time ladder to the top, and work part-time or start working from home, which is what I did. I gave up work when my first daughter was born in order to work from home. I did very well working from home, and it was great fun. However, my income is not anything like what it would have been, had I stayed where I was.

It is often called the "motherhood penalty", and that was often contrasted with the "fatherhood bonus". The "daddy bonus" was an idea that came over from the United States. That is a bit of a myth, however. That is what happens when men go into intensive work because their partners



have stepped out, so they have to earn more for the family, so their income goes up. It is not a benefit; it is rather good for the family, to be honest, if they are earning more.

But if the man chooses to do what the woman does, then the man gets the same experience, which is that you pay for it. Simply, you pay for it. You earn less money and you have a smaller pension. It is what happens. That is what I would call the fatherhood penalty.

Edward Davies: I would add one thing to that. Completely separately to this, we have done work at the CSJ on changing attitudes to business. Something we found is that particularly millennials coming through will now pick an employer based a bit more on their social responsibility, their social attitude and how they are as an employer. That has been a real shift over the generation. We are seeing much more of dads looking at a business and saying, "Will they give me flexibility? That is going to be a factor."

There is definitely a financial penalty in being more present as a father. They all talk about the time they spend at work taking them away from being a father. But thinking about it in big, national UK plc terms, this is a good investment. If you are a present father, your child is 25% more likely to escape poverty. In the long term, this is an investment in UK plc. This is a good thing.

Similarly to you, I have taken jobs that have made me more available at home, and I have worked from home for several years. But I see that investment as both a financial and a relational investment in my kids. People are starting to see that, and that is probably quite an important thing to bear in mind. It is a national financial investment, because your kids will do better as a result.

Q13 **Tracy Brabin:** Professor Miller, do you see absolute evidence that these negative experiences are attributable to discrimination?

Professor Tina Miller: Sarah might be more able to answer that. Certainly, from my own research, as I said earlier, it is a really tricky terrain we are talking about, because of these gendered histories, as I would call them. Some men are now experiencing the motherhood penalty in that same way, and it comes back to much larger, broader issues about the fact that caring for children is invisible and undervalued. We have a caring crisis in the UK, and that is going to continue. That is not just for kids; it is for older people. This is something we really have to try to get right. Caring has to be valued, and men can care just like women can care, for children or for other people.

I think about this as an equation. I am sorry—I have probably gone off the topic a little bit. In the equation, we have mothers, fathers, paid work and care in the home, which is also a form of work. We need to get that equation right. It does not work currently, because it continues to disadvantage women. If men want to take it up, they are then suffering



the same fatherhood penalty; it is discriminating against them. Somehow, this is more than just about shared parental leave; it is about a whole range of different policy mechanisms that need to work together and be joined up.

Everyone is currently stressed out and feeling time-poor—that does come out in the research—because they are making ad hoc childcare arrangements if they are trying to work. It is still usually the mother who is the one who balances or juggles. Everyone is juggling at some point, trying to get home to bath the kid or at least be involved as a father.

It is in a bit of a mess at the moment, very broadly, and we do not want to go down the track of just incurring a fatherhood penalty. We have learned from the ways women have been discriminated against if they try to balance these things. But, for me, it really starts from the fact that we do not value caring, and it is invisible.

Sarah Jackson: I would say that there is gender inequality in the workplace, and it plays out differently for men and women. I do not see employers saying, “I am choosing to treat this man differently because he is a father.” It is not conscious. I do not see it as a “big D” legal discrimination issue; I do see it as a gender-equality issue, and as an inherent cultural issue. There are ways we can tackle it through the law, and there are ways we can tackle it by changing our conversation publicly and by showing governmental leadership.

Q14 **Tracy Brabin:** In terms of disadvantages, you have talked about the diminished earnings, but would you also see it in terms of promotion prospects as well?

Duncan Fisher: Yes, you step off the ladder and you make your own way. I basically set up my own businesses and stuff like that. It is just more insecurity, I suppose. It is a different way of doing things. I have to say, in case my children are listening, that I would not choose to do it differently for all the world.

I did that because I chose it, and that was my privilege. A lot of people do not have the privilege of choosing. I did, and I took it. I do not use my experience as something that is relevant to other people. There are a lot of people out there who suffer a lot because of it.

Q15 **Tracy Brabin:** Would you say that it would be good to think about paternity or parental status as a protected characteristic?

Sarah Jackson: I do not think paternity works as a protected characteristic. Maternity is a protected characteristic during pregnancy and for the protected period after childbirth. I have been tussling with this, and I cannot see how you would create an equivalent paternity protected characteristic. I would be much more interested in talking about some sort of protected characteristic that is about having care responsibilities, because that would capture men, women, same-sex



couples, adopters, people caring for disabled children, people caring for elderly parents, and people caring for terminally ill spouses.

So many people are not covered by discrimination law as it currently exists, and we could do so much better. That includes a lot of people calling our helpline—and indeed many of the women, who have to fall back on indirect sex discrimination. Discrimination law is complicated and difficult. If we could simplify it by having a protected characteristic that covered caring responsibilities, that would help everyone.

Edward Davies: It is a recommendation we do made in our submission: that we include paternity as part of the Equality Act. The reason we think that is because there is a culture shift that is needed that is not happening at the moment. That alone will not change a huge amount, but there is a raft of changes that are needed that say that fatherhood is just really important. A lot of the tension comes from too much time at work. The Government have an opportunity to use the long arm of the law to say, "Fatherhood is important."

We can tussle about the detail of the best place to put it, but this seems to be a good area, where employers would have to take notice and say, "Do you know what? We have to have a bit of respect for this whole dad thing, because it seems to be a big deal in Government." There will be a raft of things that Governments can do to change culture, but this would be one that would send a really strong message to employers that this matters.

Q16 **Tracy Brabin:** I just have one more question. Sarah, you did say this was about the way discrimination laws work. Could you expand on that?

Sarah Jackson: Quite a lot of people who call our helpline do not have a comparator. Discrimination requires a comparator. If you are a man in the workplace and you can point to a woman who has been given the flexible working or the leave you do not have, then you have a comparator—but most often people do not, especially if you are looking at a male-dominated workforce. If you have somebody who is working in an engineering business, for example, there probably is no female comparator, so he has nowhere to go in terms of discrimination law. That is why it does not work.

Q17 **Chair:** Just picking up on that, if I may, before I bring in Holly, you talked about how gender inequality in the workplace plays out differently. Do you feel that cannot be challenged with the present law or that law could never really challenge it?

Sarah Jackson: No, the present law could be improved. There are a couple of straightforward things you could do. You could make sure paternity leave and shared parental leave are a day-one right for all fathers. At the moment, you have to be an employee. Even as an employee, you have to have been employed for 26 weeks before 15 weeks before your baby is due to be able to give notice to take two



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weeks' paternity leave. There is a huge inequality that fathers face in the workplace right at the start. There is an equalisation there that should be made.

We should also look at the flexible working law, because you will know that, putting the fees aside, hardly any flexible working cases ever get to a tribunal. There are two reasons for that. One is that the tribunals can only look at the process. Has the employer followed the proper process? They cannot look at whether there is really a business case for refusal. The other thing is that the remedies are so low. The maximum remedy is eight weeks' pay. If you are a low-paid father, you are not going to gamble your job on eight weeks' pay. If you are an employer who does not really want to have to think about this, eight weeks' pay is not much of a penalty to worry about.

While flexible working has been a fantastic piece of legislation and it has created a culture change, the end result is that it has reached the limits of its usefulness—particularly for fathers. Those are two simple legal changes I would like to see made.

Q18 **Holly Lynch:** Professor Miller, this relates to an answer given to one of Jess' earlier questions. I am interested in the evidence base. We heard that there might be gaps in that. Is it comprehensive enough that we can dig deeper into different social groups, different cultural groups and different community groups within that evidence base? One area we did touch on was young fathers in particular, in relation to the prevalence of low-paid work. I am mindful that the Government's decision to set the threshold for the national living wage was 25, so you would expect to see a prevalence of low-paid work in the under-25s. Given that the notion that young people were not productive enough on average was one of the reasons given by one of the Ministers at the time, does that manifest in more pressure, whether that is an expectation about how hard under-25s are expected to work or financial pressures for that particular group of people?

Professor Tina Miller: To go back to the evidence, and what we have got and what we have not got, there is some great work that has been done at the University of Leeds and in other pockets in the UK, looking at young fathers, their involvement and commitment to fathering and fatherhood—and where, how and whether work fits into that.

There is an evidence base of the type of data that does not get generalised. It is not designed to be generalisable, because it is qualitative and it is much more in-depth. It really contributes to this larger-scale style of quantitative data we have available. We really need to be putting this all together. There is a lot out there; there are gaps, too.

Young fathers have a variety of demands on them. They are seen as young and irresponsible, particularly if they become a father at a young age, which historically would not have been the case, because it would



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have been the norm. If we look at patterns of when people have children, it is seen as abnormal in today's society; it would not have been 80 years ago, if we looked at age of first birth. That has gone up. We identify young fathers, just like young mothers, as being problems in some way.

I do not know whether this is answering your question, but we did a small amount of young fathers research at Oxford Brookes. Their lives were chaotic—that is the only way I can describe them. This really coincided with research that was done at Leeds; we shared data. The young fathers who were in the studies had so many other people and service providers involved in their lives. Fatherhood was one identity they had, and they were really going to hang on to that. They really wanted to be the sort of dad they had not experienced in their own lives.

Again, all of their intentions were there, but they were sort of floored at the first hurdle—in antenatal clinics, for example—by being ignored. One guy spoke about the fact that he was actually spoken to when he was in the scan, and this made him feel so great about his impending fatherhood. As a society, we are incredibly discriminatory to anyone who falls outside the norms of when we think things should be occurring. As I say, historically we would not have noticed these young fathers in the same way. Holly, I don't think that has answered your question.

Q19 Holly Lynch: It has all been really helpful. What I am trying to dig a bit further into is whether you think the living wage threshold puts more pressure on young people, and dads in particular. Do they feel uncomfortable because they feel a bit more vulnerable, given some of the justifications for why the threshold is set at 25?

Professor Tina Miller: If you are earning a living wage, if you are on a zero-hours contract or if you are experiencing some sort of precariousness in your employment, according to social class, it is going to be more difficult. We have heard today about the types of fathers who feel able to say at work, "I am going to take some leave," or even request it. A young father would be disadvantaged in even feeling able to do that.

If there is someone who is living on a low wage where employment is precarious, those things will compound the issue and make it very difficult to be making claims and requesting time etc. to be the type of father they are hoping to be. Generally, it is a different sort of father or fathering from the sort they themselves feel they had.

Q20 Angela Crawley: I have two points. Has any demographic analysis been done of the studies? What data sets are you working with? Is it a wide-scale study in terms of different employment sectors? Secondly, what exactly are you referring to as "low income"? I am not entirely clear, because obviously the average income in London is very different from the average income in Scotland. Can I clarify those two points with whoever has got studies?



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Professor Tina Miller: Mine are small-scale qualitative studies. Ethics committees require that people opt in to them. You can guess the sort of dads who opt in to those sorts of studies and give their time. There is some diversity in there, though, but not anything I would claim to be more broadly representative.

Sarah Jackson: On the helpline, we use £28,000 a year as a family income as our definition of low income. About 60% to 65% of helpline callers fall within that category.

Edward Davies: In the polling we have done, we have tended to say that under £20,000 are lower paid, and then the top band is over £70,000. We see around £40,000 as the middle. That would be about what we do there. To the point about whether there is enough demographic data, particularly in what we would call the lower or normal income, there is not enough breakdown of that to really know about it.

Q21 **Angela Crawley:** Let me just come on to a different area, which I have lost—

Jess Phillips: You are too caught up with your data.

Angela Crawley: How effective are current Government policies, including shared parental leave? Why are so many fathers not taking up the right that they are entitled to? Anyone can jump in.

Professor Tina Miller: A policy change signals something, so it is great that shared parental leave was introduced. It signals a commitment to changing something, but how that translates at the coalface in everyday lives is different. That is the sort of research I do, looking at the micro-processes in households.

I know Nick Clegg spoke about mothers and fathers having an equal choice. He conjured up this picture of mums and dads having a really nice chat over the breakfast table at home, making a decision about who would work, who would stay at home and all of those things. It is much more complex than that, because people need money when a baby is born. Usually, because of the motherhood penalty, the woman does not earn as much. There are all sorts of financial reasons that it makes sense for the father to be the one who stays in work. Equally, looking after a child is really hard work.

The one thing that really came out in my studies was fathers recognising for the first time ever the invisibility of caring. They would say, "I could work flat-out all day at home with a kid. I could really do all sorts of interesting things—and it does not count for anything out there." Men are—this is a generalisation—used to their lives and identities, their worker identities, being rewarded outside of the home in the workplace.

Of course, what goes on in the home is a private sphere and all those things, but they realised that it did not count for anything. It is really important work, but you do not get a pat on the back or a promotion for



being a really involved father and doing a great job with your kids. It is difficult to make decisions in that sphere.

In my submission, I gave the case of Sweden, which basically introduced some of their policies 30 years ahead of us. They had to go back and change it to make fathers take the leave, because that is the only way you can kick-start the cultural shift that has to go along with the policy change. There will be fathers who will really welcome it; there will be some mothers who really do not like the idea; and there will be some fathers who think, "Oh my goodness, I have to do that month"—or whatever it is. It is not that everyone feels the same about this, but fathers should be involved in their children's lives. Women are workers, and they also want to forge identities in the workplace. We have to make this equation work in a better way than it does currently.

Duncan Fisher: Can I say something? My first daughter was born in 1996, and ever since then I have been campaigning for shared leave entitlements. It comes around every five years, and this is the next one. I feel I have been spectacularly unsuccessful in all my efforts. The leave regime at the moment is terrible, in my view. The reason it is terrible is that it absolutely emphasises the idea that the caring role is the mother's. All the leave is given to the mother, and she then gives it to the guy if she wants to. That communicates a really unfortunate message, which is a foundation of gender inequality in our society. It says that the caring is the mother's role.

I have witnessed from the inside the intense politics that come into play when these issues are debated. You have women's lobbies, mothers' lobbies and business lobbies. You have different parts of Government. The last time it happened within the coalition Government, so you had fighting within the coalition. The result keeps being this very traditional form, and we do not move forward.

We predicted with absolute confidence at the time that this new system would not work. We wrote it down, because we knew in five years' time we could say, "Look, we said it then," to prove it. We knew it would not work, because it does not tick the boxes that we know need to be ticked for leave systems to work, from the international perspective.

There are three boxes, if you like, or three absolute requirements. One is that currently there is leave that is only for mothers, and there needs to be a similar amount of leave for fathers. We call it the "daddy month" as if it were different, but it is not. It is exactly what the mothers get. I do not like calling it the "daddy month" or calling it anything special at all. Simply, there is leave that only she can have and leave that only he can have, and they should be in equal proportion.

The second one is pay. You have to take into account that these are earning parents. They are not going to take leave. I know that is unfortunate in the current economic conditions, but that is one of the boxes.



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The third one relates to what Tina Miller was saying. You are not operating on in a level playing field, under lots of assumptions. You have to promote the cultural change. You have to advertise. For example, in Scandinavian countries they had advertising campaigns about men and babies. They put it up on posters and things. You have to put it out there, be proactive, get behind it and believe in it. I would not go quite as far as Tina in saying that we should force men to take it.

Professor Tina Miller: I did not mean that. What I mean is that it should be available to all men and there should be an expectation—not that we should go to their houses.

Duncan Fisher: In the Scandinavian countries you see that, even if you just open up the choices, the choices will change hugely. We can then start worrying about further changing it, but the availability of choice is quite enough for a very big change.

The ultimate test of the current legislation is the incredibly low take-up by fathers. It is like you have tried to make it low. That is so low that it is engineered to be low. That is not a normal thing. We are forcing that situation, and we need to change the system and let people choose differently. I feel long in the tooth, and I am hoping that we will get around to some success by the time I am a grandparent.

Edward Davies: Can I add to that? The word “culture” has come up quite a lot, and I am slightly loth to use management speak before lunch, but there is that saying, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” It feels like a lot of policy that goes on at the moment is about pulling a lever, using a strategy and hoping it does something—without actually addressing culture. That is a much bigger question, and it is going to require more than, “Let’s pull this lever here and hope that happens.” It will not happen; it has not happened; it does not happen. There needs to be a much bigger piece of work that says, “This is about changing a culture, not a law.”

Sarah Jackson: That is where you have to make partnership with employers. Employers can do the communication piece. They can say, “We are serious about this.” With Family Friendly Working Scotland last year we did focus groups with low-income parents, and it was very clear that when both fathers and mothers did know about flexible working, they thought it was not for them; they thought it was for the people in the office.

There is a very clear thing that employers can do. When we look at shared parental leave, I agree with Duncan that the take-up has not been huge, but where it has been huge is in NCT fathers. If you look online and you look at all the blogs, they work for Citi; they work for DWF; they work in professional and legal services.

That is creating a culture change, but it is only happening because those big organisations have done massive advertising campaigns and said,



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"Take this leave; we mean it." There is something really important about engaging the employer community to say, "This is important to us, whether you are a man or a woman. If you have care responsibilities, your life outside work is important to the way you perform for us. Here is your flexible working right. Here is your paternity leave, your maternity leave and your shared leave. Take it; we mean it. We are not going to discriminate against you."

- Q22 **Angela Crawley:** Scotland had the Year of the Dad last year in 2016. Should the UK replicate that to set that example, raise awareness and get people to take up paternity leave?

Duncan Fisher: Yes.

Professor Tina Miller: Yes.

Duncan Fisher: That was a great campaign. We were very jealous.

- Q23 **Angela Crawley:** To what extent do you feel that fathers have enough financial support to enable them to fulfil their caring responsibilities? What evidence is there that greater financial incentives would persuade more fathers to take care of their children?

Sarah Jackson: Some 25% of the fathers who are calling us are worried about tax credits, universal credit or in-work benefits. Families are struggling. If you are on maternity leave, you are getting less than the national minimum wage at a time when your costs have gone up. It is not surprising that he stays at work, really, whatever his wage is. If you look at the Family and Childcare Trust's submission, they talk about young fathers and how they feel under the cosh financially. The support is not there.

When you looked at an independent right for fathers' leave last year, we helped you calculate the cost of doing that. Leave will only get taken if it is paid, and that is why—we casually say "the EYs"—the big corporates pay people. They pay maternity leave at full pay for up to 26 weeks in many cases. They are matching that for shared parental leave for their men. That makes it affordable. It also means that people come back to work; it is a good retention tool. But it is evidence, absolutely. Duncan has talked about the evidence from other countries. If you pay fathers to take leave, they can afford to do it.

- Q24 **Angela Crawley:** We will probably come on to that. Finally, what would be the most effective changes to current policies? What policies would you propose both for employers and for mothers to redress this balance?

Sarah Jackson: Do you want the list? I have talked about changes to paternity leave and notice. We have all talked about an independent right to paid leave. We need day-one rights for paternity and shared parental leave. We need a paternity allowance, as we have a maternity allowance, because so many men are unable to take paid leave at all when their child is born. We need an independent right to paid leave at



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wage-replacement levels. We have talked about flexible working and that the right to request needs to be strengthened.

It would be really good if we could encourage the Government to take the lead on this as a big public sector employer. They could look at flexibility by default, so that all jobs are reviewed for their potential for flexible working and advertised as such. Only if there is a really solid business case for it to be an inflexible job should it be advertised in that way. That would go some way to beginning to create a culture change and move flexible working away from being an accommodation for mothers and children. All of those things could make a huge change—and none of them is too difficult.

Edward Davies: The other thing we would like to see is a named individual Minister with a responsibility for this, probably in the Cabinet Office. If you are trying to change culture, if you put the person responsible for this in DWP or DfE, they are going to be siloed into what they do. You need someone right across the remit who can say, “Do you know what? I need to be in the Department of Health doing this as well, because antenatal classes are important. I know dads reading with kids is a brilliant indicator of their GCSE outcome, so I need to be in the DfE. I know half our prisoners do not have a father figure, so I need to be in the Ministry of Justice.”

You would have one person who could sit centrally and say, “This is part of our culture as a Government. I have a say on all these things and I can make sure the policies that come out are father-friendly and family-friendly.” That would make a huge difference. Again, it is not a specific policy as such. It is saying, “Culturally, this needs to change on a really big scale.” I would have the Prime Minister, but realistically the Cabinet Office is probably where that person would sit. They would be given a remit across everything.

Q25 **Mrs Drummond:** I just want to go back a bit to what Duncan said some time ago about fathers taking time off work. Obviously there is a physical issue here where it takes women time to get over childbirth and then there is breastfeeding. Having breastfed all my four children to about a year old, I did not really want my husband there particularly during that first year for each one. I had four in five years, so it was actually five years. But would it be a good idea to take that shared parental leave at a later date, i.e. during the child’s life rather than the first year? There seems to be pressure to take the time off during the first year rather than at other times.

Duncan Fisher: This is a key issue. Breastfeeding is a key issue. I am glad you have brought it up, because it sits in the background and it has done in all the debates about leave entitlements in the last 20 years. I put this in my written evidence: the thing that disrupts breastfeeding is full-time work, and particularly long-hours full-time work. That is the thing we try to avoid, but the systems we are talking about are doing precisely that. We are not encouraging that.



Interestingly, and perhaps counter-intuitively, the global research on breastfeeding shows that the more fathers are engaged in the care of the baby, the more breastfeeding there is. There is this idea that somehow if the man is at home the mother is pushed out and away from breastfeeding. It just does not work like that in families. I could say a little bit more about why that happens, because there is a lot of science now that we understand. Basically, if he is there and he is more involved, he tends to be more caring and more attentive. If he is well informed—this is part of this global thing—about breastfeeding, he will support breastfeeding and breastfeeding will go up. It is not a zero-sum game; it is just not like that. The idea that we cannot have men looking after babies who are less than one year old because it might disrupt breastfeeding is completely the opposite of what happens when they do: breastfeeding is encouraged.

If you are concerned about breastfeeding, I would say the key to improving breastfeeding rates is information and education for families, particularly targeting fathers. That will greatly enhance the rates. The work flexibility we are talking about will not affect it significantly compared with that other strategy, if that makes sense.

Q26 Mrs Drummond: Yes, but would it not be useful to have that shared parental leave that they could take at another time during the child's life rather than perhaps at the start? Is there any evidence to show that is a good idea or not?

Duncan Fisher: No, there is not. The science says the opposite. Literally in the last year, they have published research on the biology and neurobiology of fatherhood. Basically, when a man cuddles a baby his hormones change, just as mothers' hormones do, and his brain changes—his plastic brain. His brain changes permanently. The more he cares for the baby, the more his brain changes. It is a quantitative thing.

That points to the importance of the father-child cuddling. Let us call it that. "Bonding" we call it, but it is actually the physical thing that triggers it. The proximity of father and baby is important from the beginning—from the first day. If you organise society such that the mother does the first year and then the men come in, two things happen. One, he has not connected with the baby in the same way that she has; he is not tuned in.

Q27 Mrs Drummond: He is not working 24/7, though, I would hope.

Duncan Fisher: You can work and be close to your baby. As you say, it is not—

Mrs Drummond: The way you were saying it was you do not see the baby for the first year. It does not work like that.

Duncan Fisher: Nevertheless, the key is the father looking after the baby by himself. That is the key, because then two things happen. One, you get the bonding; you get the attunement, if you like. Two, you get



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the growth of competence and growth of confidence that he can be a carer. That is one thing I say to all new fathers. Occasionally—very rarely—they ask what my advice is. That is the one thing I say: days alone with the baby. That changes it.

Q28 **Mrs Drummond:** A baby has to be breastfed.

Duncan Fisher: Yes.

Jess Phillips: After six months they eat food.

Mrs Drummond: Yes—no, I know. What I am—

Duncan Fisher: We did both in my family, you see. We managed to combine exclusive breastfeeding with this system.

Professor Tina Miller: There are quite low rates for breastfeeding in the UK. It should not drive policy. Sadly, not everyone breastfeeds.

Q29 **Tracy Brabin:** We are accepting that one of the biggest issues is that men fall off that fiscal cliff when they decide to take paternity leave. In some countries, it is 90%. All sorts of countries have tried different models. What would be your recommendation to the Government for what would be a real engine for change if you decided a percentage of earnings?

Sarah Jackson: Ninety per cent. is what women get for the first six weeks.

Tracy Brabin: Equality, you mean.

Sarah Jackson: Equality, yes, absolutely.

Q30 **Jess Phillips:** Maybe you did answer this, but I was a bit concerned, Duncan. You were saying that fathers had to have the baby on their own, but what I thought you were suggesting was that mothers and fathers should stay off work together. Probing on what Flick was saying, it was not so much about the first year but about parents taking leave following one another in order for it to be suitable for their working environment. You sort of answered it by saying they needed to be on their own, though. I can totally see that it would have been lovely to have had six months off with my husband there the entire time—I watched a lot of Grand Theft Auto when he was there.

The fact of the matter is that that would not be a policy thing that would help anyone go to work. I wanted to make sure that is not what you were suggesting as a solution: that both are given an equality of leave and they should take it at the same time.

Duncan Fisher: I asked you the question about whether there should be that possibility, for example if you had twins or a disabled child.

Sarah Jackson: What we do know about shared parental leave tells us that couples like to have some time together. This is still anecdotal



because the research is not solid on shared parental leave, but what I am picking up from the blogs and from talking to employer members is that couples who choose to use it and who can afford to use it will take a few weeks tacked on to statutory paternity leave so that the couple together is choosing to spend four to six weeks to establish family life. Then, quite often, he will take another two to four weeks when she goes back to work later on.

What I would like to achieve is something that maximises the choice and flexibility for family life. There is also a big issue at the end of year one. We have been talking a lot about the first year of life, and there is a lot of important stuff there about family bonding and the long-term stability and life chances for the children in these families. But there is then a horrible gap between the end of year one and when school starts. The CBI has done some really good work looking at how you fill the gap. What is the benefit to the country of properly paying for childcare?

But I would say that it is not just about having childcare in place so that both mothers and fathers can be back in full-time work as soon as their baby turns one year old. I do not think that is the family life anyone is looking at. If you go back to the evidence from the Modern Families Index and the evidence from all the work Tina is doing, you see that the currency of time is so valuable. We did some research a few years ago with the relationships research charity OnePlusOne, where we looked at the impact of work on couple's relationships. We could show that where work is impacting negatively, that goes back into the home and is destructive. It can be reversed.

We have to recognise the cost to the UK of driving people to a position where both members of a couple feel that they have to work full-time. We need a cultural change, so we get to a place where it is natural for fathers and mothers to be working less than full-time until their children are however old. That would also reduce childcare costs.

Professor Tina Miller: That also links into other caring costs, though. If fathers are involved from the beginning, there is this whole idea that men can care too. They may not do it in the way that their wives or partners want them to do it; they do it slightly differently. You might recognise that, and they might talk about getting it wrong.

Jess Phillips: It is much better.

Professor Tina Miller: We also do not want the idea of women doing all the elder care as well. We require a broader cultural shift in terms of caring being a human activity, a resource we all have, which we will achieve in different ways.

But we really signal something so important in that first year about men's capacities to care. They can do it very competently; more competently than some mothers—not naming anyone. But they can take that on into later-life caring responsibilities, which we know is a growing area and a



growing policy concern and cost. That also ties into the flexible working that is required, not just in the first year. Families need to be able to organise and care for the family in a very broadly conceived way.

- Q31 Holly Lynch:** Can I just come back to you, Edward, and in particular the Centre for Social Justice's recommendation that we need to look to father-proof workplaces? Are you able to tell us a little bit more about what that means in reality? Can we expect to see that in every single workplace?

Edward Davies: Some of this comes back to our recommendation on the Equality Act, which in some ways can feel like a bit of a sledgehammer. Particularly if you are in vulnerable employment, you need something legislative—something you can hold on to. Again, it is designing something not for the middle-class lawyer, who probably feels empowered enough to say, "I want some leave. I am entitled to this." It is about having something in place where you can say, "Do you know what? The law says I can do this, and you cannot sack me for it."

If you are in vulnerable employment, if you are in a difficult place, if you are not a high earner, it is about what we can put in place so that you can say, "Actually, this is important for me, too." That legislative side of things is really important.

- Q32 Holly Lynch:** Quite specifically, what could those legislative things be in terms of a workplace that is happy and can accommodate those requests from fathers? What should those specifics be in terms of statutory law?

Edward Davies: The Equality Act is the one we put here. The first thing we put in our submission was that we do not really know, particularly for people in vulnerable employment, what that is.

So far, a lot of this has focused on people in slightly higher earning, slightly more secure jobs. It has looked at flexibility and that sort of thing—whereas we are not quite sure. We think there needs to be a lot more research on this. If you are working on an assembly line and it starts at 9 am and finishes at 5 pm, you cannot not be there. What does that look like? There is not enough thought or enough research, essentially, into what it could look like for people like that.

Again, I come back to this: it is a cultural thing as well. There will not be much thought into that, because culturally it is not valued in that environment. Why would we look at that? Having the Government legislate for this, having the Government put someone senior right at the top and say, "This matters," will be the only way you will see things like that changing.

- Q33 Holly Lynch:** To give you an example, I recently met women from West Yorkshire police about some of the pressures on them, balancing childcare and one thing and another. One of the points they raised was whether it was women or their partners. There are specific specialist roles such as firearms deployment, for example, and the pressure there was



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that these are specialist jobs and so any scope for flexibility in parental care was that bit more reduced. Is it still acceptable to say that we need to look to accommodate these requests within those jobs? Is it acceptable to say that it just cannot be done for certain jobs?

Edward Davies: Yes. There are going to be jobs where this cannot apply. If there is a fire and the bell goes, you have to go. Absolutely, there has to be an element of that. Again, however, it is that shifting of culture; it is about changing the mentality of employers.

There could be scope, but it is not a priority. Culturally, as an employer, for 4,000 years I have not had to think about this when employing this guy, because there have been these gendered, defined roles. Suddenly, in the last 20 years, as an employer I am being made to think about this. Yes, absolutely, there will be moments when you have to do the job. But too often it is skewed towards, "I am going to make you do this job, because historically this is how we treat you in the workplace."

You see it in little, subtle ways as well, such as the way people react to a father who goes to pick up their child. You hear little comments like, "Oh, he is on the run again." You would never dream of saying that to a mother who was doing that, because they have that protected identity a bit more in the workplace—because they have fought for that for the last 50 years. No one has quite fought for the fathers in the same way.

Sarah Jackson: I just want to chip in on whether there are jobs where families cannot be accommodated. That is more of a yes and a no. What we are seeing is that organisations that you would not expect to be thinking about it are thinking about it. It is about honesty and managing expectations. The women in the West Yorkshire police were quite clear that there are things that firearms officers have to do.

Where people run into trouble is where an employee just assumes that flexible working means they can have flexible working. Where it works is where an employer thinks very clearly and carefully about the design of the role. Organisations as unlikely, if you like, as the RAF and BAE Systems Maritime – Naval Ships, who are shipbuilders, are looking at ways of supporting family life, and they are doing it by being honest about the limitations and the constraints. It is really important not to slip into a sense that there are some jobs that can never be flexible or family-friendly.

- Q34 **Holly Lynch:** Perhaps further to the point you made, Edward, culture is a really interesting element of this. Sometimes it is not about the role the Government or employers play, but about whether there are pressures in terms of social attitudes or cultural norms that are weighing really heavily on that decision making around parental care and the role of fathers. Do you have evidence of different cultural pressures from your hotline, Sarah?



Sarah Jackson: We have some evidence. For example, the 25% of fathers who ask us about benefits and finances do not talk about childcare. It is absolutely striking that childcare costs are not something they present with. That tells us something culturally. It is also clear that there is a lack of understanding about how they can use emergency leave or parental leave. They are very much stuck in an assumption that flexible working is the only way, and if they have been told no, there are no alternatives.

The answer is yes; they are making assumptions. This is not from the helpline, but again thinking about the focus groups in Scotland last year. There, couples were very clear that what they wanted to do was look after their kids themselves. Fathers would often say, "I would like to, but she earns less than me. I earn more and I have the steady job, so I am the one who should give up the fathering."

Edward Davies: It is really employer-specific at times, as well as being job-specific. I am thinking of other work we do at the CSJ. Last week we released something on housing for military families. As a soldier, being deployed is not something you can opt out of, but you can support families by looking at their housing, looking at the support they get on the base and things like that. That does not apply to a gas fitter; that does not apply to someone who works in a think-tank. Having an employer think about family stuff and what it means in that context is the really important thing.

Q35 **Ben Howlett:** You have provided some really interesting evidence in relation to the social and attitudinal barriers that are in place, but I will ask the question in a different way. I can sense where you are coming from in terms of the most effective ways in order to tackle some of these attitudinal or social barriers, but, specifically, what is the low-hanging fruit on this issue? What is the most effective way to tackle these barriers in a short, sharp way?

Edward Davies: One that comes up—it is a really basic one—is that, if you want to engage dads, the one time they have to engage with the state on becoming dads is at antenatal appointments. The Department of Health, for very good reasons, is not really interested in dads, because it is interested in making sure the mum and baby are safe.

Someone mentioned earlier that there was one dad to whom it meant so much that he was even looked at and spoken to at an antenatal appointment. Taking my CSJ hat off for a second, I have volunteered for a dads' charity for the last eight or nine years, and we do antenatal classes in hospital. We just go to these places and we say, "Right, we are going to do a dads-only course and we are just going to talk about your issues and what you want to talk about." We do that because this is the only place they will have to interact at some point, so this is the point we target.



Even then, we are entirely dependent on the goodwill of midwives to let us into the hospital. We have three or four hospitals where we have good relationships and the midwives say, "This is a good thing." It is the right spot to do it, because they are there and they are willing. They are desperate for information, and yet it is not quite set up. It is not a priority; it is not something they have to do; it is not something they are funded to do. It feels like that would not even cost much. There are people doing this for free all over the place. You could say, "Can you just make sure every dad turns up to an antenatal appointment? Can you make sure you talk to them at some point? Can you just make sure you address them, acknowledge they are in the room and that their role is important?" That is a Department of Health thing that could be done really easily. It would not cost much to engage them at that point.

Q36 Ben Howlett: Before I ask the others, that might also have an impact in relation to postnatal depression and the safety of men as well, which is really not talked about.

Edward Davies: On the courses I do, postnatal depression comes up every single time in mums and dads. It is totally unspoken about. Suicide is the biggest killer of men under 50 now. Why are we not doing something about that?

Duncan Fisher: I completely concur with that. I have spent the last 20 years developing information services and working with maternity services. I am now taking it internationally to Africa and the middle east. That is the key. In terms of low-hanging fruit, the key moment where fathers and institutions connect is around the birth. That is the maximum opportunity. It is very complicated, because it does not quite fit the NHS system, and there is a lack of resources. It is very fraught to try to get something done, but it definitely should be done.

In the last 20 years, we made a mistake in focusing too much on the institutions and changing them, rather than engaging with fathers and mothers themselves and changing what they want from a maternity service—or what they want from leave, for that matter. There is a communication piece to do, which can be done. It could be done digitally, which is what I am working on at the moment—digital communication to those fathers but also to the mothers about the importance of the father-child relationship. That is what it comes down to.

It is not that we do not believe, in this country, that the father-child relationship is important. The key thing is that we think the mother-child relationship is a whole lot more important. It is the comparison that counts. Whatever decision we make, we are always making it on that basis. "Yes, it is important—but that is more important, so we are going to prioritise." That happens across the board.

What you can do around that is simply inform mothers and fathers about the science, simply inform them about the nature of the father-child



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relationship compared with the mother-child relationship as well, and information—so that we start to form different expectations and a different demand.

We have been talking about employers and things. We do have to bear in mind that, for mothers and fathers, these barriers are inside our heads too. The easiest way to illustrate it is that, whenever mothers start to work, there is this issue of guilt. There is something like, “You are stepping away.” There is all this talk. Every time a father stops working and earning, he starts feeling inadequate. It is not every father or mother, but I have been doing this for 20 years. When I am not earning money, I feel terrible. It just gets you in the middle of the night. It is the same with many mothers who are pursuing careers. They have this niggling thing. Those barriers are barriers inside us. We also very much need to think about enabling employees, mothers and fathers, to tackle these issues and become confident with wider choices. We have to think about that, too.

Sarah Jackson: My low-hanging fruit would be, as I have already said, that we should have a day-one right to paternity leave. It cannot be right that a woman goes into a new job and, if she discovers she is pregnant the next day, she has a right to take maternity leave, but if a father goes into a new job and his partner becomes pregnant the next day, he has to wait 26 weeks before he can even talk about it. It is only two weeks’ leave. It should be a day-one right; it should be for workers as well as employees; and it should be paid at 90%, like maternity leave.

Professor Tina Miller: I agree with all of that, but I also just want to emphasise what an incredible opportunity the moment is when a man becomes a father for the first time. Antenatally, we can do a lot of preparation, but that is really a life-changing moment for mothers and fathers. For all sorts of men, who suddenly see that they are going to try to do this in their life or whatever, it is a really great opportunity to grasp. But the policies currently signal, “Yes, you are important here for those first 10 days, if you are lucky enough to have paternity leave.” Then it is, “Okay, now you are back in the workplace.”

Shared parental leave is not filtering through as currently constituted, in terms of, “You are going to continue to be equally important.” We have signalled from such an early point, and it is almost deflating. This really is an opportunity for fathers of any ages to be suddenly thinking, “Right, okay, my life is going to be like this. I am going to do this for this child.” It is such a rich moment to try to make a difference.

If we want to reorganise the way in which we organise caring and work, you have to be in there signalling something different from what is currently being signalled. It is a great opportunity, but it is not currently being used in the most effective way.

Q37 **Ben Howlett:** I am going to be really cheeky and ask another question, if you don’t mind. Yesterday, I found out that one of my friends who is



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married to another man is about to adopt a baby. Obviously, it is a very interesting area. There is a growing number of men who are wanting to adopt. I have not heard anything yet in relation to same-sex male couples who want to take on, from an early age—from birth—paternity rights. Do you have any comments in relation to that and access to services as well? It is an area that this Committee has perhaps not necessarily focused on as much as we should have.

Sarah Jackson: We see very few, if any, examples on the helpline—perhaps not surprisingly, because it is a small group of parents. But I would imagine that you would see similar issues that are faced by lone parents or lone fathers, particularly those who are not the primary carer and so have organised access on particular days or particular weekends. A fairly common call we will get from a lone father in that situation is, “I have everything arranged so that I see my kids here, here and here in the month, and my shifts are being changed.”

The employer does not think through the fact that this is a man who has family responsibilities. There is an employer blindness there. That is what same-sex male couples might encounter, in the same way that young fathers encounter it. Employers do not expect a man to have childcare responsibilities that are immovable.

Q38 **Chair:** How do you change that? What has been effective elsewhere in changing that?

Sarah Jackson: I recommend giving more teeth to the right to request, as previously suggested. Those fathers have to have somewhere to take their lack of rights—or, rather, they are rights but they are rights that are very difficult to access.

Q39 **Chair:** Before I bring Flick in, there are just a couple of other things I wanted to ask. In terms of the evidence about changes in employment practices, such as increasing freelance, agency or casual working, is there anything you would like to share with us about how that particularly affects fathers? We heard quite a lot of that when we did our gender pay gap inquiry around mothers, but is there any evidence about how those changes in employment practice are affecting fathers?

Edward Davies: This is not necessarily evidence, but I am acutely aware at the moment that the industrial strategy Green Paper is out, which is looking at the future of the nation’s industry and productivity and what that all looks like.

There are a number of areas like this in terms of changing work practices: you have a growing gig economy, growing shift work, and different contracts coming up. Again, this is something that tends to be held by BEIS at the moment; it is the business of the business Department. Again, this is another argument for just saying that there needs to be someone at a level above departmental level, up in the Cabinet Office or somewhere like that, who can put their finger down into each of these areas.



The CSJ is an organisation interested in family, but even we are responding to the industrial strategy from the viewpoint of education, skills and later-life development. We are not responding to parts of family. That is not evidence of the type you asked for, but there is this sort of wider thing about work that happens in isolation in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and does not have family input. The industrial strategy Green Paper is out right now as a perfect example of that. I wonder how many family groups are putting into that, and I wonder whether the Department cares that they are.

Sarah Jackson: I know we have talked a lot about what evidence there is today. Now would be an extremely good moment to do a fifth work-life balance survey. If you remember, the business Department did four work-life balance surveys. They talked to employers and to employees. At the time in the early 2000s, it was very much about understanding how ready employers and employees were for flexible working. It also fed into the parental leave discussions. There would be a really sound rationale now for a fifth work-life balance survey, which could particularly look at fathers and leave. If it could focus on SMEs in particular, those are the big gaps we have now.

Q40 **Mrs Drummond:** To do a quick plug, Edward, the Women and Work APPG are doing women in the industrial strategy, so perhaps we could have a submission from you. We have an inquiry over the next year; we will write a report at the end of the year. Any help on that would be brilliant.

Right—sorry—I will go to the last set of questions, you will be glad to know, looking at international comparisons and what other countries do better. Where are we in relation to other countries? We have touched on this a little bit, and it is probably quite poor. Where are we in relation to other countries? Then I will come on to the policies and workplace practices we should cherry-pick from abroad. Can we start with where we are compared with others?

Professor Tina Miller: We are better than America, on a positive note.

Mrs Drummond: Probably increasingly so, I suspect.

Professor Tina Miller: But we do quite poorly compared with the Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden. I work a lot of with colleagues in Sweden on this area, where you really see the cultural shifts that have taken place around expectations of working, caring, who is doing what and the sharing.

In fact, as you were saying earlier, Duncan, we made this clear a while ago, before the shared parental leave policy came in. We have learned a lot from other countries, and the only way to make this work appears to be non-transferable leave for the father. It was probably not a good choice of language, but when I said we should force men to take the



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leave, I meant that we need to have that non-transferable element in there, rather than just leaving it as an open choice between mothers and fathers.

Germany has an interesting system. Did you talk about Germany earlier?

Duncan Fisher: Yes, a bit. They have a particular system. On this, I would recommend the work of Peter Moss. I found out that he has not made a written submission, which is a pity, but he is absolutely the most knowledgeable person on international comparisons—what works and what does not in other countries. I strongly recommend that you look at his work, because he and his team have analysed this.

The international systems are very complicated and very different. In Germany, you have an incentive system. If both parents take leave, they get a bit more of it. There are things like that. They are very complicated and detailed things. As I say, out of that they synthesised those three things I said earlier: protected leave entitlements that you cannot give away; finance; and backing it up with conviction and public information campaigns, so that you attack the culture.

But it is not about forcing people to do this. Often on the daddy month it is, "Oh, that is social engineering." The liberal argument is, "That is social engineering." It is not; it is just taking the lid off the constraints on choices and letting people choose a bit more flexibly. No country has achieved equality in that sense. There are problems in Sweden—there are problems everywhere. No one has arrived yet; they are just a lot further down the road than we are. We are quite far behind.

Q41 **Mrs Drummond:** Is it Sweden where they have reduced the hours of work as well, so that people can get home earlier? Which country is that? One of those Scandinavian countries has said, "Work finishes at three," or something like that.

Edward Davies: Yes, they are trying a six-hour day.

Tracy Brabin: Was it just Wednesday afternoons?

Sarah Jackson: That trial has just finished. It was a smaller town in Sweden, and they reduced the working week to 30 hours.

Q42 **Chair:** Did it work?

Sarah Jackson: It was very expensive. We are waiting for the academic study evidence, but what I have read about it is that it worked in the sense that people liked it, not surprisingly. It was really good for family life. The particular case study I saw was carers in a care home. The standard of care had gone up, because people's shifts were shorter. They were not tired and so could focus on the people they were caring for.

The view is that, if it could be afforded, it is an extremely good way of approaching things. Certainly, we suffer from long hours in the UK. You will be happy to hear that our men in the UK are no longer working the



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longest hours in Europe; we are now second or third longest. But it does mean that about 30% of men are working 48 hours or more a week. If they are fathers—and they are likely to be, because fathers work longer hours than non-fathers—a 48-hour-plus week means you are probably not seeing your children.

You are probably leaving the house before they get up and coming back too late to put them to bed. The cuddling that Duncan is advocating is not happening, because the child is asleep.

Q43 Mrs Drummond: Are there any models we should be adapting or policies you would like to see put into this country from abroad, given all the studies you have done?

Edward Davies: I do not know whether it counts as international, but you mentioned Scotland's Year of the Dad earlier. It was a very low-cost, straightforward thing to do to say that this is a priority. I think the Scottish Government spent about £400,000 on it. We are not talking about a hugely expensive thing, but just a campaign where we say, "We are going to prioritise this." That is very close to home.

Again, it is not about billboards and things. A lot of this stuff is happening. There are small organisations all over the country doing this stuff already. It is about highlighting them, highlighting best practice, encouraging them and really pushing.

Sarah Jackson: The Year of the Dad was driven by Fathers Network Scotland, who are a network. They are really well connected. They engaged a lot of fathers' organisations and grassroots organisations, and they had a lot of events. It was a really wonderful, lively and engaging year.

Q44 Mrs Drummond: When did that finish?

Sarah Jackson: It just did.

Q45 Mrs Drummond: We have to see the knock-on effects and see whether it has changed culture in the workplace, haven't we? It will probably take another year until we get the feedback, which will be interesting.

Edward Davies: At the CSJ we have not really looked at international comparators, but we do across all our work. Without wanting to bang the same drum again, it is that thing about culture. Thinking about how you transpose an individual policy to a different culture is quite important. It is important not to think that, because this policy works in Sweden, we can just transpose it and it will work in the UK. If you are pulling it into a different culture, there will be quite a different outcome.

Mrs Drummond: That is the point, isn't it?

Chair: That is great. Are there any other questions? Thank you so much for your time today. We are incredibly grateful for both your oral evidence and the written evidence you have given to us. We will be using



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that extensively, I am sure, in the report we will be publishing in the next few weeks. Thank you very much for your time.