

Fatherhood Institute evidence to the Business and Trade Committee Make Work Pay: Employment Rights Bill inquiry

Paternity leave

We welcome the provisions set out in the Bill to make paternity leave a Day 1 right. This change will increase the number of fathers eligible to this important form of family leave, make it easier for families to plan their finances, and help change the employment culture.

However, we note that self-employed fathers and those on agency and zero-hours contracts will remain ineligible, and we would urge the Government to further widen eligibility to include such fathers, many of whom will be on low incomes and thus struggle to spend time with their newborns¹.

We would also stress that there is strong evidence from both the UK and overseas that to adequately protect workers, improve security at work and raise living standards, paternity leave needs not just to be a Day 1 right, but also to be paid at a high salary replacement level. The Bill makes no provision to improve statutory paternity pay, leaving many fathers – and especially those on lower incomes – in the position of not being able to take paternity leave.

The UK's statutory paternity offer is the least generous in Europe, and 40th out of 43 OECD countries². It costs an average-earning UK father more than £1,000³ to take two weeks' paternity leave paid at the statutory rate – which is less than half the National Living Wage⁴.

Unsurprisingly given this context, take-up of statutory paternity leave in the UK is low by international standards. HMRC data suggests a take-up rate for paternity leave of just 32 men per 100 live births. In the 18 OECD countries with recent available data about paternity leave take-up⁵, the average was 57 men per 100 live births – and in seven of these countries, take-up was greater than 70 men per 100 live births⁶. Five offered paid paternity leave equivalent to at least 2 weeks at 100% salary

¹ A [2023 TUC survey](#) found that only 31% of self-employed fathers took time off when their partner had a baby.

² Fatherhood Institute [chart](#), based on OECD 2023 data.

³ Qualifying employee fathers in the UK are eligible to two weeks' paternity leave. The statutory rate for paternity pay is £184.03 per week (from April 2024). Two weeks' statutory paternity pay is £368.06 (2 x £184.03). Two weeks' pay at the UK average for a full-time working man (£695.60 per week: Office for National Statistics, April 2023: median weekly full-time pay for full-time men) is £1,391.20 (2 x £695.60). The difference is £1,023.04

⁴ Paid at £11.44 per hour, this works out at £400.40 for a 35-hour working week

⁵ We refer here to paternity leave, i.e. leave taken by fathers/ non-birthing partners around the period of the birth, rather than other forms of leave, including parental leave.

⁶ OECD Family Database, p3. The seven countries with take-up of >70 men per 100 live births were Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Estonia.

replacement; and all seven provided a package of earmarked (father-only) leave that was substantial in length, and well-paid⁷. Of the top ten countries for paternity leave take-up, eight also featured in the top 20 of the international league table for the overall amount of paid leave earmarked for fathers (including paternity and reserved parental leave)⁸.

Several UK surveys have found that many fathers either cannot afford to take paternity leave and/or are left financially unstable by the inadequate paid leave on offer⁹.

The even lower take-up of Shared Parental Leave and Pay – the previous Government's estimate was that 1% of eligible mothers and 5% of eligible fathers used SPL¹⁰ and more recent data suggests fathers' take-up is less than 2%¹¹– provides further evidence that eligibility for leave, in and of itself, does not drive behaviour change.

Parental leave

As above, we welcome the provisions in the Bill to make statutory parental leave a Day 1 right. However, this leave remains unpaid and as such is unaffordable for most fathers, who in most couple families are either the sole or main earner¹².

As discussed above, the Bill makes no provision to improve statutory paternity pay. Arguably an even bigger omission from the Bill is provision to improve on the **length and type of well-paid leave available to fathers in their baby's first year.**

⁷ The overall package of earmarked leave for fathers in the seven countries was, in weeks of full-time equivalent pay, Luxembourg 20 weeks; Netherlands 11.1 weeks; Slovenia 10.7 weeks; Finland 10.5 weeks; Sweden 10.8 weeks, Denmark 5.3 weeks; Estonia 4.3 weeks.

⁸ The eight countries that feature in the top 10 for paternity leave take-up AND in the top 20 for overall amount of paid leave earmarked for fathers were Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania.

⁹ A [2023 TUC survey](#) of 2,006 parents with children aged less than 6 found that 53% of families struggled financially when fathers took paternity leave, and 35% of fathers with a household income of £25,000 or less didn't take leave. Almost a fifth (18%) of fathers were still doing some work whilst on paternity leave – rising to 30% of those who worked part-time. A [2023 Pregnant Then Screwed survey](#) (see page 3) found 43% of recent fathers citing financial hardship as a reason for not taking their full leave entitlement. A [2022 Fatherhood Institute/Koru Kids survey](#) of 1,505 parents of children aged five or under, found that 32% of fathers were left feeling financially unstable by their inadequate paternity leave.

¹⁰ For more detail see the Government's SPL [evaluation](#). Figures published recently in response to a [Parliamentary Question](#) suggest that in 2023/24, 17,200 individuals received Shared Parental Pay: a growth of around a third since 2021/22, but still representing a tiny percentage of the UK workforce.

¹¹ The Dad Shift found that 10,600 men claimed shared parental pay in 2023/24, which represents 1.7% of the number of women claiming statutory maternity pay in that year.

¹² Among UK families with at least one working parent, only one mother in five (22%) earns even half the family income; even in families where both parents are in paid work, only a third of mothers contribute half or more. Cory, G. and Stirling, A. (2015). Who's breadwinning in Europe? A comparative analysis of maternal breadwinning in Great Britain and Germany. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Aside from paternity leave, the only ways for UK fathers to take additional leave are to take (a) annual leave¹³ and/or (b) sick leave – neither of which are designed to support men to participate in caregiving or other unpaid domestic work, and should be used by fathers, as well as other employees, for their intended purpose; or (c) for the mother – assuming both she and the father are eligible (which in most families is not the case) – to share some of her maternity leave with him, via the current shared parental leave system (SPL).

Shared parental leave – misnamed, since it is in fact **transferable maternity leave** – is simply not addressing the problem UK fathers and mothers face: that of lacking real choices around the sharing of caregiving and earning. Only two-fifths of families qualify; and most of those who do cannot afford for the father to take the leave¹⁴, and/or do not want to shorten the mother's leave.

The Government's own evaluation¹⁵ found tiny percentages of eligible parents using SPL, and a recent independent evaluation¹⁶ found that the SPL scheme has failed to facilitate both increased take-up and increased leave length for fathers, since its introduction in 2015.

International evidence shows that giving fathers **their own, well-paid parental leave**, rather than simply improving the paternity leave offer, is likely to have the biggest impact on gender equality – freeing mothers to return to work earlier and thus helping the Government achieve its goal of fast growth, while requiring employers to recognise, support and protect fathers wishing to take on a greater share of parenting responsibility alongside their breadwinning role. It has been estimated that more extensive paid leave for new fathers could help cut the gender employment gap, increasing economic output across all UK local authorities by £23bn (around 1% of GDP)¹⁷.

A key paper from Pregnant Then Screwed/ Centre for Progressive Policy/ Women in Data¹⁸, identified that countries offering fathers at least six weeks' well-paid leave had a 4 percentage point smaller gender wage gap and 3.4 percentage point smaller labour force participation gap, than those offering less.

¹³ A [Zurich Insurance survey](#) found that a third of fathers were forced to take holiday to spend time with their newborn because of low paternity leave allowance

¹⁴ Shared Parental Pay is paid at the same low statutory rate as paternity leave, unless employers choose to enhance this pay. The vast majority do not – and even among employers known to offer 'top tier' parenting leave, 78% of those offering gender-differentiated leave (55% of the total) do not match their shared parental leave offers for fathers/partners to their enhanced maternity leave offers. For more detail see this [Personnel Today article](#).

¹⁵ See footnote 9

¹⁶ The evaluation was led by Dr Joanna Clifton-Sprigg at the University of Bath, and is summarised [here](#).

¹⁷ Centre for Progressive Policy. (2023). [Fair Growth](#).

¹⁸ Centre for Progressive Policy, Pregnant Then Screwed & Women in Data (2023). [Leave in the lurch: Paternity leave, gender equality and the UK economy](#).

Fatherhood Institute analysis shows that among the 12 countries identified as achieving these smaller pay and labour participation gaps:

- **All but one offer fathers their own, paid parental leave:** whereas only eight offer paternity leave
- **The parental leave available in all these 11 countries is also longer than the paternity leave (where offered).** Only one of the countries (France) offers more paternity leave (4.6 weeks), than parental leave (3.5 weeks)
- Countries on the list which have made the greatest strides towards gender equality **offer substantial, well-paid periods of reserved parental leave for fathers.** For example, Norway offers 15 weeks' worth of fully paid reserved parental leave for fathers; Iceland, 14.3 weeks and Sweden, 10 weeks¹⁹. Two of these three countries do not offer paternity leave.
- By contrast, **only four of the 26 comparator countries** offer reserved parental leave for fathers, while 21 offer paternity leave.

Well-paid parental leave gives fathers the opportunity to become confident, competent caregivers for their infants – ideally solo, and later in the baby's first year, when the mother is better able and more likely to return to paid work.

Benefits from fathers' greater involvement in childcare²⁰ and housework²¹ include improved child outcomes²² and development²³; father-child relationship quality²⁴ and quantity²⁵; fathers' and mothers' wellbeing²⁶ and relationships²⁷ and gender equality – narrowing the gender wage gap

¹⁹ These countries were third, first and fifth in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index [rankings](#) for 2024.

²⁰ Pragg, B., & Knoester, C. (2017). [Parental Leave Use among Disadvantaged Fathers](#). *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(8), 1157-1185.

²¹ Tamm, M. (2019). [Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation](#). *Labour Economics*, 59, 184-197.

²² For example, in Sweden introduction of a 'daddy month' increased the probability of girls' doing a maths-intensive programme in upper secondary education. See Mikkelsen, S., & Peter, N. (2024). [More dads at home, more girls in maths-intensive studies? Evidence from a parental leave reform](#). *Economica*.

²³ Huerta, M. C., Adema, W., Baxter, J., Han, W.-J., & Waldfogel, J. (2013). [Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related?](#) Evidence from Four OECD Countries.

²⁴ Communication, closeness, involvement. See Petts, R. J., Knoester, C., & Waldfogel, J. (2020). [Fathers' Paternity Leave-Taking and Children's Perceptions of Father-Child Relationships in the United States](#). *Sex Roles*, 82(3-4), 173-188.

²⁵ Norman, H., Elliot, M., & Vanchugova, D. (2023). How Important Is Early Paternal Engagement? Deriving Longitudinal Measures of Fathers' Childcare Engagement and Exploring Structural Relationships With Prior Engagement and Employment Hours. *Journal of Family Issues*, 0(0), 0192513X231214642. doi:10.1177/0192513x231214642

²⁶ Korsgren, P., & Lent, M. v. (2022). [Earmarked Paternity Leave and Well-Being](#); Lidbeck, M., Bernhardsson, S., & Tjus, T. (2018). Division of parental leave and perceived parenting stress among mothers and fathers. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 36(4), 406-420. doi:10.1080/02646838.2018.1468557

²⁷ Arnalds, Á. A., Eydal, G. B., & Gíslason, I. V. (2022). Paid Parental Leave in Iceland: Increasing Gender Equality at Home and on the Labour Market. In C. de la Porte, G. B. Eydal, J. Kauko, D. Nohrstedt, P. t Hart, &

through mothers' earlier return to work²⁸ and increased earnings²⁹. Supporting boys and men to 'lean in' to their caring instincts through well-paid, non-transferable statutory parental leave reserved for fathers may also help turn them away from harmful ideas about manhood.

We note and welcome the Government's pledge to **review the parental leave system** in its first year, and we urge the Government to confirm that this will take the form of **a full public consultation with a wide remit** to consider holistically the role that an improved statutory paternity offer, including both well-paid paternity leave and well-paid, non-transferable parental leave reserved for fathers, could make to enhanced outcomes for the UK's families and economy.

Employment policy should not, as is currently the case, frame fathers' caregiving time as an economic inconvenience. Rather it should welcome, celebrate and leverage it, as an investment in gender equality, better child outcomes, transferable skills and economic growth.

Protection from unfair dismissal

We welcome the provisions in the Bill to make it unlawful to dismiss employees during pregnancy and within six months of their return from statutory family leave. We would welcome further clarification that this change will include fathers/partners returning from paternity leave and other forms of family leave – including those currently available to them (unpaid parental leave and shared parental leave) and the additional leave we hope the Government will make available following its parental leave review (paid, non-transferable parental leave reserved for fathers).

Flexible working

We welcome the provisions in the Bill to make flexible working a Day 1 right, but urge the Government to go further, by introducing an advertising duty on employers³⁰. Evidence suggests that more than half of new fathers who request flexible working don't get the flexibility they ask for³¹, and that fathers who seek to work flexibly face 'fatherhood forfeits'³².

B. S. Tranøy (Eds.), *Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Olafsson, A., & Steingrimsdottir, H. (2020). [How Does Daddy at Home Affect Marital Stability?](#) *The Economic Journal*, 130(629), 1471-1500.

²⁸ Boll, C., & Nikolka, T. (2024). [The Impact of a Parental Leave Benefit Reform on Parents' Leave-taking, Labor Supply and Childcare Arrangements](#).

²⁹ Johannson, E.-A. (2010). [The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings](#). This study explored the effect, in Sweden, of parental leave - own and spouse's - on subsequent earnings. Each month the father stays on parental leave increases the mother's earnings (four years later) by 6.7%.

³⁰ For a rationale on this, see this [summary report](#) by Pregnant Then Screwed and others.

³¹ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/half-new-dads-dont-get-flexibility-they-ask-work-tuc>

We believe an advertising duty would bring about a change in employment culture to normalise flexible working wherever possible, to the benefit of mothers and fathers and their children, and of the UK economy.

³² Kelland, Jasmine, Duncan Lewis, and Virginia Fisher. 2022. "Viewed with Suspicion, Considered Idle and Mocked-Working Caregiving Fathers and Fatherhood Forfeits." *Gender, Work & Organization* 29(5), 1578–1593. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12850>.