

Written evidence from Fatherhood Institute [SPL0028]

Summary of evidence from the Fatherhood Institute

[The Fatherhood Institute](#) is a UK charity working to create a more equitable society in which both mothers and fathers are valued and supported as carers and earners.

In comparison to other leading economies, the UK's statutory paternity leave is under-funded, and the shared parental leave scheme¹ badly designed.

As a result, our parenting leave² system fails to support birth mothers and fathers/second parents to share their responsibilities for earning and caregiving in their baby's first year.

The UK thus misses vital opportunities to reduce the gender pay gap³, stimulate economic growth⁴ and boost family outcomes⁵ by increasing men's capacity to take an equal role as hands-on parents, and build closer relationships with their children⁶.

International evidence shows that giving fathers/second parents a substantial period of well-paid caregiving leave (a reserved quota of *parental leave*, which could be taken later in the baby's first year and ideally solo) is key to achieving such outcomes. In this paper we provide examples of other countries' systems that are based on this model.

Our [6 weeks for dads](#) campaign calls for all UK fathers⁷ to be eligible to six weeks' well-paid statutory leave in their baby's first year, as a minimum. This would be made up of two weeks' paternity leave, to be taken after the birth, and a 'daddy month' (four weeks) of non-transferable parental leave, to be taken at any point in the baby's first year – ideally solo.

Both periods of leave would be paid at 90% of average weekly earnings, just as the first six weeks of maternity leave is now. Both would be a Day

¹ Misnamed, since it is, in fact, a *transferable maternity leave* scheme.

² We use this as a 'catch-all' term for all leaves (and related pay) designed to support parents in their baby's first year – including maternity leave, paternity leave and shared parental leave.

³ The UK's gender pay gap for all employees was 13.1% in April 2024, and 7% for full-time employees. Source: [ONS, October 2024](#).

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation has estimated that increasing the statutory paternity offer to 6 weeks at 90% salary reimbursement could deliver £2.6bn of long-term growth to the UK economy. Source: [Politics Home](#)

⁵ Including improved maternal and paternal mental health, reduced relationship stress and improved child development and educational outcomes. For more on these, see section 5.3 below.

⁶ Studies of adolescents find consistently that children of both sexes report feeling closer to their mother than their father, and being more likely to talk to her about things that matter to them. Source: Fatherhood Institute, [The kids are alright](#) (pp27-8).

⁷ Although our focus is fathers, we include LGBT+ co-parents.

1 right for employed fathers/second parents, with a payment 'cap' for high earners. We suggest a Paternity Allowance for self-employed fathers, who are currently ineligible to paternity leave: like the Maternity Allowance available for mothers ineligible to maternity leave.

We estimate the cost of this model to be £1.73 billion, but this would be more than offset by the resulting boost to UK long-term growth, and savings due to positive impacts on other key outcomes.

February 2025

Our evidence in full

1. The current UK parenting leave offer

In the UK, eligible birth mothers have an individual right to 52 weeks' maternity leave⁸, 39 of which are paid (the first six weeks at 90% of average earnings and the next 33 weeks at the statutory rate of £184.03 per week or 90% of average earnings – whichever is lower).

Employed fathers can take up to two weeks' paternity leave, paid at this same statutory rate⁹, which is less than half the National Living Wage¹⁰.

To be eligible for paternity leave, UK fathers must have worked continuously for the same employer for at least 26 weeks by the time of applying to take the leave – 15 weeks before the baby's due date. The Employment Rights Bill proposes to remove this qualification and make paternity leave and shared parental leave a Day 1 right for employees¹¹; this change is expected to come into force in 2026. So far it is not clear what will happen to statutory paternity or shared parental pay, either in terms of their level and any qualifying period.

Aside from paternity leave, the only way for employed UK fathers to take additional leave is to take annual leave, and/or for the mother – assuming both she and the father are eligible¹² – to transfer some¹³ of her maternity leave to him, via the shared parental leave (SPL) scheme.

Self-employed or other non-employed fathers are ineligible to either statutory paternity or shared parental leave, so they must fund any time spent looking after their baby and/or partner from their own resources. More than a quarter of fathers (27%¹⁴) fit into this category. Survey data suggests that more than two-thirds of self-employed fathers take no time off when their baby is born¹⁵.

⁸ This is the second-highest mothers' entitlement in the OECD, after Greece.

⁹ The UK statutory paternity offer (i.e. the amount of paid leave, including paternity leave and parental leave earmarked specifically for fathers/second parents) is the least generous in Europe, and [40th out of 43 countries in the OECD](#).

¹⁰ The National Living Wage is £11.44 per hour, and works out at £400.40 for a 35-hour working week

¹¹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67125ac48a62ffa8df77b38d/bereavement-paternity-and-unpaid-parental-leave.pdf>

¹² In its original impact assessment conducted before the introduction of shared parental leave, the Government estimated that 285,000 families would be eligible. The total number of live births in 2015, the year the scheme was introduced, was 787,603 (England & Wales, 697,852; Scotland, 65,536; Northern Ireland, 24,215). This suggests that fewer than two-fifths (36%) of families were eligible at that point.

¹³ Up to 50 weeks can be transferred

¹⁴ This estimate comes from a survey commissioned by the then-Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. For more details see section 3.1 below.

¹⁵ For more details see section 3.1 below

2. Background context

2.1 Patterns of earning and caregiving

Research shows that men have higher average incomes than women, which creates economic incentives for families to divide parental leave-taking in such a way that fathers minimise their time out of work, unless previous earnings are fully replaced¹⁶. Traditionalist attitudes about mothers' and fathers' roles (among parents themselves, and their employers) are also persistent and help keep uptake of parental leave by fathers low¹⁷ unless they are consciously disrupted.

Fathers in the UK are usually the higher earner in parent-couples: in families where one or both parents work, 78% of fathers contribute at least half the household income¹⁸. Fathers in couple households with dependent children are still much more likely than mothers to work full-time, especially when the children are young¹⁹, and to work long hours²⁰.

In the UK, today's fathers already devote much more time to looking after their children than their own fathers did. Official data found working fathers in 2022 spending two-thirds of the time working mothers were spending on unpaid childcare²¹. But this shift in time-use has derived mostly from fathers reducing the time they spend on sleep and leisure: the gender gap in the amount of time parents spend on paid work remains²².

2.2 Comparisons with other countries

¹⁶ See, for example, Marynissen, L. et al. (2019), "Fathers' Parental Leave Uptake in Belgium and Sweden: Self-Evident or Subject to Employment Characteristics?", *Social Sciences*, Vol. 8/11, p. 312, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8110312> and Kaufman, G. (2017), "Barriers to equality: why British fathers do not use parental leave", *Community, Work & Family*, Vol. 21/3, pp. 310-325, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2017.1307806>.

¹⁷ Li, Q., C. Knoester and R. Petts (2021), "Cross-national attitudes about paid parental leave offerings for fathers", *Social Science Research*, Vol. 96, p. 102540, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2021.102540> and Agerström, J., M. Carlsson and A. Erenel (2023), "The effect of social gender norms on parental leave uptake intentions: evidence from two survey experiments on prospective fathers and mothers", *Applied Economics*, pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2022.2142192>.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 84.6% of fathers, and 34.2% of mothers, with a youngest dependent child aged 0-2 were in full-time paid employment. Source: Office for National Statistics Working and Workless Households in the UK (Oct-Dec 2022).

²⁰ In couple families 75.4% of fathers (53.1% of mothers) with a youngest dependent child aged 0-2 work 30-44 hours per week and 18.1% of fathers (4% of mothers) work more than 45 hours a week. Source: Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey (Apr-Jun 2021)

²¹ Time-use data suggests that the time spent by fathers on unpaid childcare as a percentage of time spent by mothers was 12-15% in 1961 (source: Henz, U. (2019). [Fathers' involvement with their children in the United Kingdom: Recent trends and class differences](#). Demographic Research, Vol. 40, Article 30: 865-896. In 2022, the percentage was 65% for working fathers (source: Fatherhood Institute (2022), [Closing the Gap](#)).

²² For every 60 minutes spent by working fathers on paid work, working mothers spent 45 minutes in 2022. Source: Fatherhood Institute [Closing the Gap](#).

Most OECD member countries now provide statutory rights to paid paternity leave directly after childbirth; the average length of this leave is 2.3 weeks. Spain has the longest paternity leave, offering eligible fathers up to 16 weeks of paid paternity leave, at full income replacement for the average earner. Across OECD countries that base payments on gross earnings, fathers are on average entitled to 1.4 full-rate equivalent weeks. UK paternity leave – which can be taken in one or two blocks of one working week (effectively ten working days) equates to 0.4 full-rate equivalent weeks²³. Four OECD countries provide a week or less of paid birth leave to fathers, and nine offer no paid paternity leave at all²⁴.

While the UK was earlier than many countries to introduce its 2-week paternity leave in 2003, it has fallen behind many other comparator countries in its statutory paternity offer²⁵ since then. In 1995 only 13% of countries across income levels offered paid paternity leave, but 56% were doing so by 2022. Among high income countries, 70% were offering paid paternity leave in 2022, and 75% of countries in Europe and Central Asia were doing so. Almost half (49%) offered at least 2 weeks, and 13 countries reserved 14 weeks²⁶ or more of paid leave for fathers.

As well as offering one of the least generous statutory paternity offers in the OECD²⁷, the UK is an outlier, especially among higher income countries, in the huge gap (50 weeks) between mothers' and fathers' entitlements to leave in the baby's first year. By 2022 most countries in western Europe had a gap of 12 weeks or less, and eight countries had also introduced incentives²⁸ for fathers to take parental leave²⁹.

Among OECD countries, 22 were offering fathers more than six weeks' earmarked leave paid at the equivalent of 100% of salary in 2023³⁰. And 24 countries had ensured mothers have access to the minimum 14 weeks of paid leave recommended by the International Labour Organisation, while also ensuring either that paid leave was reserved for fathers with a

²³ Fluchtman, J. (2023). Supporting equal parenting: paid parental leave in [Joining Forces for Gender Equality What is Holding us Back?](#). OECD, 9 May 2023.

²⁴ Fluchtman, 2023.

²⁵ We use the term 'paternity offer' as a 'catch-all' term to include paternity leave (a period of leave to be taken around the time of the birth, to enable fathers to support mothers' recovery and breastfeeding establishment, and to bond with the baby) and father-specific parental leave (periods of leave intended to enable participation in hands-on baby care).

²⁶ Earle, A., Raub, A., Sprague, A., & Heymann, J. (2023). Progress towards gender equality in paid parental leave: an analysis of legislation in 193 countries from 1995–2022. *Community, Work & Family*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2023.2226809>

²⁷ The UK's statutory paternity offer is 40th out of 43 countries in the [OECD league table](#); only Israel, the US and New Zealand, which give no paid leave to fathers, offer less.

²⁸ Austria, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea and Portugal (Earle et al, 2023)

²⁹ Nearly twice as many countries specifically reserve infant caregiving leave (referred to in this document, and more widely, as *parental leave* – as distinct from *maternity leave* and *paternity leave*) for women as do for men (186 vs. 109), and the gender inequalities in duration are even greater. In 145 countries, fathers have less than 2 weeks of paid leave reserved for this use, while no country reserves less than 2 weeks of paid leave for mothers.

³⁰ https://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/files/ugd/efff1d_4d71c418c2e44aecb6ed84a11a15bcc7.pdf

gender disparity of 12 weeks or less, or that there were incentives for fathers to take shared leave³¹.

3. Affordability and take-up of leave by fathers

The current rates of UK statutory paternity and shared parental pay mean that taking such leave is unaffordable for fathers in many families (assuming they are eligible in the first place – which many are not).

3.1 Paternity leave

Fatherhood Institute analysis shows that if an average-earning, full-time working man takes two weeks' statutory paternity leave at the current rate, he is £1,023.04 worse off, compared to what he would earn if he carried on working³².

Unsurprisingly, therefore, take-up of statutory paternity leave in the UK is low – leaving too many mothers with limited or no support while they recover from childbirth and establish breastfeeding – the two elements of early parenthood that only they can provide.

An Institute for Employment Studies [survey](#) of 3,000 new parents commissioned by the then-Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy³³ found that two in five fathers (41%) did not access statutory paternity leave, with more than a quarter (27%) saying they had no entitlement. One in five (18%) fathers took no time off when their child was born. Take-up of paternity leave was 70% among employee fathers, but 38% among those with 'worker' status.

More recently, a 2023 TUC survey³⁴ found that a fifth (21%) of eligible fathers didn't take paternity leave. This rose to 35% for fathers in households with an income under £25,000. More than half (53%) of families struggled financially when fathers did take paternity leave, and almost seven in ten (69%) self-employed fathers took no time off when their baby was born.

In 2023-4 just 207,600 individuals received SPP (see Table 1 below). Given that there were 656,969 live births in the UK in 2023³⁵, the number

³¹ Earle et al, 2023.

³² 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

³³ Data for the Parental Rights Survey (2019) was collected from children born in 2017. For more details see visit <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/parental-rights-survey-2019>.

³⁴ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/1-2-families-struggle-financially-when-dads-take-paternity-leave-tuc-poll>

³⁵ Made up of 591,072 in England and Wales (Source: [ONS](#)), 45,935 in Scotland (Source: [National Records of Scotland](#)) and 19,962 in Northern Ireland (Source: [NI Statistics & Research Agency](#)).

of individuals receiving SPP (207,600) represented just 31.6 men per live birth that year³⁶.

Table 1: Individuals in receipt of statutory paternity pay³⁷

Year (April to March)	Total
2019-20	208,000
2020-21	176,400
2021-22	204,200
2022-23	195,300
2023-24	207,600

Comparative international data on men’s take-up of paternity leave is patchy, but in the 18 OECD countries with available data, an average of 57 men per 100 live births took leave: almost twice the rate in the UK; and in seven countries, take-up was greater than 70 men per 100 live births³⁸. Among 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*³⁹.

3.2 Shared parental leave

Official figures show that since shared parental leave and pay were introduced in 2015, take-up has been extremely low. Recent data shows that in 2023-4, only 17,200 received shared parental pay, of whom 10,600 (61.6%) were men and 6,600 (38.4%) women (see Table 2 below). So just 1.7 men and 1 woman per 100 live births in that year took SPL⁴⁰. For more on the impact of SPL see section 4 below.

Table 2: Individuals in receipt of shared parental pay by gender⁴¹

Year (April to March)	Number of individuals		
	Women	Men	Total
2019-20	2,900	10,200	13,000
2020-21	2,600	8,600	11,200
2021-22	3,200	9,800	13,000
2022-23	4,100	10,200	14,200
2023-24	6,600	10,600	17,200

As with paternity leave, an average-earning father eligible for shared parental pay at the statutory rate stands to lose £511.52⁴² for every week

³⁶ This may be an underestimate due to some employers not claiming back SPP payments from HMRC.

³⁷ Parliamentary Question [UIN 16297](#), tabled on 26 November 2024

³⁸ [OECD Family Database, p3](#)

³⁹ Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania

⁴⁰ This figure is based on 656,969 live births in the UK in 2023. See footnote 29.

⁴¹ Parliamentary Question [UIN 16618](#), tabled on 27 November 2024

⁴² See footnote 14 above.

of SPL taken, compared to what he would earn if he continued working. Given that in most cases couples would only consider the mother giving up some of her leave later in the baby's first year – when in most the cases household income has already fallen due to the mother, by then, being on the same low statutory maternity pay rate – it is easy to see why this is simply not an option for most families.

3.3 Enhanced leave offers

A small minority of employers offer enhanced leave to their parent-employees, above and beyond the statutory requirements for maternity and paternity leave. But most take their lead from our gendered statutory system, offering fathers considerably less leave at full pay than mothers.

A Fatherhood Institute/Inspiring Dads summary⁴³ of enhanced leave packages from 270 employers in September 2024⁴⁴ found that 45% were offering equal amounts of fully paid leave to parents regardless of their gender. The remainder (55%) offered non-equal leave, and among this group, 78% were not offering the equivalent of their enhanced maternity provisions to fathers or second parents taking shared parental leave. The average length of leave paid in full for mothers was 22.7 weeks, compared to 4.9 weeks for fathers. In several companies, the gap between the number of fully paid weeks of leave available to men and women was wider than six months.

Since employers are not required to publish data about take-up of such offers, we are not able to quantify the impact of enhanced leave length and pay, on fathers' take-up of leave.

4. Impacts of shared parental leave

Research suggests that small numbers of UK families– mostly higher income couples where both are well-paid and in white collar jobs – have benefited greatly from the mother transferring some of her leave to the father, often describing the experience as transformative in terms of enabling them to better share their early parenting responsibilities and reshape their working practices⁴⁵ and supporting improved mental wellbeing⁴⁶.

⁴³ <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/just-45-of-top-employers-offer-equal-fully-paid-parental-leave/>

⁴⁴ To our knowledge, the [Inspiring Dads database](#) on which we drew for this summary is the most comprehensive available in the UK, having been compiled by a team expert in parental leave design, well networked with employers and the HR community, and using independently verifiable source information.

⁴⁵ For example [Banister and Kerrane \(2022\)](#) found fathers distancing themselves from 'ideal worker' norms, and either making formal adjustments to their working patterns or monitoring their working hours more closely.

⁴⁶ Hobbs (2024) found that extended leave can promote fathers' psychological wellbeing by allowing them a rare and valuable opportunity for self-reflection, personal growth, development of parental mastery, and to support the wellbeing of their family. See Hobbs, J. (2024). A qualitative exploration of how extended paternity leave can promote fathers' psychological wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 14(2), 3239, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v14i2.3239>

But, as outlined above, the proportion of families able to access such freedoms – and thus achieve better outcomes – is tiny. The previous Government’s own evaluation found that only 1% of mothers and 5% of fathers passing the eligibility criteria for SPL used it⁴⁷, and more recent data confirms that the scheme is skewed against lower-earning families, with just 5% of SPL users coming from the bottom 50% of earners⁴⁸.

A recent, independent evaluation found that the policy has had zero impact, overall, on fathers’ take-up of leave in their baby’s first year, or the length of such leave. The key barriers were eligibility, affordability and mothers’ need to ‘give up’ leave in order for fathers to take it⁴⁹.

5. Lessons from overseas

5.1 Reserving parental leave for fathers

In addition to maternity and paternity leave, many countries grant parents paid parental leave, allowing fathers and/or mothers to take longer periods of paid employment-protected leave to care for their children in the first year (and beyond). The average entitlement to paid parental leave and/or home-care leave in the OECD is 39 weeks⁵⁰.

In the UK, birth mothers (and lead adopters) alone have an individual right to protected time for caregiving, via our unusually long paid maternity leave⁵¹. Elsewhere, parenting leave has been designed and/or reformed with the specific intention of increasing fathers’ take-up of leave – usually by providing a reserved ‘father’s quota’ of parental leave, either in addition to or instead of, paternity leave.

Below we summarise parenting leave designs and data⁵² about take-up from eight countries/provinces which have taken such an approach⁵³.

⁴⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shared-parental-leave-spl-evaluation>

⁴⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg7k24j8ywo>

⁴⁹ The study, by Bath University, used a representative sample of 40,000 households and compared families potentially eligible to the leave (post 2015) with those who weren’t (before the policy was introduced). Read more in the policy brief available [online](#).

⁵⁰ Fluchtman, 2023.

⁵¹ UK maternity leave allows birth mothers and lead adopters 52 weeks’ protected leave, the last 13 weeks of which are unpaid. Although 33 of the 39 paid weeks are paid at the low statutory rate, most mothers do take the leave. As the lower earner in the household, this is more economical than transferring the leave to the father. Shared parental leave offers the theoretical possibility of transferring maternity leave, and thus caregiving responsibility, to the father/second parent, but the very low take-up rates show that this has not been happening.

⁵² For this section we draw on the [International Network on Leave Policies and Research](#)’s 20th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2024.

⁵³ Within the European Union, changes have been spurred by efforts to align with the [EU directive on work-life balance](#) (Directive 2019/1158/EU), which required a minimum of ten working days’ paternity leave for fathers, and an individual right to four months paid parental leave (of which at least two months must be non-transferable), [to be enacted by August 2022](#).

5.2 Examples of countries offering reserved father quotas or incentives

5.2.1 Canada (Québec)

Mothers can take maternity leave of 18 weeks at 70% of earnings, or 15 weeks at 75%. Paternity leave is five weeks at 70% or three weeks at 75%. There are two shared parental leave options: 40 weeks with one parent able to take up to 35 weeks' pay at 55% of earnings, or 69 weeks with one parent able to take up to 61 weeks at 33% of earnings. Sharing of benefits is incentivised in both options, via an additional five-week or eight-week allowance if couples share. Prior to the introduction of the parental sharing option, women received 90.6% of the total amount of parental benefits paid and men received 9.4%. In 2022, the use of paternity and parental benefits among spouses was considerably higher in Quebec than in the rest of Canada; 92.9% of spouses or partners claimed or intended to claim paternity or parental benefits, compared with 31.3% on average in the other nine provinces. The introduction of leave exclusively for fathers has had a huge impact on the proportion of fathers claiming or intending to claim leave in Québec, rising from 27.8% in 2005 to 85.6% in 2019. In 2021 in Québec, both parents took parental leave in 72.3 per cent of all births registered; in 19.5% of families only the mother and in 8.2% only the father, received benefits. So fathers took leave for 80.5% of births covered by the Québec offer.

5.2.2 Estonia

Maternity leave is 100 days, with 30 compulsory days after the birth. This is paid at 100% of earnings. Paternity leave is 30 days, paid at 100%. Shared parental benefit is paid at 100% of personal average earnings for 475 days (i.e., 68 weeks) from after the end of maternity leave, with a cap equivalent to three times average earnings. Parents can work and draw the benefit, which is reduced if the employment income exceeds 50% of the benefit ceiling. Fathers can take paternity leave and/or receive 'parental benefit for fathers' during mother's maternity leave or parental leave. Parents can take up to 60 days of parental leave at the same time, and both receive parental benefit. In 2020, the number of men who used paternity leave represented 60% of live births, rising to 74.7% in 2021. There is no information available on take up of paternity leave for 2022, but 10,546 men received paternity benefit, which represents 90.5% of live births during the year. In 2022, 30,644 persons received shared parental benefit, of whom 17.4 per cent were men and 82.6 per cent women. Most fathers receiving parental benefit continue to work while doing so, whereas most mothers do not.

5.2.3 Finland

Maternity leave is 40 working days, with two weeks before and two weeks after the birth obligatory. This is paid at 90% of annual earnings up to a cap, and 32.5% of earnings above this. There is no statutory paternity leave. Since 2022 each parent has had an individual entitlement to 160

days' leave, of which 63 days is transferable. Pay is 90% for the first 16 days, and 70% thereafter. Parents can take parental leave simultaneously for up to 18 days. Before 2022 fathers had nine weeks' paternity leave, of which up to 18 days could be taken at the same time as the mother. Up to 74% of fathers took the leave of up to 18 days; the remaining paternity leave, which fathers could take on their own, was growing in popularity, from around 30% of fathers taking it in 2013 to 56% in 2021. Parental leave was 158 days and could be used by either parent; these days were mostly taken by mothers, with only around 7% of fathers taking it in 2021. They took an average of around 60 days. There are early signs that the percentage of parental leave days taken by fathers have increased since the 2022 reforms.

5.2.4 Iceland

There is no maternity or paternity leave. Each parent has an individual right to six months' leave, of which six weeks can be transferred to the other parent. It is obligatory for the parent giving birth to take two weeks of leave following the birth and one month may be taken before the expected birth date. The leave can be taken on a full or part-time basis, and taken continuously or in blocks. Parents can be on leave together for some or all of the period. The leave is paid at 80% of the parent's average earnings (with a cap) across a 12-month period ending six months before the birth. Overall, 95% of mothers and 77.7% of fathers take leave; mothers take an average of 213 days and fathers 131 days.

5.2.5 Norway

There is no separate maternity leave, but it is obligatory for women to take 6 weeks of their reserved parental leave after delivery for health reasons, and 3 weeks may be taken before the expected birth date. Fathers get 2 weeks' paternity leave or 'daddy days'; these are usually paid by the employer and don't have to be taken directly after the birth. There are up to 61 weeks' statutory parental leave, of which up to 19 weeks are reserved for the mother (the mother's quota) and up to 19 weeks for the father (the father's quota). The remaining leave is a family entitlement and can be taken by either parent. The reserved father leave cannot be taken in the first six weeks. Parental pay can be taken at 100% of earnings for 49 weeks or 80% for 61 weeks, with a cap. After the first six weeks, it is possible for one or both parents to combine all or part of the parental money period with part-time work. Around 70% of fathers take the full father quota of parental leave. Overall, fathers take around a third of the parental leave available, and mothers two-thirds.

5.2.6 Portugal

Since 2023, Portugal gives families 120 days' 'initial parental leave', paid at 100% of earnings, or 150 days paid at 80%. Mothers are obliged to take 42 days' leave after the birth. Fathers have 35 days, of which 28 are obligatory (seven to be taken directly after the birth, and 21 within the

mother's 42 days of obligatory leave); these are paid at 100% of gross earnings. There are an additional 30 days of 'sharing bonus' (originally introduced in 2009) available if each parent takes at least 30 consecutive days of leave or 2 periods of 15 consecutive days once the other parent returns to work: in this case 150 days are paid at 100 per cent of earnings or 180 days at 83 per cent of earnings, with no upper limit on payments. If the father takes at least 60 consecutive days, or 2 periods of 30 consecutive days, after the mother returns to work, payment is increased to 90 per cent of earnings. If the parents decide to share the 30 days of the fifth month of initial parental leave to stay home at the same time (each maximum 15 days), the payment remains at 80 per cent of earnings for each parent. The total length of leave remains the same but ends earlier if a portion is taken at the same time. There is also 'additional parental leave' of three months per parent, paid at a lower rate, which can be taken up to the child's sixth birthday. By 2023, 51.4% of fathers were taking at least 30 days of the total initial parental leaves granted. Among sharing couples, in 2023, 71.3% chose the longer leave period (six months paid at 83% of earnings), while 28.7% took the five-month option, paid at 100% of earnings. Initial parental leave taken without the sharing bonus is nearly always taken up by mothers. Take-up of the obligatory fathers' leave as a proportion of the total number of initial parental leaves granted, has risen from 83.9 per cent in 2015, to 94.1% in 2022. In families where mothers are on well-paid leave (paid at 80-100% of earnings due to sufficient record of social contributions), 99.5% of fathers take up obligatory and well-paid fathers-only leave. The lower paid additional parental leave has much lower take-up and is mostly used by mothers.

5.2.7 Spain

Mothers have 16 weeks' maternity leave, up to four of which can be taken before the birth. Six weeks' leave after the birth is obligatory. Employed and self-employed fathers have 16 weeks' paternity leave, with six weeks after the birth obligatory. These leaves are all paid at 100% of gross earnings, with a cap. Spain has also proposed eight weeks' non-transferable paid parental leave per parent, as an individual right – but the paid element has yet to take effect. In 2022, paternity leave take-up was 88.9% of eligible fathers, representing an overall take-up rate of 76.1% of all live births. Only 12% of users of the new, unpaid parental leave were fathers, lending weight to the argument that high wage replacement is key to improving take-up.

5.2.8 Sweden

There is a two-week obligatory maternity leave, and ten days' paternity leave, all paid at 77.6% of earnings (with a cap). Parents with joint custody are eligible for 240 days of paid parental leave benefit each, of which 90 are reserved and non-transferable. The maximum period of paid post-natal leave is approximately 16 months, with 13 months paid at

77.6% of earnings. Up to 60 days can be used by both parents together during the first 15 months. In 2002, fathers took about 12% of all parental leave days used in that year; by 2023 it had increased to 31%. For children born in 2021, 21.5% of couples equally shared leave used during the child's first 24 months.

5.3 Impacts of reserved parental leave for fathers

As well as the clear need to improve take-up of paternity leave (see section 3.1 above), evidence from studies of more progressive systems (see section 5.2 above) suggests that if UK fathers also had access to a period of well-paid, use-it-or-lose-it reserved parental leave, this would bring substantial benefits.

Numerous high-income countries have demonstrated that providing leave is compatible with maintaining high levels of competitiveness and employment⁵⁴.

Reserved parental leave for fathers is seen as key to reducing both the gender wage gap and the gendered gap in men's and women's participation in paid employment – both of which act as an impediment to economic growth⁵⁵.

The OECD recently estimated that the motherhood/ childbearing penalty accounts for around 75% of the gender wage gap in Northern and Western European countries⁵⁶. It has also been estimated that closing the gender employment gap in all UK local authorities would increase economic output by £23bn (approx. 1% of GDP)⁵⁷.

Analysis of OECD data⁵⁸ found that 12 countries offering fathers more than six weeks of paid leave had a 4-percentage point smaller gender wage gap, and a 3.7 percentage point smaller gap between men's and women's labour force participation, than 26 countries offering less than six weeks. Among these 12 countries, eleven offered fathers reserved paid *parental leave*; indeed, in some of these countries, *paternity leave* per se does not exist⁵⁹.

The case for investment should also factor in the positive impacts of substantial paid leave for fathers on infant health and educational

⁵⁴ For more on this see Heymann, J., & Earle, A. (2010). *Raising the global floor: Dismantling the myth that we can't afford good working conditions for everyone*. Stanford University Press.

⁵⁵ New data from Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that fathers receiving 6 weeks' leave at 90% salary reimbursement could deliver £2.6bn of long-term growth to the UK economy. See footnote 2 for source.

⁵⁶ Ciminelli, G., Schwellnus, C., & Stadler, B. (2021). [Sticky Floors or Glass Ceilings? The role of human capital, working time flexibility and discrimination in the gender wage gap](#).

⁵⁷ Centre for Progressive Policy. (2023). [Fair Growth](#).

⁵⁸ Centre for Progressive Policy/Pregnant Then Screwed/Women in Data. (2023). [Leave in the Lurch](#).

⁵⁹ Fatherhood Institute [blog](#), June 2023

outcomes, maternal and paternal health, reduced couple separation, and increased competitiveness from higher labour force participation⁶⁰.

Periods of reserved leave (or 'daddy months' as they are often called) not only help to narrow the gender wage gap including through mothers returning to work earlier⁶¹, mothers' increased earnings⁶² and fathers' continuing hands-on involvement in childcare⁶³ and housework⁶⁴, but also show other benefits. They have been found to contribute to child educational outcomes⁶⁵, child cognitive development⁶⁶ and father-child relationship quality⁶⁷; to improve both fathers' and mothers' wellbeing⁶⁸; to increase fertility⁶⁹; to reduce separation and divorce⁷⁰; and to change gender norms, including among grandparents⁷¹. Specifically, paternal engagement in the first year of parenthood is important for fostering ongoing engagement until the child is at least age eleven, and this positive effect builds over time⁷².

⁶⁰ For more on this see Folbre, N. (2010). *Valuing children: Rethinking the economics of the family*. Harvard University Press.

⁶¹ Boll, C., & Nikolka, T. (2024). [The Impact of a Parental Leave Benefit Reform on Parents' Leave-taking, Labor Supply and Childcare Arrangements](#).

⁶² 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%.

⁶³ Pragg, B., & Knoester, C. (2017). [Parental Leave Use among Disadvantaged Fathers](#). *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(8), 1157-1185.

⁶⁴ Tamm, M. (2019). [Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation](#). *Labour Economics*, 59, 184-197.

⁶⁵ 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*.

⁶⁶ 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](#).

⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁸ 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

⁶⁹ For example, increased progression to second and third births. See Puur, A., Abdullayev, S., Klesment, M., & Gortfelder, M. (2023). [Parental Leave and Fertility: Individual-Level Responses in the Tempo and Quantum of Second and Third Births](#). *European journal of population*, 39(1), 22.

⁷⁰ 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, & 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.

⁷¹ For example, in Germany, following the introduction of reserved leave for fathers, grandparents' attitudes were found to be considerably less sexist than before this policy change. See Unterhofer, U., & Wrohlich, K. (2017). [Fathers, Parental Leave and gender norms](#).

⁷² 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

6. Moving towards a better deal

Countries' labour markets, governmental systems, parenting leave designs and prevailing gender attitudes differ, so there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to building a better offer for parents.

However, the parenting leave models which have shown themselves to be the most transformative for gendered earning and caregiving behaviours⁷³ share the principle of each parent having an individual right to reserved, non-transferable parental leave (with or without, in addition, specified maternity and paternity leaves). They also feature high rates of wage replacement: research suggests at least 80% is a critical determinant of parents' leave take-up, particularly fathers⁷⁴.

With these key features in mind, we propose a 'Six weeks for dads' model as a significant improvement on the UK's current parenting leave design. This would offer a middle ground between what we have now and the best-in-class Scandinavian systems, and lift us from the bottom to the middle of the [OECD table for earmarked leave for fathers](#).

The six weeks would be made up of two weeks' paternity leave, to be taken after the birth, and a 'daddy month' (four weeks) of non-transferable parental leave, to be taken at any point in the baby's first year – ideally solo. Both periods of leave would be paid at 90% of average weekly earnings, just as the first six weeks of maternity leave is now; both would be a Day 1 right for employed fathers/second parents, with a payment 'cap' for high earners. We suggest a Paternity Allowance for self-employed fathers, like the Maternity Allowance available for mothers ineligible to maternity leave.

This model would for the first time, give UK mothers and fathers⁷⁵ access to an equal amount of leave paid at a high wage-replacement rate (six weeks each, paid at 90% of earnings); with fathers' individual right to a month's leave specifically for caregiving helping to transform gendered roles and attitudes, and to close our country's gender pay and workforce-participation gaps.

In terms of cost, current spending on leave for fathers makes up a tiny proportion of the amount the UK spends on parenting leave. HMRC data

⁷³ For example Iceland, where men's share of all parental leave taken was just 3% prior to the introduction of mother and father quotas in the early 2000s and is now about 45%. Source: [OECD Gender Equality and Work](#).

⁷⁴ For more on this, see, for example, Koslowski, A., & O'Brien, M. (2022). Fathers and family leave policies: What public policy can do to support families. In M. Grau Grau, M. las Heras Maestro, & H. Riley Bowles (Eds.), *Engaged fatherhood for men, families and gender equality* (pp. 141–152). Springer; and Raub, A., Nandi, A., Earle, A., Guzman, N. D. C., Wong, E., Chung, P., Batra, P., Schickedanz, A., Bose, B., Jou, J., Franken, D., & Heymann, J. (2018). *Paid parental leave: A detailed look at approaches across OECD countries*. WORLD Policy Analysis Center.

⁷⁵ Although our focus is fathers, we include LGBT+ co-parents.

shows that in 2021/22, 204,200 UK fathers received a total of £59.3 million in statutory paternity pay. This represented just 1.9% of the total parenting leave bill⁷⁶.

Giving fathers six weeks' leave at 90% of average earnings would involve a substantial cost to the Exchequer. Our ballpark calculation is that paying an average-earning full-time working father six weeks' paternity/ parental leave at 90% of his usual wage, would cost £3,753⁷⁷. Based on the most recent data for UK live births⁷⁸ and a take-up rate of 70%⁷⁹ for the full six weeks allowance, this suggests an overall cost of around £1.73 billion⁸⁰.

However, as described in section 5.3 above, this cost would be offset by savings in other areas, as well as stimulating long-term economic growth – already estimated at £2.6 billion⁸¹.

⁷⁶ https://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/files/ugd/efff1d_79a40003861548049f62bc47a5f2ca48.pdf

⁷⁷ The UK average wage for a full-time working man was £695.60 per week in April 2023 (Office for National Statistics, April 2023: median weekly full-time pay for full-time men); £695.60 per week x 6 = £4,170 x 90% = £3,753.

⁷⁸ There were 656,969 live births in 2023 (see footnote 29).

⁷⁹ If 70% of babies born had a father who took leave, this means 459,878 fathers receiving the pay.

⁸⁰ 459,878 fathers each receiving £3,753 = £1,725,923,259.90.

⁸¹ Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. See footnote 2.