



APPG on Fatherhood

Fathers policy briefing: January-March 2017

Parliamentary updates

Shared Parental Leave

Chair of the APPG on fatherhood, David Lammy MP has submitted a [parliamentary question](#) (due for answer on 21 March 2017) asking “How many and what proportion of eligible men have taken up shared parental leave since it was introduced?” The Government has responded by saying that it does not hold information on the take-up of Shared Parental Leave since it was introduced in December 2014 for the parents of children due or placed for adoption from 5 April 2015. Based on a small sample of the data provided to HM Revenue & Customs by employers, the Government estimate that around 6,000 employees claimed either statutory Shared Parental Pay or Additional Paternity Pay (the predecessor to Shared Parental Pay) in 2015/16.

The Women and Equalities Committee is inviting [representations](#) from interested stakeholders on issues including shared parental leave (with the main focus on the gender pay gap) in advance of an evidence session with Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, Justine Greening, on 26 April 2017.

The inquiry has been seeking evidence on the following issues:

- How well do fathers feel their current working arrangements help them to fulfil their caring responsibilities for children of all ages?
- Are there employment-related barriers to fathers sharing caring roles more equally?
- Do fathers have the financial support to enable them to fulfil their caring responsibilities?
- Are there social or attitudinal barriers to fathers in the workplace which need to be challenged?
- Are there changes to the workplace – such as an increase in freelance, agency or casual working – which might have an impact on fathers? Are there challenges for fathers working in particular employment sectors?
- What role can Government, employers and other stakeholders play in overcoming these barriers? What policy or legislative changes would be most effective in supporting fathers to fulfil their caring responsibilities?
- Are there specific issues facing fathers from particular groups or backgrounds, for example because of their income or ethnicity, or fathers of disabled children and young people?
- Are there examples (in the UK or internationally) of best practice amongst employers that could be taken up more widely?

The Women and Equalities Committee held an evidence session on fathers and the workplace on 22 March 2017. Witnesses included: Sarah Jackson, chief executive officer, Working Families; Edward Davies, policy director, Centre for Social Justice; Professor Tina Miller, Oxford Brookes University; Duncan Fisher,

co-founder and director, Family Initiative. In overview the committee heard provisions for fathers were insufficient and this was due to cultural and attitudinal barriers that failed to recognise the value of caring in general, and the value of fatherhood in particular. Investment in family-friendly policies would, however, yield significant social and economic benefit to the country.

Summary

Jess Phillips (Lab, Birmingham Yardley) asked the witnesses what evidence there was that fathers wanted to spend more time with their families. Sarah Jackson, chief executive officer, Working Families said she had three separate sources of evidence. The Modern Families Index revealed a steadily increasing picture of fathers who wanted more and fathers were more engaged with their families. They would consider family commitments in thinking about whether they would take a new job, and would take a pay cut to be able to spend more time at home she said. Younger couples were expecting greater equality than hitherto.

Jackson thought flexible working was a useful tool but the issue was cultural. Benchmarking showed innovation policy had supported mothers rather than fathers since the 1980s but the best employers were beginning to improve their support for fathers, she explained. Jackson acknowledged the evidence tended to come largely from the better-paid workforce.

Edward Davies, policy director, Centre for Social Justice, agreed there was less focus on shift workers, where the greater difference could be made. Higher-earning fathers did more antenatal classes but they benefitted lower-earning fathers more, he stated.

Professor Tina Miller, Oxford Brookes University, thought the way fathers were treated at antenatal classes was a factor but the discourse around "being there" for the family was becoming more mainstream. Professor Miller noted a lack of understanding on what would be involved in shared parenting before the baby arrived. Therefore, she said, this was one of the reasons why it was difficult to persuade fathers to seek the leave they would need.

Duncan Fisher, co-founder and director, Family Initiative, said uptake of leave offers for fathers around the world was very high, indicating a massive latent demand. Jackson said calls to the helpline indicated fathers did not know what their rights were and found them difficult to access when they did. Scotland was investing in its fathers, she said: there were pockets of excellent practice, including among SMEs too.

The panel agreed there was a need for more data-gathering, and that it would be interesting to talk to the trades unions.

The parenting penalty

Jackson told Tracy Brabin (Lab, Batley and Spen) the motherhood penalty, in terms of lost income, and to businesses, in terms of lost talent, was well understood, but fathers were beginning to express the same doubts about their working futures as women had done for years. Men were feeling dissatisfied but constrained by the breadwinner expectation, Jackson said. Men were just beginning to understand that time was as important a currency as money in terms of their family and own wellbeing.

Davies thought companies were much more interested in socially responsible employees. The panel agreed there was a financial penalty incurred by spending more time with the family. The child of a present

father was 25 per cent more likely to escape poverty, Davies said, and this long-term investment for the nation was beginning to be recognised.

Caring for children and others was invisible and undervalued, said Professor Miller, and men could do it just as well as women. The equation was currently not being got right and a range of policy mechanisms needed to work much better together. Women had been discriminated against and it was essential that men should not now be discriminated against as well, she stated.

Equality and discrimination law

Jackson agreed it was important employers should not be allowed to treat a man differently because he was a father, and there were ways to tackle this through the law and through the narrative. Having care responsibilities should be a protected characteristic, said Jackson. Jackson told Maria Miller, chair, (Con, Basingstoke) paternity and shared paternal leave should be a day one right for employees; and flexible working law needed to be addressed because at the moment tribunals only considered process, and the compensations were extremely low.

Fisher noted he had had the privilege of being able to choose to work from home, despite the financial penalty: many men did not have the choice in the first place.

The Government needed to recognise the importance of fatherhood, said Davies, and send a really strong message to employers thereby.

Young fathers

Professor Miller told Holly Lynch (Lab, Halifax) young fathers were identified as being irresponsible in some way. A young father would feel unable even to ask for leave, she thought.

Effective policy

Responding to Angela Crawley (SNP, Lanark and Hamilton E), Professor Miller said shared parental leave signalled a commitment to changing something, but how this changed the quality of daily life at the coalface was yet to be determined. Fathers might not take up the leave because care work undertaken at home would not be recognised in the workplace and would not translate to income or status.

The current leave regime was terrible, said Fisher, because it emphasised the cultural norm that the caring role was the mother's and this was the foundation of gender inequality in our society. Leave regime worked when leave was similar for mothers and for fathers; when it was paid; and when the cultural change had been effected first.

This was why partnership with employers was so important, said Jackson. Employers needed to say to their employees that how they met their care responsibilities was important to them. Financial incentives were key, said Jackson. Maternity pay was less than the minimum wage. Leave would only be taken if it was paid, and paid leave meant people came back to work. There should be an independent day one right to paid leave at wage replacement levels and there should be a paternity allowance. The right to request flexible working should be strengthened: in fact, flexible working should be offered as a default.

Davies said there should be a named individual Minister responsible for this issue at Cabinet level to ensure all government policies were family-friendly. He wondered how much the family was present in the Industrial Strategy.

Shared parental leave

Flick Drummond (Con, Portsmouth South) asked whether paternal leave might be offered later so that fathers did not interfere with breastfeeding. Fisher said interestingly the more engaged the father the better breastfeeding worked. When a man cuddled a baby, his brain changed permanently, and the more he cuddled the baby, the more his brain changed Fisher added. The proximity of the father to the baby was important from the first day. It was therefore not helpful that the mother dealt with the baby for the first year, and the father came in later. The key was the father looking after the baby by himself, he said.

Jackson noted couples also liked to spend time together, and warned that it was insufficient to concentrate only on the first year of life. There was a serious gap until school started. It should not just be about putting childcare in place so that both parents could go back to work: this was not healthy for family life. It needed to be a natural expectation that both parents would work flexibly, Jackson explained.

Professor Miller agreed, stressing it needed to be signalled much more strongly that men could care just as well as women, and for older people as well as for children.

The father-proofed workplace

Davies said fathers in vulnerable employment especially needed legislative protection. He told Lynch much more thought was needed around the culture and need of men on an assembly line and in similar roles. He acknowledged there were also specialist roles where flexibility might not be possible but the principle of culture change should nevertheless be made a priority.

Employers like the RAF were thinking creatively about how better to support family life, however, noted Jackson.

Attitudinal and social barriers

Responding to Ben Howlett (Con, Bath), Davies said a good point to engage with fathers was during antenatal appointments. Hospitals should try harder to welcome and engage with fathers, he thought. Fisher agreed. There should be more focus on determining what parents actually wanted.

The father-child relationship had to be understood to be as important as the mother-child relationship, Davies said. Fathers had to be free not to earn and mothers to be free to earn without guilt.

Professor Miller agreed the opportunity to inspire a [man](#) at the point at which he became a father to improve himself and be the best person he could be was currently being missed because the importance of the role was being diminished by the absence of proper provision and support.

Jackson noted employers did not think through how changing hours might affect a divorced father with strict visitation arrangements.

International comparison

Professor Miller told Drummond the UK was doing better than the US but worse than the Scandinavian countries in this space. Non-transferrable leave was the model the UK should seek to emulate, she thought.

Fisher noted Germany applied an incentives system where more leave was available if both partners took it. No country had achieved equality, he noted, but the UK was a long way behind. Reducing the working

week had succeeded in that people had liked it, family life had improved, and the quality of care in care homes had improved, Jackson said, but it had proved very expensive.

Davies observed good practice was underway in the UK and it was a matter of better publicising it

Parental alienation

MPs have spoken in a recent [Commons debate on parental alienation](#) – the deliberate manipulation of a child by one parent against the other parent. Often it occurs after a couple have separated. Comments included concerns about groundless accusations as to the fitness of fathers, but also in relation to manipulation by both mothers and fathers in support of efforts to prevent a partner being involved in a child's life. The Minister for Courts and Justice, Sir Oliver Heald, said that he wanted to address the perception that the family justice system contains an inherent inequality against fathers seeking to live with or spend time with their children. He said that the legislative framework governing child arrangements orders and adjudication of disputes by the family court is gender neutral and focused on the welfare of the child, as opposed to any perceived rights.

Paternity leave and premature babies

The Scottish Parliament recently held a [debate](#) on extending maternity and paternity leave for parents of premature babies. SNP MSP Kenneth Gibson noted: *“As a father, I was particularly struck to learn that nearly 70 per cent of fathers of premature babies end up having to return to work before their baby has even left the hospital's neonatal unit. I am therefore glad that the importance of the presence of babies' fathers is acknowledged in the scope of the bill”*.

There is a [Maternity and Paternity Leave \(Premature Birth\) Bill 2017](#) in the UK Parliament although as Private Members Bill (sponsored by Steve Reed MP) there is no guarantee it will get a Second Reading (it was scheduled for 24 March 2017), let alone progress.

Fathers and the family unit

The role of fathers in the family unit was the focus of a recent [Westminster Hall debate](#). The House of Commons Library provided a [briefing note](#) in support of the debate.

- Neil Gray (SNP, Airdrie and Shotts) began the debate by describing the "old stereotypes of dad as breadwinner and mum as carer" as outdated. Gray felt that society as a whole benefited from the involvement of fathers in their children's lives. The benefits included increased confidence, education attainable and wellbeing in children. He pointed towards the Scottish Government 's 'Year of the Dad' as a way of supporting gender equality in the role of fathers. On the issue of parental leave, Gray called on the Government to encourage men to take more of it in order to reduce the gender pay gap and provide clearer information on father's rights to paternity leave.
- **Chair of the APPG on fatherhood, David Lammy** (Lab, Tottenham) said that the issue was a cross-party one. He expressed concern about the lack of support given to young fathers, particularly working-class ones.
- Steve Double (Con St Austell and Newquay) commented on the "growing crisis of absent fathers" and explained that children from low-income households who had an active father figure at home were 25 per cent more likely to escape the relative poverty they grew up in.

- Suella Fernandes (Con, Fareham) lamented the narrative of "deadbeat dads and hapless fathers" that she felt had become "entrenched". She further criticised the legal framework which created barriers to a father's equal access to his children in the event of separation or divorce.
- Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) felt that fathers were increasingly willing to be active in their children's lives. However, he acknowledged that society often made this ambition difficult to achieve. Newlands said that the economy had not yet adapted to the "changing role of the modern dad" and emphasised the need for a more family-friendly work-life balance.
- Shadow minister for Equalities, Paul Sherriff, agreed with Newland's comments on creating a better work-life balance for fathers. She called on the Government to commit to providing flexible, universal childcare.
- The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, Caroline Dineage, noted the timeliness of the debate, referring to the Women and Equalities Committee's recently launched inquiry into fathers in the workplace. She said that she would consider a UK-wide 'Year of the Dad'. On the gender pay gap, Dineage emphasised that the issue was a central part of the Government's plans. She pointed towards forthcoming legislation that would require large employers to publish their gender pay gap. The minister explained that the Government had extended the right to request flexible working to help men and women maintain a better work-life balance. In response to Sheriff's calls for the improved access to free childcare, Dineage outlined the Government's commitment to providing 30 free hours 7 of childcare entitlement. The Government was also due to publish an early years workforce strategy that would include how to ensure more men work in the sector. She concluded by paying tribute to fathers, grandfathers, stepdads and foster parents across the country.

Fathers Network Scotland ran an [event on the father-child relationship](#) on 16 March. For more information you can contact cathy@fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk.

Impact of absent fathers

In response to a question by Lord Northbourne on what steps the Government is taking to address issues arising from family breakdowns, and the impact on male children of growing up in a household without a resident father, Lord Henley [said](#):

"The Government recognises the damaging impact of conflict between parents on children's outcomes. New evidence was published last year highlighting this link, and making clear that the presence or absence of parental conflict has a much greater impact on a child's outcomes than the structure of the child's family. Our child maintenance system encourages separated parents to collaborate and make family based arrangements where they can, working together in the interests of their child once they separate. Evidence shows that after separation where parents are able to take a collaborative, low conflict approach it is better for children's outcomes, including over the involvement of the non-resident parent where this is appropriate, whether this is the child's mother or father."

Lone parents

In response to a [parliamentary question](#) by Lord Northbourne: "What estimate the Government has made of the increase in the number of children in the UK being brought up in a family with only one resident parent, and in particular of the number of boys being brought up in a family with no resident father; and what policy they have developed in this regard", Lord Henley has responded for the Government: "The

information requested is not collected. This Government is committed to providing the best outcomes for children. The Department's forthcoming Green Paper on Social Justice will outline how it plans to improve children's outcomes."

Paternity pay

Rachel Reeves MP has submitted a written question querying whether the Government plans to develop a paternity allowance similar to maternity allowance for self-employed fathers as a result of the rise in Class 4 national insurance contributions. Financial Secretary to the Treasury Jane Ellison MP [responded](#): *"As the Chancellor announced in his statement to the House of Commons on the 15th of March, the Government will no longer be proceeding with the changes announced at Spring Budget 2017 to increase Class 4 National Insurance contributions (NICs) in April 2018 and April 2019. The Government will consult over the summer on options to address differences in parental benefits – the principal outstanding difference between employed and self-employed people that NICs provide access to."*

In response to a separate parliamentary question on parental pay from Stephen Timms MP, the Pensions Minister, Damian Hind MP has [stated](#): *"Based on a small sample of data provided to HM Revenue & Customs by employers, we estimate that around 215,000 employees claimed Statutory Paternity Pay and around 6,000 employees claimed either Statutory Shared Parental Pay or Additional Paternity Pay in 2015/16. Note that this covers all recipients during 2015/16, including those who commenced their claim in 2014/15"*.

Social Mobility Commission

In a [debate on the Social Mobility Commission](#), David Burrowes MP highlighted the importance of contact between children and fathers: *"The Government have made great strides in trying to ensure greater opportunities in work, but we must also look at how to create greater opportunities to ensure that fathers are not only in contact but are involved in their children's upbringing. I saw from clients in the criminal justice system that one of the prevailing factors for them was either an absent father or a father who was not involved in their lives.*

Nicky Morgan MP responded: *"My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The importance of families and of having two parents or two important role models in life—and of both boys and girls having a strong male role model—should not be underestimated. It is no secret that I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) on some policy issues, but the work that he did at the Centre for Social Justice and the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) is doing now on the importance of family relationships and public policy should not be underestimated"*

Media

- [Observer editorial](#) by David Lammy MP on fatherhood - *Fathers help create happy families, but the state neglects their role*
- [Opinion piece in the Metro](#) by Dave Hornby on misrepresentations of the role fathers play in supporting their children - *It's not babysitting, it's parenting: Why dads shouldn't get extra praise for fatherhood*
- [Opinion piece on the BT website](#) on parental leave by Felicity Hannah - *Stop penalising dads who want to take parental leave*
- [BBC Documentary](#) on Rio Ferdinand's struggles with fatherhood and widowhood – *Being Mum and Dad*

Stakeholders

Study on father-child relationships

As part of the Year of the Dad 2016, the Scottish Government, in collaboration with Fathers Network Scotland, commissioned researchers from the University of Glasgow to produce a research [report](#) providing insight into the nature of father-child relationships in Scotland. The report uses data from the *Growing Up in Scotland* longitudinal study to explore the quality of father-child relationships as perceived by children aged 10 years old. The factors predicting less positive father-child relationships are examined, as well as exploring how father-child relationships relate to other aspects of children's wellbeing.

Fathers and children's mental health

[Fatherhood: the impact of fathers on children's mental health](#), a new briefing paper by the Centre for Mental Health, explores the research available on this topic and highlights the distinct role fathers can play in nurturing good mental health in their children. The report notes that whilst there is growing awareness about the importance of mothers' mental health, less is known about fatherhood and the impact fathers can have on their children's mental health. From pregnancy to adolescence, fathers are a major influence on a child's emotional and behavioural health. They provide support in the same ways as mothers, such as through sensitive parenting, boundary-setting and creating secure attachments. But

they can also help to emotionally buffer mother and child against environmental stresses, and provide compensatory support should a mother need to recover from a mental health difficulty. There is also evidence that fathers facilitate their child's linguistic development in a distinctive way.

The report notes that in a minority of cases, fathers can negatively affect their child's wellbeing. Certain factors can prevent or facilitate effective fatherhood, including:

- **Psychological factors** such as motivation, or confidence in parenting
- **Social support** including relationships with partners, ex-partners, gatekeeping of paternal involvement
- **Institutional, legal and policy practice** such as father-friendly employment policies, welfare support, contact arrangements

However, it suggests that there is evidence that initiatives which build the self-confidence, motivation and potential contributions of fathers can be effective. There needs to be more recognition of the protective potential of fathers to children's mental health. With greater attention to the importance of fatherhood, we could give many more children, whatever their background and circumstances, a better and healthier start in life.

Case relating to the registration of a father on a birth certificate

A couple left "devastated" when they were caught in a legal bind after their fertility treatment documents were lost have won a landmark High Court ruling. The pair became parents to twins born after using a sperm donor in Nottingham but consent forms went missing. It meant they could not register the father on the birth certificates. But a top judge said the man should be recorded as the father and registrars' guidelines should be revised to stop the situation happening again. After the twins were born, officials twice refused to record the man as the father because forms which showed the couple had consented to the donor treatment were missing. The court heard they felt "no choice" but to register the children's births with the boxes identifying their father left blank. In his ruling, the judge not only ordered the man to be registered as the father but also for new birth certificates to be issued. He did so because had the original certificates been amended the role of the donor would have been obvious to anyone who saw them and the parents had not intended to inform their children "they were 7 conceived using donated sperm". While he accepted registrars had followed the official handbook, Sir James said it would have to be re-written in the light of his decision. The full judgment can be read [here](#).

Parental consent for removing children from the UK

A council which failed to alert border agencies when a mother took her children to Australia without their father's consent, has been asked by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to pay the father's expenses to return them. The report can be read [here](#).