

Women & Equalities select committee inquiry - Fathers at work - submission from Working Families and Family Friendly Working Scotland

Introduction

Working Families is the UK's work-life balance charity. We support working parents and carers to tackle discrimination, achieve flexibility in the workplace, and navigate the in-work benefits system through our free legal advice service. We also work directly with employers on enabling them to create family friendly workplaces that work for people and the economy. Family Friendly Working Scotland is our partnership programme in Scotland.

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry. Our submission draws primarily on Working Families' evidence from:

- The 2017 *Modern Families Index* – Working Families and Bright Horizon's annual snapshot of how working families in the UK manage the balance between family life and work. Our study was completed by 2,750 parents across the UK.
- *Family Friendly Working and Low Income Families*, 2017 – produced by Family Friendly Working Scotland, this study explores low-income families' experience of family friendly and flexible ways of working.
- The 2016 *Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark* - Working Families' annual benchmark measures the full range of flexible working and work-life balance practices used by Working Families' employer members, and how these are integrated into the organisation's values, policies and culture.
- *Off Balance – Parents of Disabled Children and Paid Work*, 2015 - Working Families' study of some 900 parents of disabled children, exploring the barriers to work they experience.
- *Daddy's Home! A Life Planner for Fathers*, 2004, updated in 2015 to incorporate Shared Parental Leave (SPL) – explores what made fathers decide to change the way they work, and shows how they made that change.

- Evidence from Working Families' legal advice service.

1. How well do fathers feel their current working arrangements help them to fulfil their caring responsibilities for children of all ages?

1.1 62% of fathers told us they work flexibly. Yet for half of fathers, their work life balance is increasingly a source of stress, and a third feel burnt out regularly. Nearly half report that work impinges on putting their children to bed regularly. Half report work impinges on the time they spend with their children. And more than half report it impinges on their relationship with their partner.¹ One father we spoke to as part of Working Families' *Daddy's Home* research told us that work was affecting how he was able to engage with his children. Even when he was with them and reading a bedtime story, he would be constantly thinking about work.

1.2 Fathers, particularly younger fathers, show an appetite to take a pay cut to work fewer hours (47%), and to downshift (47%) into less demanding roles to get a better work life balance. 38% of working fathers felt they should find a new job – and 13% felt they had no option but to leave work altogether.² This indicates that for many fathers (including those that work flexibly) there is a disconnect between the reality of their working life and their aspiration to be more involved in family life.

1.3 We are concerned by what we have heard from fathers who considering downshifting, taking a pay cut or leaving work altogether³, for the reasons explored below. The UK is at risk of creating a 'fatherhood penalty' – where men's careers are deliberately stalled or put on hold as they try to find or keep roles they can combine with family life. Clearly employers will be losing out too – as talented members of their workforce leave/downshift to try and get a better work-life balance elsewhere.

2. Do fathers have the financial support to enable them to fulfil their caring responsibilities?

2.1 Evidence from other countries, particularly Nordic countries, shows that sufficient pay is crucial to encourage fathers to take leave around childbirth and in the first year. Without pay at near wage-replacement levels fathers are unlikely to take paternity (or Shared Parental) leave.⁴ Other research shows that fathers who are able to take leave in the first year of their child's life are more likely to be involved with their children's care in subsequent years.⁵

2.2 We continue to support the creation of standalone 'use it or lose it' paid paternity leave along the lines of the model we previously worked with the Committee on. Current levels of statutory paternity pay are not sufficient to ensure all fathers are able to make use of this provision.

¹ Modern Families Index, Working Families and Bright Horizons 2017

² Modern Families Index, Ibid

³ Men who put their careers on hold may be confident they can resume them later when it is good for them to do so. But the evidence from the experience of mothers is that it can be very hard to get back on track.

⁴ Background brief on father's leave and its use, OECD 2016

⁵ The Impact of Paternity Leave on long-term father involvement, Rege M and Solli I. F.

3. Are there social or attitudinal barriers to fathers in the workplace which need to be challenged?

3.1 Fathers responding to the *Modern Families Index* identified a number of factors that they felt inhibited their ability to provide for or be more involved in the care of their own children. These included a workplace culture where part time or reduced hours work is viewed as inferior and where long working hours are equated with commitment, and consequent reward.

3.2 Whilst 62% of fathers say they work flexibly, more than one in ten is concerned that flexible workers are seen as less committed. The same number are concerned working flexibly will have a negative impact on their career. Recent research also suggests that men who seek part-time work (for work life balance) are viewed less favorably by employers⁶.

3.3 Fathers that took part in Family Friendly Working Scotland's research wanted to spend more time with their families but felt it was far more acceptable for a woman to be working flexibly than a man⁷. In some cases, where flexibility had been considered, reduced hours had been ruled out because the father was the higher earner in the household.

"In the area where I work it is not seen to be very masculine to ask for work time off so you can spend more time with your children. It is seen to be the role of women. A massive cultural change is needed." *Businessman in engineering, with three children. Leaves work early to collect children*

3.4 Despite statistics showing that long hours reduce efficiency⁸, one in five parents working full time tells us they are putting in five extra weeks a year – the equivalent of their annual holiday allowance - in unpaid work, just to keep up with the demands of the job. One in five fathers is doing extra hours in the evening or weekends all the time⁹. It is worth repeating that for half of fathers, their work life balance is increasingly a source of stress, and a third feel burnt out regularly.

3.5 For nearly one fifth of fathers either their employer is unsympathetic about their childcare responsibilities, or they would never tell their employer they had childcare problems for fear of being viewed negatively. 44% of fathers have lied or bent the truth to their employer about family related responsibilities that 'get in the way' of work¹⁰. There is disconnect when it comes to the reality of working life – the culture doesn't match the flexible and family-friendly policies in place¹¹.

⁶ Fatherhood Forfeits and Motherhood Penalties. Kelland, J 2017

⁷ Family Friendly Working and Low Income Families - Quantitative and qualitative analysis report, Family Friendly Working Scotland, 2017

⁸ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2014/12/working-hours>

⁹ Modern Families Index, Ibid

¹⁰ Modern Families Index, Ibid

¹¹ Although we should be cautious in drawing a comparison, this point can be supported by findings from the *Benchmark* – more than half (57%) of Working Families' members explicitly state their desire to create a flexible and family-friendly workplace in their values or mission statement.

"My daughter starts school in September – with both my wife and I working, I do not know how we can resolve this and I feel that asking to arrive at work at 10:30 every day is not an option that is sustainable with my role. Do I feel I can discuss this with my management? No." *Father of two working full-time in the banking sector*

"Colleagues (who don't have children) give snide remarks because of our responsibilities. People at work (should) be educated and trained to understand better that at any point in our lives, we could be in the position of having caring responsibilities - and would they then want to be treated like that?" *Father who responded to Working Families 2017 father's survey*

4. 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?

4.1 The increase in insecure freelance, agency or casual working – where flexibility is on the employer's terms – does not, as it is currently configured, support fathers or mothers to share work and care. Parents and carers on these types of contracts are afforded little of the security, autonomy and control they need to combine work and family life that parents and carers with more secure contracts and fixed income streams enjoy.

4.2 We have seen via our legal advice service a rising category of rogue employers who consider that they do not have to – and will not – obey the law unless forced to do so, and who are well aware that employment tribunal fees create a major barrier to people bringing claims against them. Restoring access to justice, scrapping these fees and ensuring those with successful claims are compensated would protect and support all workers, not just fathers.

4.3 Working Families is calling for a levelling of the playing field on parental rights between those classified as 'workers', those classified as 'employees' and those classified as 'self-employed'. This levelling would protect and support parents and carers in insecure work, removing some incentives for employers to exploit their staff and simplifying the complicated employment status landscape for employers and employees.

Safina was expecting a baby who had a congenital condition and was only expected to live for a few weeks. Her husband was a self-employed minicab driver, meaning he had no access to paternity pay. He wanted to take time off but couldn't afford to stop working. Even if he took unpaid time off, he was worried he wouldn't be given work in the future.¹²

¹² Feedback from Working Families' Legal Advisor, December 2016

4.4 Many parents and carers we speak to are forced into agency work, casual work or become self-employed¹³ because their need for flexibility is so acute and they cannot find it elsewhere in the labour market. At present 8.7% of quality jobs¹⁴ are advertised flexibly, with 54% of employees currently working flexibly¹⁵ and an estimated 14.1 million people wanting flexibility in their working hours or location¹⁶.

5. 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?

Employers:

5.1 There is evidence that the lack of flexibility in how work is organised brings very real costs in terms of low productivity, lost skills and experience, and a reduced talent pool; and evidence that performance improves when objectives and workload are carefully designed to fit the hours available.^{17 18}

5.2 Making jobs flexible by default would normalise flexible working¹⁹ – making it less obviously a ‘perk’ reserved for mothers²⁰, and triggering the kind of culture change that is so desperately needed in the UK, particularly for fathers. Working Families has developed the *Happy to Talk Flexible Working* logo and strapline for all employers, to encourage thoughtful job design and to explicitly signal their commitment to flexible working.

5.3 Whilst widespread and embedded flexible working is central to supporting parents’ efforts to achieve a better work-life fit, on its own it isn’t enough to tackle the time and wellbeing penalty UK fathers are subject to²¹. Flexibility cannot simply mean working long hours flexibly. Job design is key.²²

¹³ Through our legal advice service we encounter employers creating ‘false employees’ – designating them as self-employed to avoid paying tax, the minimum wage and other benefits - while imposing work on them.

¹⁴ Jobs paid £20k FTE or more

¹⁵ Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2016.

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2015/jun/09/british-workers-flexible-working-only-6-percent-job-ads-offer>

¹⁷ The effects of working time on productivity and firm’s performance: a research synthesis paper, Golden L 2011

¹⁸ Flexible Working and performance, Cranfield University and Working Families 2007

¹⁹ The *Benchmark* tells us that flexible working is still seen as being a deviation from a ‘normal’ model of work, with only 39% seeing flexibility as default or normal. It is worth remembering that employers taking part in the study are Working Families’ members – and likely to be leading the way in terms of flexible and family – friendly working.

²⁰ 2014 figures revealed that fathers were twice as likely as mothers to have flexible working requests turned down: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10601408/Fathers-twice-as-likely-as-mums-to-have-flexible-working-requests-turned-down.html>

²¹ 37% of parents spoken to as part of the *Modern Families Index* study said that they felt resentful towards their employer about their work-life balance, despite 53% stating they feel positive about the work-life balance opportunities their employer offers.

²² The strapline and logo includes simple guidance about job design - to help employers consider what the job really needs and what type of flexible working might work best for their organisation. More information can be found here: <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/campaigns/happy-to-talk-flexible-working/>

5.4 Line manager support and training around flexible working and job design²³, and honest conversations between employers and employees about both work-life balance and workload, are crucial to moving organisations beyond good policies on paper into best practice.

5.5 As noted above (paragraph 2.1) pay is a key factor in take up of parental leave – employers who can afford to enhance paternity pay and shared parental pay should be encouraged to do so. The business benefits of working with the grain of employees' lives are well documented²⁴.

Government:

5.6 We continue to support the creation of standalone 'use it or lose it' paid paternity leave along the lines of the model we previously worked with the Committee on. We are disappointed that the Government feels this does not require action at the present time – figures suggest that the existing gender pay gap will take a generation to close, and now we have uncovered evidence of an emerging fatherhood penalty. Delay in taking action is a false economy.

5.7 The Government should equalise statutory maternity pay and shared parental pay to prevent Shared Parental Leave being a second class option. Current take up of the scheme is in line with government expectations but an improved financial offer would make it an option for more families.

5.8 Making Shared Parental Leave a 'day one right' in the same way as maternity leave would send a clear signal that the government is serious about supporting both fathers and mothers in the workplace – and make using the scheme a more realistic prospect for more fathers. The proposal to extend SPL to grandparents risks undermining the intention of the policy – to give fathers the opportunity to share care of their children – and of perpetuating gender divisions in caring across the generations.

5.9 To engender a flexible by default approach to job design the UK government should:

- Adopt this approach in the public sector, so that all jobs in central and local government are advertised on a flexible basis unless there is a specific, good business reason not to and;
- Promote the *Happy to Talk Flexible Working* strapline and logo amongst private sector employers as part of a voluntary approach to improving practice.

²³ The *Benchmark* shows that line managers are seen by employers as key personnel in both the practical administration of day-to-day flexible working, and also in the development of an organisation's culture around flexibility and family friendliness. More than nine out of ten members (94%) identified the line manager as responsible for promoting flexible working. To be able to do this effectively line managers need skills and training, and, where flexibility is a strategic organisational priority, this skillset should be a core competency.

²⁴ For example in the business case for flexible working published by Working Families in 2016 <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/employers/business-case-online-guide/>

5.10 Prohibitive childcare costs and/or lack of availability very often mean that one parent will give up work or change jobs, further embedding the outdated 'one parent works, one parent stays at home' model. This problem is particularly acute for families on low-incomes. The system needs significant reform to keep pace with modern families.²⁵

5.11 Childcare vouchers are a widely-used benefit that is popular with parents and employers alike. Crucially, vouchers are available to fathers regardless of their partner's employment status, who could be in training or education or out of work longer than the grace period offered by the new Tax Free Childcare scheme. The government should keep childcare vouchers open to new entrants.²⁶

"[Government and employers need to] change the gap between the aspirations of a flexible workforce vs. the reality. My employer notionally has flexible policies in place but the practice of how they are offered/not offered to employees means that they are not as flexible in reality." *Father who responded to Working Families 2017 father's survey*

6. 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?

6.1 Polling conducted by Working Families showed that high earning parents whose income is more than £70,000 a year are 47% more likely to work flexibly than those earning between £10,000 and £40,000²⁷.

6.2 Family Friendly Working Scotland's research also found that low income families are less likely to have access to flexibility but that take up of flexibility is equal regardless of income where it is offered. We found a prevalent expectation that women might need to have some flexibility but that it is much less accepted for a man to request it.²⁸

6.3 All the policy solutions suggested in the previous section would be hugely beneficial – for example jobs designed flexibly as the norm rather than the exception would help fathers across all salary bands access flexibility, putting them in a much better position to be able to share care with their partner.

6.4 UK policy-makers have not acknowledged the major barriers to paid work faced by mothers and fathers of disabled children – let alone developed specific policies aimed at lowering them. Seven out of ten parents of disabled children describe finding suitable, affordable childcare as 'very difficult' or 'impossible'. For parents of disabled children, their need for flexibility at work is even more acute.

²⁵ Childcare costs survey, Family & Childcare Trust, 2016

²⁶ The future of childcare support for working parents, Working Families and the Childcare Voucher Provider's Association, 2017

²⁷ <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/news/flexible-working-only-if-you-earn-enough/>

²⁸ Family Friendly Working and Low Income Families - Quantitative and qualitative analysis report, Family Friendly Working Scotland, 2017

6.5 When their childcare issues are considered in combination with the drought of flexible jobs available and issues around overwork, it is no wonder at the point their child is diagnosed with a disability one parent often chooses to give up work. This is often the mother – positioning the father firmly in the work sphere and significantly reducing his involvement and often leading to an extended period outside the labour market for the mother

6.6 All the policy solutions suggested in the previous section would be hugely beneficial for parents of disabled children. These, combined with a new, statutory right to a period of ‘adjustment leave’²⁹, would go a huge way toward helping fathers (and mothers) of disabled children stay in work, and to combine work and care.

“I never get a conventional one- or two-week holiday, because I have to use all of my annual leave entitlement throughout the year to cover unworked hours or time-off for meetings with social services or other health professionals.” *Father of disabled 13 year-old*

7. Are there examples (in the UK or internationally) of best practice amongst employers that could be taken up more widely?

7.1 Parents think employers should make efforts to change the company culture so work-life balance is more acceptable (20%, rising to 40% of fathers aged 36-45)³⁰. Working Families has collected case studies of good practice in the UK, and has also worked on helping employers develop and enhance options for fathers in their workforce. Below are some examples; we are happy to provide more upon request.

The **London School of Economics and Political Science** won Working Families’ Best for All Stages of Fatherhood Award in 2014 and 2015. More information can be found [here](#); but the experience of this member of staff is worth highlighting:

The wife of an associate professor took the first six months off after their son was born and then the associate professor took six months on full pay. When his son learnt to speak he called his parents ‘mamadaddy’, fusing the two words together.

He said: “This makes an enormous difference to our wellbeing as a family. The childcare is genuinely shared. If employers are genuinely committed to equality this kind of scheme is a must. It has allowed us to institutionalise a fair childcare system and keep both our careers on track.”

iCrossing, an SME member, was commended in 2015 in the same category. More information can be found [here](#); but the experience of their Chief Technology Officer is worth highlighting:

He works, on average, two days a week from home, adjusting his working week to fit the differing levels of demand on his time from family life.

²⁹ Working Families is happy to provide more information about this policy solution – how it could be configured, remunerated etc. – upon request.

³⁰ Modern Families Index, Working Families and Bright Horizons, 2017

"It gives me three hours of my day back to spend with my family or get useful stuff done. My sense of wellbeing is enhanced by the trust that I am shown and can confer on the rest of the team."

7.2 Though these examples are commendable they are exceptions. There is much still to do to promote flexible and family-friendly working, particularly for SMEs.

The final words goes to two fathers:

"There is an assumption that I don't want to get home to do bath and bedtime because I'm a man - in reality I LIVE to be home in time for those moments!" *Father who responded to Working Families 2017 father's survey*

"You've got to be honest to yourself. You'll never get those years back. Make the most of your children. I met a man only a year older than me who didn't see much of his son growing up as he was establishing his own business. Now he has made all the money he wants, but his son is a teenager." *Father who responded to Working Families 2017 father's survey*

**Working Families would be pleased to give oral evidence to the committee.
For more information contact J**

