

# MPs call for reform of workplace policies to support fathers <sup>[1]</sup>

The Women and Equalities Committee is urging the Government to bring in 12 weeks' paid paternity leave for fathers because current policies do not meet the needs of families.

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Its report on Fathers and the Workplace, published today, calls for reform of workplace policies to support fathers to better balance their parental responsibilities and to ensure they meet the needs of the 21st century family.

The report is informed by evidence from employer organisations, unions, researchers, think-tanks, experts and mothers and fathers.

It finds that current policies supporting fathers in the workplace do not deliver what they promise despite good intentions. It says this is particularly the case for less well-off fathers.

For example, the right to request flexible working has not created the necessary cultural change in the workplace, it says. The Government itself told the committee that its shared parental leave policy, intended to allow fathers to share care in their child's first year, will not meet its objective for most fathers.

In the report, the committee goes on to make a number of recommendations to balance the needs of fathers, mothers and employers, as well as create 'real change' for parents, including:

- An entitlement for fathers who are employees to paid time off to attend antenatal appointments as a day-one-right. The Government should consider whether the entitlement to attend two appointments is sufficiently supportive for parents of multiple babies or where other factors mean additional appointments are required.
- Currently fathers can take unpaid leave to accompany a pregnant woman to two antenatal appointments.
- Paying statutory paternity pay at 90 per cent of a father's pay (capped for high earners) to ensure that all fathers, regardless of income, can be at home around the time of their child's birth. At present, the statutory weekly rate of paternity pay is £140.98 or 90 per cent of a father's average weekly earnings (whichever is lower).
- Consideration by the Government of the costs and benefits of introducing a new policy of 12 weeks' dedicated leave for fathers in the child's first year to replace shared parental leave when it reviews this policy this year.
- For the Government to legislate immediately to make a reality the Prime Minister's call for all jobs to be advertised as flexible from day one, unless there are solid business reasons not to.
- Harmonising workplace rights for fathers who are agency workers or self-employed with those for employed fathers where practical.
- Shared parental leave gives couples the option of splitting 50 weeks of leave entitlement and 37 weeks of pay, but take-up is thought to be as low as 2 per cent.

Committee chair Maria Miller MP said, 'The evidence is clear - an increasing number of fathers want to take a more equal share of childcare when their children are young but current policies do not support them in doing so. There is a historical lack of support for men in this area, and negative cultural assumptions about gender roles persist.'

'While the Government has taken positive steps forwards and has good intentions, workplace policies have not kept up with the social changes in people's everyday lives. Outdated assumptions about men's and women's roles in relation to work and childcare are a further barrier to change.'

'If we want a society where women and men have equality both at work and at home, I would strongly urge ministers to consider our findings. Effective policies around statutory paternity pay, parental leave and flexible working are all vital if we are to meet the needs of families and tackle the gender pay gap.'

Commenting on the report, Sam Smethers, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, said, 'We need a radical re-think of our parental leave system. The antiquated assumption that dad goes back to work while mum stays home to look after the baby bears no relation to what most parents in the UK want. Yet our parental leave system is still driven by a 1950s model of family life.'

'We are particularly pleased to see the Committee recommend three months' reserved "daddy leave". This leave needs to be paid at a high enough rate so that dads can afford to take it. When an employer thinks a man and a woman are equally as likely to take time off to look after the kids, we will begin to address one of the fundamental drivers of the gender pay gap.

'Creating a new norm where every job is required to be advertised as flexible from day one will drive a transformation in workplace culture which will support parents, carers and indeed everyone in the workplace who needs or values flexibility.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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