

United Kingdom⁵⁶⁵

Samuel Mohun Himmelweit (University of Bristol), **Jamie Atkinson** (Manchester Metropolitan University), **Alison Koslowski** and **Margaret O'Brien** (both University College London)

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For comparisons with other countries in this review on leave provision and early childhood education and care services, please see the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review (also available individually on the Leave Network website). To contact authors of country notes, see the [members page](#) on the Leave Network website.

1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents

a. Maternity leave (responsibility of the Department for Business and Trade)⁵⁶⁶

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 52 weeks: leave can be started from 11 weeks before the beginning of the week the baby is due.
- It is obligatory to take leave during the 2 weeks after childbirth (or 4 weeks if the mother works in a factory).

Payment, funding and taxation

- 90 per cent of a woman's average gross earnings for 6 weeks with no upper limit, followed by a flat-rate payment of either GBP£187.18 [€216.17]⁵⁶⁷ or

⁵⁶⁵ Please cite as: Mohun Himmelweit S., Atkinson J., Koslowski, A. and O'Brien, M. (2025) 'United Kingdom country note', in Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2025*. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/

⁵⁶⁶ See <https://www.gov.uk/maternity-pay-leave>.

⁵⁶⁷ Conversion of currency undertaken for 16 July 2025, using: <https://data.ecb.europa.eu/currency-converter>.

90 per cent of average gross weekly earnings (whichever is lower) for the next 33 weeks. The remaining 13 weeks are unpaid.

- Payments are made by employers; medium and large businesses can claim back 92 per cent from the Exchequer (central government) and small businesses 108.5 per cent per cent. This is done through reductions to the amount of National Insurance contributions paid by employers to HM Revenue & Customs.
- Payments (statutory and any employer top up) are taxed if earnings are above the personal allowance threshold (currently GBP£12,570 per year (not changed since 2021/22)) [€14,516.69].
- Annual leave entitlements continue to accrue during the leave period.
- Mothers are entitled to Maternity leave and SMP if their baby is born early, is stillborn after 24th week of pregnancy or dies after being born.

Flexibility in use

- The mother can opt to start her leave at any point from 11 weeks before the beginning of the week the baby is due until the baby is born, though leave and payment begins automatically if the mother takes time off work for a pregnancy-related illness in the 4 weeks before the week that the baby is due. Mothers can choose to return to employment from 2 weeks after childbirth (or 4 weeks, if they work in a factory).
- Up to 10 'keeping in touch' days can be spent working for the employer during the period of statutory Maternity leave, without it affecting Maternity leave or pay.

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- Access to employment benefits for all UK citizens and EU citizens who were resident in the UK before 31 December 2020 and with leave to remain in the UK, is based only on employment status, length of service, and an earnings threshold. For non-UK residents, access to employment benefits requires a visa first.⁵⁶⁸ There are a range of visas including general work visas, short-term work visas, and study visas. Different employment benefit rules apply for each visa type.
- Asylum seekers are not normally allowed to work whilst their claim is being considered.⁵⁶⁹ They may apply for permission to work, and so be eligible for employment benefits, if they have not received an initial decision on their claim within 12 months, but this will only be considered if that delay was through no fault of the claimant.
- Rights to leave are contingent on employment status. Women must have 'employee' employment status – not 'worker,' self-employed, or contractor employment status.⁵⁷⁰ Under UK employment law, women who have 'worker,' 'exclusively self-employed,' or 'contractor' employment status are not eligible to receive Maternity leave or pay (they may be eligible for Maternity Allowance, see below).

⁵⁶⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration/work-visas>

⁵⁶⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583192/Permission-to-work-v7.pdf

⁵⁷⁰ See: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-status>

- Female employees who have worked for their employer continuously for 26 weeks, up to the 15th week before the week the baby is due, and who meet a minimum earnings threshold (currently GBP£125 [€144.36] per week), are eligible for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), as described above.
- Reasons for ineligibility for SMP include: being exclusively self-employed, not satisfying the continuous employment rule, or having a stillborn baby before the 24th week of pregnancy.
- Women who are not eligible for SMP may be eligible for a Maternity Allowance (MA) for up to 39 weeks at the flat-rate of GBP £187.18 [€216.17] or 90 per cent of average gross weekly earnings (whichever is the lowest). Women who have recently left work, changed jobs, or are self-employed may be eligible for this payment. To qualify, they must have worked for 26 weeks out of the 66 preceding the expected week of childbirth, and have earned at least GBP£30 [€34.65] per week in 13 of these weeks. For self-employed women, the amount of MA depends on National Insurance (NI) contributions: to get the full amount, they must have made 13 weeks' of Class 2 NI contributions, while those who have made no NI contributions will get £27 [€31.18] per week. Women not eligible for the Maternity Allowance may be eligible for the UK social assistance scheme (Universal Credit).

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent) or delegation of leave to person other than the mother

- Employed mothers have the right to transfer all Maternity leave to the father, except for the 2 weeks of obligatory leave, i.e. up to 50 weeks are transferable. This period of leave is termed 'Shared Parental leave' (SPL).⁵⁷¹ There is no requirement for a woman to return to employment before the father can begin taking SPL. Instead, the mother must commit to an employment return date in the future, when she will end her Maternity leave⁵⁷².
- SPL can be taken in blocks of time of at least one week. It cannot be taken in a day mode or on a flexible part-time basis. However, legislation does provide for 20 optional 'keep in touch' days for employees taking SPL. This provides the opportunity for employees to complete paid work during the leave period, with the possibility of receiving their full salary for that time (up to a maximum of 20 days) provided their employer agrees. Subject to their employers' approval, parents can take alternating weeks and there is provision for parents to take leave together.
- Eligible parents have the right to give their employer up to three notices of their intention to either take continuous leave (full blocks of leave), discontinuous leave (blocks of leave mixed with periods at work), or to change dates of already arranged leave.
- Employers must be given eight weeks' notice for each block of leave. Employers are only legally obliged to agree to continuous block

⁵⁷¹ See: <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay>

⁵⁷² The total period that both parents can be on the shared leave together would be 6 months, although the policy does not stipulate that parents can both be on leave at the same time. Only one payment is given to the SPL couple to share whether on leave together or separately.

arrangements but can agree to discontinuous forms of leave and more than three notices.

- Statutory shared parental pay (ShPP) is available for eligible employees meeting prescribed qualifying requirements, although income replacement levels will not be any greater than the current Maternity leave provision. Notably ShPP does not include eligibility for fathers/partners or mothers to the higher statutory Maternity pay even if SPL is taken during weeks three to six, after the compulsory first two weeks of statutory Maternity leave. That is, partners taking SPL will be paid at the lesser of 90 per cent of earnings, or the flat-rate of GBP£187.18 [€216.17] during the 37 weeks of paid leave. The remaining 13 weeks are unpaid. Like other forms of leave payment, ShPP is treated as earnings for tax purposes. Any earnings above the personal allowance threshold (currently GBP£12,570 [€14,516.69]) will be subject to deductions for income tax and National Insurance.
- In order to qualify for SPL, an individual needs to be legally classified as an 'employee'; meet a continuity of employment test (currently 26 weeks' service with the same employer by the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth); have a partner who meets an employment and earnings test (i.e., have worked for 26 weeks out of the 66 weeks before the expected week of childbirth and have earned at least GBP£30 [€34.65] in total in 13 of the 66 weeks); and be working for the same employer when they want to take leave.
- To qualify for ShPP an individual must earn on average at least GBP£125 [€144.36] per week for eight weeks preceding the 15th week before the expected birth date and pass the continuity of employment test (see previous bullet point). Some workers (i.e. not employees) could qualify for ShPP while being ineligible for SPL.
- Married couples (including same-sex couples), civil partners, joint adopters, the child's other parent, and partners living with the parent and the child – who share responsibility for the child – are all eligible for SPL.
- Entitlements for adopters and intended parents in surrogacy cases are closely aligned with the rights available to birth parents, e.g., no qualifying period for leave; enhanced pay to 90 per cent of earnings for the first six weeks (for one parent); and time off to attend introductory appointments. Intended parents in surrogacy and 'foster to adopt' arrangements will also qualify for adoption leave and pay (see below).

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- Some employers go beyond the statutory minimum.

b. Paternity leave (responsibility of the Department for Business and Trade)⁵⁷³

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 1 or 2 weeks, a week being equivalent to the number of days that the individual normally works in a week.⁵⁷⁴

Payment, funding and taxation

- Flat-rate payment of GBP£187.18 [€216.17] per week, or 90 per cent of average weekly earnings (whichever is lower).
- Paid, taxed and funded as for Maternity leave.

Flexibility in use

- Fathers and partners can take Paternity leave in non-consecutive periods of 1 week.
- Fathers and partners can take leave at any time in the first year after childbirth or adoption.
- Provided that fathers are eligible to take leave (see below), they should specify the starting date of the period of leave and its duration to their employer. They should provide this information at least four weeks prior to each period of leave (this does not apply to adoption cases).
- Dates for Paternity leave can be changed with four weeks' notice.

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- For eligibility of UK citizens and EU citizens resident in the UK, as well as asylum seekers, see Maternity leave/eligibility.
- Rights to leave are contingent on employment status. To be eligible for Paternity leave or pay, individuals must be employees.
- To qualify for Paternity leave, employees must meet certain conditions: they must be either the child's biological father or the child's adopter or the husband, partner or civil partner of the mother (or adopter) or the intended parent in cases of surrogacy; they must have worked continuously for their employer for at least 26 weeks by the 15th week before the baby is due⁵⁷⁵ and remain employed at the time of the child's birth; and they must provide their employer with at least 15 weeks' notice of their intention to take Paternity leave.
- To qualify for Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP), as well as the above conditions, individuals must be earning at least GBP£125 [€144.36] per week (before tax).

⁵⁷³ See: <https://www.gov.uk/paternity-pay-leave>

⁵⁷⁴ Stipulated as such by the government, except if the father normally works two or three days per week, he would receive four or six days leave, and if the father works seven days, he would receive 14 days. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/paternity-pay-leave/leave>.

⁵⁷⁵ This continuous employment requirement is in the process of being removed. See Changes in Policy since April 2024 section.

- Reasons for ineligibility for SPP are the same as for employees claiming SMP, but there is no paternity allowance (equivalent to maternity allowance, MA), for those not eligible for SPP.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother

- The individual receives the same amount of leave for multiple births.
- If the baby is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy, individuals can still take leave already booked and can still book and take any remaining leave although this must be done within 8 weeks of the stillbirth.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- Some employers go beyond the statutory minimum.

c. Parental leave (responsibility of the Department for Business and Trade)

Length of leave

- 18 weeks per parent per child.
- Leave is an individual, non-transferable entitlement.
- Only 4 weeks of leave may be taken in any one calendar year for each child per parent, unless an employer agrees otherwise (i.e., the 18 weeks cannot be taken in one continuous period of time).⁵⁷⁶

Payment, funding and taxation

- None.

Flexibility in use

- Leave may be taken in blocks or in multiples of one week, up to, and for no more than, four weeks per year unless the employer agrees otherwise. A week is equivalent to the number of days that the individual normally works in a week.
- Leave may be taken up until the child's 18th birthday.
- Employees must give employers 21 days' notice before taking leave.

⁵⁷⁶ www.gov.uk/parental-leave

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- For eligibility of UK citizens, as well as asylum seekers, please see Maternity leave/eligibility.
- To be eligible individuals must have, or expect to have, parental responsibility for a child.⁵⁷⁷
- Rights to leave are contingent on employment status. To be eligible for unpaid Parental leave, individuals must be employees.
- Additionally, employees must have completed one year's continuous employment with their present employer.⁵⁷⁸

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g., multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parent

- As the leave is per child, each parent of twins is entitled to 36 weeks.

Regional or local variations in leave policies

- None.

Additional note (e.g., if leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements, employer exclusions, or rights to postpone)

- The statutory scheme is referred to as a fall-back scheme, since the intention is that 'wherever possible, employers and employees should make their own agreements about how Parental leave will work in a particular workplace'.⁵⁷⁹
- Employers may postpone granting leave for up to 6 months if they have a 'significant reason' to do so, for example if it would cause serious disruption to the business.
- Some employers go beyond the statutory minimum. Indeed, some employers structure additional employer-based leave policies around the individual entitlement basis of Parental leave rather than the gendered statutory Maternity and Paternity leave policies. Additional contributions are more common in large establishments.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No statutory entitlement.

⁵⁷⁷ See <https://www.gov.uk/parental-rights-responsibilities>

⁵⁷⁸ This continuous employment requirement is in the process of being removed. See Changes in Policy since April 2024 section.

⁵⁷⁹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014) *The Fourth Work-Life Balance Employer Survey (BIS Research Paper No184)*. London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398557/bis-14-1027-fourth-work-life-balance-employer-survey-2013.pdf

e. Other types of leave and flexible working

Adoption leave and pay

- Providing they meet the eligibility criteria for Maternity leave, and its derivative SPL, an adoptive parent (or one of the parents in a joint adoption) is eligible for 52 weeks of adoption leave, paid at 90 per cent of the main adopter's average earnings for six weeks with no upper limit, then a flat-rate payment of either GBP£187.18 [€216.17] or 90 per cent of average gross weekly earnings (whichever is lower) for the next 33 weeks. The remaining 13 weeks are unpaid. There is also a right to paid Paternity leave for an adopter not taking adoption leave (if they meet the Paternity leave eligibility criteria). Adoptive parents are also eligible for unpaid Parental leave.

Time off for the care of dependants

- Employees may take a 'reasonable' amount of **time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependent**. A dependent could be a spouse, partner, child, grandchild, parent, or someone who depends on the individual for care.⁵⁸⁰ The legislation does not define what is 'reasonable,' since this will depend on the situation.⁵⁸¹ There is no entitlement to payment. Some employers go beyond the statutory minimum.
- Employees are entitled to take up to one week of unpaid **carer's leave per year to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need**. A week means the equivalent to the number of days that the individual normally works in a week; this can be taken in individual days or half-days across a year.

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- None.

Flexible working

- All employees have a legal right to apply to their employers to work flexibly (e.g., to reduce their working hours or work flexi-time). Employers have a legal duty to consider these requests and may refuse them only on one or more of eight business reasons that are set out in the legislation.⁵⁸²
- Employees are entitled to make a flexible working request from the first day of their employment and can make two requests a year.
- Employers are obliged to process requests within two months.
- Employers who turn down a request must give the business reason for the refusal.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ www.gov.uk/time-off-for-dependants

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/1/7/The-right-to-request-flexible-working-the-Acas-guide.pdf

⁵⁸³ Legislation is currently going through Parliament which will make employers also justify that their decision is 'reasonable', see Changes in Policy since April 2024 section.

Antenatal appointments and care

- Pregnant employees are permitted paid time off for antenatal care. Fathers are permitted time off to attend two antenatal appointments, but it does not have to be paid time off. Potential adopters are allowed time off to attend two adoption appointments.

Other provisions

- **Neonatal Care Leave.** Parents of babies admitted to neonatal care are able to take up to 12 weeks paid Neonatal Care Leave (NCL); this leave is additional to any other leave entitlement, and is for parents of babies born after 6 April 2025 and admitted into neonatal care within 28 days of birth for a period of at least 7 days. The minimum entitlement of NCL is 1 week (7 days) and the leave must be taken in blocks of a week. NCL must be taken in the first 68 weeks of the baby's birth. Neonatal care constitutes any medical care received in hospital, or elsewhere under direction of a consultant following discharge from hospital, or palliative or end of life care. To qualify for NCL, individuals must be the baby's parents or the partner of the baby's mother/adopter; they must also be legally classified as employees. There are no length of service qualifications as this is a 'day one' right.

The right to receive Statutory Neonatal Care Pay requires 26 weeks of service and earnings on average of at least GBP£125 [€144.36] a week. It is a flat-rate payment, currently GBP£187.18 [€216.17] per week, or 90 per cent of average weekly earnings (whichever is less).

- **Parental Bereavement Leave.** Employees who have a child who has died under 18 years old or who have a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy can take two weeks' paid Parental Bereavement leave (PBL). PBL can be taken as one continuous period or as 2 separate weeks, and must be taken within 56 days of the date of the death or stillbirth. The death or stillbirth must have happened on or after 6 April 2020 if the parent is employed in England, Scotland or Wales or after 6 April 2022 if employed in Northern Ireland. To qualify for PBL, individuals must be the child's parents or the partner of the child's parent. They must also be legally classified as employees. There are no length of service qualifications as this is a 'day one' right.

The right to receive Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay requires continuous employment of 26 weeks with the same employer and earnings on average of at least GBP£125 [€144.36] a week. The level of payment will be the flat-rate payment, currently GBP£187.18 [€216.17] per week, or 90 per cent of average weekly earnings (whichever is less).

2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy

The maximum period of post-natal leave is 13.9 months, but most of this is unpaid or low paid; leave paid at a high rate is only available for six weeks of Maternity leave. Leave provision is the same across the UK as it is part of the national government's responsibility for employment policy, but Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy is devolved to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern

Ireland, and so more heterogeneous; each country has a distinct education and health system, including ECEC.

In England, all children aged three and four years are entitled to 15 hours per week of free ECEC for up to 38 weeks per year. Some two-year olds are also eligible, for example, if a local authority is responsible for their care or if a parent receives income support. Working parents of children aged over nine months are entitled to 15 hours per week of free ECEC, meaning that working parents of three- and four-year olds qualify for a total of 30 hours (1,140 hours per year). From September 2025 this entitlement to 30 hours will extend to all working parents of children aged over nine months. Most children start school in the September after their fourth birthday.

In Wales, all children aged three and four years are entitled to at least ten hours per week of free ECEC for 48 weeks, with up to 30 hours per week available for parents that meet the eligibility criteria, which include employment rules. Some two-year-olds are entitled to 12.5 hours per week of free ECEC. Most children start school in the September after their fourth birthday.

In Scotland, all children aged three and four are entitled to 30 hours per week of free ECEC during term time (1,140 hours per year). Some two-year olds are also eligible on a very similar basis to that in England. Generally, children start school when they are aged between four and a half and five and a half.

In Northern Ireland, all children are entitled to 22.5 hours per week of free ECEC in the year before they start school; children start school aged four or five.

While entitlements therefore vary across the UK, there is a gap of nearly two years between the end of leave and a universal ECEC entitlement and a gap of nearly three years between the end of well-paid leave and an ECEC entitlement.

For ECEC attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' in the cross-country tables at the front of the review.
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3. Changes in policy since April 2024 (including proposals currently under discussion)

Neonatal Care Leave and Parental Bereavement Leave (see Section 1e) both came into effect in April 2025.

The Labour Party was elected in July 2024, promising to legislate changes to some employment rights, including making entitlements to leave 'day one' rights. The Employment Rights Bill is currently moving through Parliament and it is anticipated that it will become law in 2025. It contains a number of changes to leave policies. The qualifying period of employment for Parental Leave and Paternity leave and Statutory Paternity Pay will be removed, meaning that they will become a 'day one' right for employees; the rules for Shared Parental Leave (SPL) will be changed, so that fathers or partners no longer lose their right to claim Paternity Leave after taking a period of SPL; and employers will only be able to refuse flexible working requests if it is 'reasonable' to do so and the employer must state the grounds for

refusal and explain why it is reasonable. Further consultation on the details of flexible working requests are promised.⁵⁸⁴

Aside from these changes, before the election the Labour Party also promised a 'review of parental leave' within the first year of a Labour government. In a policy paper published in November 2024, the government stated that the review was necessary because the 'current parental leave system does not support working parents'.⁵⁸⁵ In January 2025, the Prime Minister confirmed that this review was underway.⁵⁸⁶ A review of unpaid carer's leave is also promised.⁵⁸⁷ Separately, the UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee is carrying out an inquiry into Paternity and Shared Parental leave 'with the aim of identifying the most effective ways of incentivising more equal sharing of childcare and wider domestic responsibilities between mothers and their partners'.⁵⁸⁸

4. Uptake of leave

The UK government still does not routinely collect data for uptake of leaves. The most recent publicly available national data is from the 2019 Parental Rights Survey.⁵⁸⁹ It found that 83 per cent of mothers took Maternity Leave and 59 per cent of fathers took Paternity Leave. Take-up rates for Shared Parental Leave were 1 per cent for mothers and 5 per cent for fathers. The *Millennium Cohort Study* and *Growing up in Scotland* surveys also provide some indication of leave uptake.⁵⁹⁰ These studies conduct interviews with parents of representative cohorts of children born in a given time period.

a. Maternity leave

No information available.

b. Paternity leave

No information available.

c. Parental leave

⁵⁸⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-to-make-work-pay/next-steps-to-make-work-pay-web-accessible-version#ministerial-foreword>

⁵⁸⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-to-make-work-pay/next-steps-to-make-work-pay-web-accessible-version>

⁵⁸⁶ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-01-29/debates/53CA58C7-F879-4EC1-8EE5-80D22755389A/PrimeMinister>

⁵⁸⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-to-make-work-pay/next-steps-to-make-work-pay-web-accessible-version>

⁵⁸⁸ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8697/equality-at-work-paternity-and-shared-parental-leave/>

⁵⁸⁹ Department for Business and Trade (2019) *Parental Rights Survey 2019*. See <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/parental-rights-survey-2019>. See also: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/649d54be45b6a2000c3d4539/shared-parental-leave-evaluation-report-2023.pdf>

⁵⁹⁰ <https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/cls-studies/millennium-cohort-study/>, <https://growingupinscotland.org.uk/>

No information available.

d. Other employment-related measures

No information available.