

United Kingdom¹

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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, Energy and Industrial Strategy)²

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- 52 weeks. A woman can start to take her leave from 11 weeks before the beginning of the week the baby is due. It is obligatory to take leave during the two weeks after childbirth.

Payment and funding

- 90 per cent of woman's average earnings for six weeks with no upper limit and a flat-rate payment of either GBPE151.97 [€177.39]³ or 90 per cent of average gross weekly earnings (whichever is lower) for the next 33 weeks. The remaining 13 weeks are unpaid.

¹ Please cite as: Atkinson J., O'Brien, M. and Koslowski, A. (2021) 'United Kingdom country note', in Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2021*. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/

² See <https://www.gov.uk/maternity-pay-leave>

³ Conversion of currency undertaken for 21 June 2021, using: https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-gbp.en.html.

- This payment is administered by employers. Employers of medium and large businesses can claim back 92 per cent from the Exchequer and small business employers can claim back 103 per cent. This is done through reductions to the amount of National Insurance contributions paid by employers to HM Revenue & Customs.

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.
- Mothers can choose to return to employment from two weeks after childbirth (or four, if they work in a factory).
- Up to ten 'keep in touch with work' 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)

- Since the UK left the EU on 31 December 2020, qualification for parental and other benefits for EU citizens has changed. For all UK citizens or EU citizens who were resident in the UK before 31 December 2020 and with leave to remain in the UK, access to employment benefits is based on only employment status, length of service, and an earnings threshold. For non-UK residents, access to employment benefits requires a visa first.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.
- Women must have 'employee' employment status – not 'worker,' self-employed, or contractor employment status.⁶ 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 to Maternity Allowance – see below). Family rights to leave are contingent on employment status e.g. for a UK father to qualify for shared parental leave, he must be an employee with 26 weeks continuous employment and his partner must be employed or self-employed.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration/work-visas>

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583192/Permission-to-work-v7.pdf

⁶ See: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-status>

- All female employees are eligible for 26 weeks' ordinary Maternity leave, plus a further 26 weeks of additional Maternity leave (AML).
- 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 £120 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 (DWP, 2015).
- Women who are not eligible for SMP may be eligible for a Maternity Allowance (MA) of 39 weeks at the flat-rate of GBPE151.97 [€177.39] 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 GBPE30 [€35.02] per week on 13 of these weeks. Self-employed women must complete a National Insurance claim for Class 2 NICs through self-assessment (DWP, 2015). 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

- Since 5 April 2015, employed mothers have had the right to transfer all Maternity leave to the father, except for the two weeks of obligatory leave, i.e. up to 50 weeks. This period of leave is termed 'Shared Parental leave' (SPL).⁷ 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 leave.⁸
- SPL can only be taken in one-week (seven-day) blocks of time. It cannot be taken in a day mode or on a flexible part-time basis, although parents can take alternating weeks and there is provision for parents to take leave together.
- Each parent can alter leave arrangements up to three times (in continuous or discontinuous blocks) before the end of week 52 (unpaid from week 40).
- Employers are only legally obliged to agree to continuous block arrangements.

⁷ See: <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay>

⁸ The total period that both parents can be on the shared leave together would be six months, although the policy does not stipulate that parents can both be on leave at the same time.

- Statutory shared parental pay is available for eligible employees meeting prescribed qualifying requirements, although income replacement levels will not be any greater than the current Maternity leave provision and does not include the period of 90 per cent of earnings as with statutory maternity pay, i.e. partners taking statutory shared Parental leave will be paid at the lesser of 90 per cent of earnings, or the flat-rate of GBP£151.97 [€177.39] during the first 37 weeks. The remaining 13 weeks of the first year are unpaid.
- In order to qualify for SPL, an individual needs to meet a length of service qualifying criterion (currently 26 weeks' service with the same employer by the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth); have a partner who meets an economic activity 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 [€35.02] in total in 13 of the 66 weeks); and be working for the same employer when they want to take leave. Permission is not required from employers provided leave is taken in a continuous block. If an employee passes the continuous employment test and the other parent or partner passes an economic activity test, the employee is entitled to 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).
- 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.

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

- Some employers make additional provisions that go beyond the statutory minimum. For example, research conducted in 2019 found that just over two-thirds of employers in all sectors offered some enhancement on statutory maternity pay.⁹ In relation to contractual pay for SPL offered by individual employers, it is not discriminatory on grounds of sex for employers to enhance maternity pay whilst not enhancing pay for parents on SPL.¹⁰

⁹ <https://www.aon.com/unitedkingdom/insights/benefits-and-trends-survey-2019.jsp>

¹⁰ This was confirmed by the UK Court of Appeal in the joined cases of *Ali v Capita Customer Management Ltd* and *Hextall v Chief Constable of*

b. Paternity leave (responsibility of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)¹¹

Length of leave

- 1 or 2 weeks¹² (here, a week is the same amount of days that the individual normally works in one week).

Payment and funding

- Flat-rate payment of GBP£151.97 [€177.39] per week, or 90 per cent of average weekly earnings, if that is less.
- Funded as for Maternity leave, with employers able to claim back some, or all, of the payments from HM Revenue and Customs.

Flexibility in use

- It cannot start until the baby is born and must finish within 56 days of the baby's birth, or within eight weeks of the due date if the baby is born prematurely.
- The leave must be taken in one go.

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, please see Maternity leave/eligibility. Men must have 'employee' employment status not 'worker,' 'self-employed,' or 'contractor' employment status. Under UK employment law, men who have 'worker,' 'exclusively self-employed,' or 'contractor' employment status are not eligible to receive Paternity leave or pay. Family rights to leave are contingent on employment status.
- Employees must meet four conditions: they are the biological father of the child or also the child's adopter or the mother's husband, partner or civil partner; they expect to have responsibility for the child's upbringing; they have worked continuously for their employer for at least 26 weeks by the end of the qualifying week (i.e. the 15th week before the baby is due) and remain employed at the time of

Leicestershire Police Judgment available at:

<https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/hextall-v-leicestershire-police-and-capita-v-ali-and-another/>

¹¹ See: <https://www.gov.uk/paternity-pay-leave>

¹² 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 here: <https://www.gov.uk/paternity-pay-leave/leave>.

the child's birth; and they provide their employer with at least 15 weeks' notice of their intention to take Paternity leave.

- Men must be earning at least GBP£120 [€140.07] per week (before tax), i.e. the minimum earnings threshold.
- Reasons for ineligibility for statutory paternity pay (SPP) are the same as for employees claiming SMP, but there is no paternity allowance (equivalent to maternity allowance, MA), for those men who are 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 father

- In the case of premature births, the period in which leave can be taken is extended until eight weeks after the child was due (that is, the requirement to finish Paternity leave within 56 days of the baby's birth is not applicable).
- The individual receives the same amount of leave for multiple births.

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

- Some employers go beyond the statutory minimum. Unpublished research conducted by the CIPD in 2016 found that 10 per cent of employers offered a longer period of Paternity leave than the statutory minimum. The same study found that 32 per cent of employers offered paternity pay that went beyond the statutory minimum.¹³ Additional contributions are more common in large establishments. Employment sector differences were not significant, except that employers in the hospitality, health, and social work industries were the least likely to offer Paternity leave pay enhancements.

c. Parental leave (responsibility of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)

Length of leave

- 18 weeks per parent per child, but not more than four weeks per child in any one calendar year.
- Leave is an individual, non-transferable entitlement.
- Only four weeks of leave may be taken in any one calendar year for each child, unless an employer agrees otherwise (i.e. the 18 weeks cannot be taken in one continuous period of time).¹⁴

¹³ www.cipd.co.uk/Images/labour-market-outlook-focus-on-working-parents_tcm18-17048.pdf.

¹⁴ www.gov.uk/parental-leave

Payment

- 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.
- Leave may be taken up until the child's 18th birthday.

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

- For eligibility of UK citizens, as well as asylum seekers, please see Maternity leave/eligibility. All employees who have completed one year's continuous employment with their present employer and who have, or expect to have, parental responsibility for a child.

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.

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.'¹⁵
- Employers may postpone granting leave for up to six months in situations where leave-taking would cause significant 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.

¹⁵ 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

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No statutory entitlement.

e. Other employment-related measures

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 ceiling, then a flat-rate payment of either GBP£151.97 [€177.39] 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).

Time off for the care of dependants

- Employees may take 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.¹⁶ The legislation does not define what is 'reasonable,' since this will depend on the situation.¹⁷ There is no entitlement to payment.
- Some employers go beyond the statutory minimum. Where this is so, it has sometimes been promoted for use during the pandemic.

Flexible working: the right to request and the duty to consider

- 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). Employees need to have worked for their employer continuously for 26 weeks before applying. Employers have a legal duty to consider these requests and may refuse them only on one or more business-related grounds that are set out in the legislation.¹⁸

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- None.

¹⁶ www.gov.uk/time-off-for-dependants

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/1/7/The-right-to-request-flexible-working-the-Acas-guide.pdf

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.

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 system, including ECEC.

In England, children aged three and four years are entitled to 15 hours per week of free ECEC for up to 38 weeks per year; to be eligible for 30 hours (1,140 hours per year) a parent must be working or on statutory leave such as Maternity leave. In Wales, children aged three and four years are entitled to 10 hours per week of free ECEC for 48 weeks per year and, if their parents are working, an additional 20 hours per week. In Scotland, children aged three and four years are entitled to 16 hours per week of free ECEC per week (600 hours per year); an expansion to 1,140 hours per year (without employment conditions) should take place in August 2021. Policy discussions are underway, but have stalled for Northern Ireland, which has the lowest UK ECEC levels: there is two and a half hours of free ECEC every day during term-time for three year olds (475 hours per year); school starting age is four years old. In addition, some two-year-olds across the UK who meet certain conditions can access a period of free ECEC. There is a gap, therefore, 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.

Levels of attendance at formal services for children under the age of three years are just above the average both for the countries included in this review and for OECD countries, and well above the average for children over three years. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3. Changes in policy since April 2020 (including proposals currently under discussion)

The UK left the European Union on 31 December 2020. Whilst there may be changes to leave policies in the UK which stem from Brexit, there has been no immediate change to provision. However, the EU member states are making changes to their national laws regarding Parental leave entitlements and flexible working as a result of the Work-Life Balance Directive, which came into force in July 2019. Whilst some of the measures are already in place in the UK, others are not, creating a Brexit-related loss for British working parents. In particular, the Directive provides for Parental leave to be paid at a level set by member states and for workers to be able to take leave in a flexible way. (Parental leave in the UK is currently unpaid and cannot be taken flexibly.) The Directive also introduces a five-day period of carers' leave each year and prohibits the imposition of work-related conditions in order to qualify for Paternity leave.

The UK government has confirmed that it plans to introduce neo-natal leave but has still not yet introduced legislation to Parliament.¹⁹ Currently, parents of children that require neo-natal care must use their Maternity or Paternity leave if they need to take time off work. The proposals include a 'day one' right for qualifying employees to a period of statutory leave if their child requires neo-natal care. The child must be less than 28 days old and be in hospital for at least seven continuous days. This form of leave would be in addition to other forms of leave that they are eligible to take. The government has yet to confirm exactly who will be entitled to take the leave. It is unclear whether it would extend to parents who are adopting or in a surrogacy arrangement. The amount of leave will be capped at 12 weeks. Entitlement to statutory neo-natal pay would depend on minimum earnings and continuous employment requirements. The government has indicated that pay whilst on leave will be at the statutory rate. As the government deliberates on implementation, some organisations have begun to introduce their own non-statutory Neo-natal Leave provision for mothers and fathers.

In November 2020, the government minister Suella Braverman MP announced that she was expecting her second child in early 2021. At the time, she was the government's chief law officer: the Attorney-General. In order to allow the Prime Minister to appoint another MP to cover for

19

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/872097/neonatal-leave-and-pay-government_response.pdf

Ms Braverman, the government rushed through new legislation that would allow Ms Braverman to take six months paid Maternity leave at full income replacement, a much more generous allowance than statutory Maternity leave benefit. The Ministerial and other Maternity Allowances Act 2021²⁰ also allows a limited number of Opposition MPs (e.g. the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons) to take Maternity leave on the same terms. However, the legislation failed to address the fundamental issue that MPs, including ministers, are ineligible to take statutory Maternity, Paternity or Parental leave as they do not have an employment status and cannot be accommodated under current UK legislation. Nor does the legislation address the problems faced by women MPs who have taken “informal” Maternity leave in the recent past e.g. MPs having to seek permission to vote by proxy. Neither does it include ministers or MPs who are new fathers.

Parental leave is a policy area where the Scottish Government considers it could potentially improve upon current UK legislation, should it become possible to do so. As such, it has become a political issue linked to a call for independence from the United Kingdom. The 2021 Scottish National Party manifesto did not include any proposals to change parental leave but did make a commitment to expand the provision of free early years education to one- and two-year olds, starting with families on a low income.

Policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic to end of April 2021

Childcare and schools

- In terms of ECEC, the different nations of the UK have taken divergent approaches to policies affecting children.
- National ‘lockdown’ started on 23 March 2020 in the UK and ECEC providers have been partly closed since in all nations. From 23 March only children of key workers and children identified as in vulnerable groups could access ECEC (including pre-school childcare) and attend primary school.
- An early UK wide definition of key worker termed ‘critical worker’ was published and subsequently rolling advice has been given to ECEC providers. Critical workers are those whose paid work is deemed critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response including those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors.
- At the outset it was noted that workers who were parents working in these sectors may be able to look after their child at home, although attendance at ECEC and school was encouraged. Government advised the following principles: 1. If a child needs

²⁰ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/5/introduction/enacted

specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them; 2. Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions; 3. Parents must do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially outside of school. They must observe the same social distancing principles as adults, as far as possible; 4. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

- Prior to 1 June 2020 in the UK as a whole, only children of key workers and children identified as in vulnerable groups could access pre-school childcare and attend primary school. From 1 June, children in England who are in pre-school settings and children in Reception, Year 1 or 6 began to return to school, although it was not obligatory for them to do so if parents would prefer to keep them at home.
- Parents in England and Scotland have been able to access ECEC from June 2020 and early years settings have remained open throughout the latest national lockdown, which began on 6 January 2021. A UK-wide lockdown was imposed because of a huge increase in people who had contracted Covid-19 and a consequent increase in people being hospitalised. At the start of January 2021, primary and secondary schools pupils in the UK (apart from children of key workers or children classed as vulnerable) were told not to return to school for the start of term.
- All primary school pupils in Wales were able to return to on-site schooling from Monday 15 March 2021. Secondary school pupils in Years 11 and 13 returned to the classroom on the same date. The Welsh government does not intend a complete return to on-site schooling for secondary school pupils until after Easter this year.
- Primary and secondary school pupils in England returned to on-site schooling on Monday 8 March. Secondary school pupils were obliged to have three COVID-19 tests during that week and are being encouraged to take a twice-weekly test for COVID-19 thereafter.
- Similar to Wales, the Scottish government has taken a phased approach to school re-opening. Primary school pupils in Years P1-P3 returned on Monday 22 February, with the remainder of primary school pupils returning on Monday 15 March. Secondary school pupils also returned on a part-time basis on 15 March, and a full return was completed after the Easter holidays.
- The Northern Irish government decided that pupils in Years P1-P3 could return to face-to-face teaching from Monday 8 March. Years P4-P7 returned from Monday 22 March. Pupils in Years 12-14 returned to face-to-face teaching prior to the Easter holidays

and secondary school pupils in Northern Ireland returned on Monday 12 April.

Parental leave

- There were no modifications to Parental leave.

Other measures for parents and other carers

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, colloquially known as the 'Furlough' scheme, targeted at employees unable to work, has consequences for parents', their ability to care for children and earn a livelihood. Under the Furlough scheme, initiated in March 2020, the employer/business can claim for 80 per cent of employee's wages plus employer's National Insurance contribution up to a ceiling of £2,500 a month, slightly higher than average wage. Employers can also 'top-up' the 20 per cent. Since 1 August 2020, employers have been responsible for meeting the costs of employer National Insurance and pension contributions. On 3 March 2021, the government announced that the scheme would be extended until the end of September 2021. However there are tapering arrangements in place for the final three months. In July, the government's contribution will decrease to 70 per cent of wages (up to a ceiling of £2,187.50 per month) with employers contributing 10 per cent. In August and September, the government contribution will be 60 per cent (up to a ceiling of £1,875), with employers contributing 20 per cent.
- For employees:
 - the Government reports 'business as usual' for eligibility for Maternity, Paternity and Parental leave.
 - Workers who are ill or have with 'health-related' caring responsibilities can claim sick pay. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is currently £95.85 per week and is paid by employers for up to 28 weeks.
 - There is no new right/entitlement for workers to care for children (i.e. an independent COVID-19 care leave) under COVID apart from arguably SSP. Workers can claim SSP if they are self-isolating in accordance with government advice (e.g. because a family member has symptoms) or if they are deemed clinically vulnerable because of underlying health condition. School closures, per se, do not trigger SSP receipts.
- Self-employed workers remain ineligible to all leave in the UK under 'furlough' but can claim Universal Credit (see below) and there are other schemes to help their business.
- The government has not responded to last year's national e-petition calling for it to extend Maternity leave by three months with pay in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- There have been no changes to regular statutory arrangements although non-statutory (e.g. company level) arrangements occur.
- Under normal circumstances, schools do not provide free school meals to eligible children who are not in school. But during the coronavirus outbreak, schools are expected to continue supporting children eligible for benefits-related free school meals who are at home. This can include: providing meals or food parcels through food providers; using the Department for Education's (DfE) centrally-funded national voucher scheme; providing alternative vouchers for a local shop or supermarket. Free school meals should be offered to eligible pupils not attending school during term time weeks. Costs of the national voucher scheme to provide free school meals for eligible pupils have been met by Government during school holidays and also during the latest national lockdown starting on 6 January 2021.
- The voluntary sector provides foodbanks in many communities. The Trussell Trust, the UK's biggest food bank network, said it gave out 89 per cent more food parcels in April, compared to the same month last year, while the Independent Food Aid Network (Ifan) recorded a 175 per cent increase over the same period.²¹
- Provision for parents who are non-workers or unemployed is important to note: 'Universal Credit'- (UC) the UK's 'safety net' social insurance covering 'all needs' including housing. Universal Credit- one standard allowance for household. This scheme has been adjusted a little for COVID-19. Individuals do not need to attend the Jobcentre Plus office and can just apply online. Initially on-line waiting was significant as millions have applied.
- As of 14 January 2021, there were six million people on Universal Credit. This is an increase of 98 per cent since 12 March 2020.
- People can access advance payments a little more easily as before COVID-19 there was usually a five-week wait but any advanced amount is taken from final payment. Self-employed can apply. Level of payment still very low:
 - £342.72 per month for single claimants under 25
 - £409.89 per month for single claimants aged 25 or over
 - 488.59 per month for joint claimants both under 25
 - £594.04 per month for joint claimants with either aged 25 or over
- There has been a COVID-19 supplement increase of up to £86.67 a month from 6 April 2020 for all new and existing claimants. The government has decided to extend the increased payment until the end of September 2021.

4. Uptake of leave

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/03/record-numbers-used-uk-food-banks-in-first-month-of-lockdown>

The UK government does not routinely collect data for uptake of leaves. There is no current information.

The most recently publicly available national data is from 2009/10: i.e., the *Maternity and Paternity Rights and Women Returners Survey 2009/10*.²² This joint survey for the Department for Work and Pensions with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills provides the most recent detailed, statistically representative, updated picture of Maternity and Paternity leave, statutory maternity and paternity pay (SMP and SPP), occupational maternity and paternity pay (OMP and OPP), and maternity allowance (MA). Please see previous editions of this review for more information.

The *Millennium Cohort Study* and *Growing up in Scotland* surveys also provide some indication of leave uptake. These studies conduct interviews with parents of representative cohorts of children born in a given time period.

a. Maternity leave

There is no current information.

b. Paternity leave

There is no current information.

c. Parental leave

There is no current information.

d. Other employment-related measures

Government decisions to close schools and encourage people to stay at home for large periods of the last 12 months has resulted in a huge increase in the number of parents having to combine home schooling their children whilst working from home. In their analysis of responses to a national survey conducted in May 2020, Sevilla and Smith found that 44 per cent of respondents were working from home²³. This shift

²² Chanfreau, J., Gowland, S., Lancaster, Z., Poole, E., Tipping, S. and Toomse, M. (2011) *Maternity and Paternity Rights and Women Returners Survey 2009/2010* (Department of Work and Pensions Research Report No 777). Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/maternity-and-paternity-rights-and-women-returners-survey-200910-rr777

²³ Sevilla, A. and Smith, S. (2020) *Baby Steps: The Gender Division of Childcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, IZA Institute of Labor Economics. Available at:

seems to have reduced the stigma around working from home. In their analysis of a non-representative survey of employees conducted in May and June 2020, Chung et al found that employees who did work from home during lockdown reported that their managers were overwhelmingly supportive of the arrangement²⁴. They also found that over 70 per cent of parents wanted to increase the amount of work that they do at home in the future in order to spend more time with their children. Whether the shift to home working results in a longer term change to working culture remains to be seen.

There have been gendered consequences as a result of these changes: both Sevilla and Smith (2020), and Chung et al. (2020) found that mothers were providing most of the additional childcare during periods of school closure, with women doing twice as much childcare per week as men on average. However on a positive note, Sevilla and Smith found that on average, there has been a small decrease in the gender childcare gap within households (i.e. the difference in the amount of childcare provided by men and women).

<https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13302/baby-steps-the-gender-division-of-childcare-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

²⁴ Chung, H., Seo, H., Forbes, S. and Birkett, H. (2020) Working from home during the Covid-19 lockdown: Changing preferences and the future of work. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/business/research/wirc/epp-working-from-home-COVID-19-lockdown.pdf>