

Leave Policies: UK update

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What's new? Public policy context

- New prime minister, same political party June 2007
- Previously Gordon Brown has pledged that care of children will become 'a new pillar of the welfare state'. Dual benefits of enhanced child wellbeing and parental employability.
- Parental leave policy located in same department but name change - Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
- Cross- departmental interest continues from other departments e.g. Dept. Children, Schools and Families

What's new? Public policy context

- State of Childhood – current major preoccupation (UNICEF report, Good Childhood and Children's Plan)
- The Work and Families Act 2006- extending parental leave policies 'more choice and flexibility' and enhancing 2003 provisions for fathers - 'more opportunities'
- Major changes- extending maternity & paternity leave. No changes to parental leave.

Policy roots

- 'to extend choice for both mothers and fathers by giving them the chance to spend more time at home, as well as support their children financially'.
Supporting Families Green Paper 1997
- 'Father inclusiveness is part of a modern family policy' (Hewitt, 2004).
- Some tension with flexible labour markets agenda
ILO Report (2007) High incidence of 'long' working hours in UK 25% (Hungary 8%) and growth of 'atypical working' families.

Current leave policy (April 2007)

- **Maternity Leave (1977)**

- Extended maternity leave options – payment now to 9 months at flat rate.
 - 52wks: 6 wks @ 90% earnings, **33** wks @ £112 [165] /wk; 13 wks unpaid
 - Future: extension of payment to 52 wks.

Supporting women, 'maternity rights' policy discourse, enabling context for WHO breast feeding norms.

55% mothers take maternity leave, 81% if employed (most return when payment ceases) 83% by 9/10 months.

Current leave policy (April 2007)

- **Paternity Leave (2003)**

- 2 wks @ £112 [165] /wk
- 93% fathers take paternity leave (50% statutory and 50% annual/other leave)
- Rise in fathers taking more than 2 wks 22%-36% between 2002-2005
- Future: Additional 'paternity' leave up to 26 weeks in child's second 6 months, contingent on mother returning to work- by April 2009.

Challenges of implementing additional 'paternity' leave

- Innovation/ controversy- 'father' will include civil partners in same sex families (and adoptive partners).
- Balancing parental flexibility with employer 'burden'
- Self- certification by **both** father and mother of personal 'facts' - e.g. no formal involvement of mother's employer but checks can take place.
- Notice period- father informs employer 8 weeks before start date (when baby c3/4 months and after mother has informed her employer of return to work date)
- What about notice period for changes in circumstances? – if replacement hired? Forced unpaid leave penalty?

Challenges of implementing additional 'paternity' leave

- Important cultural change
- Financial incentives for fathers will be vary minimum statutory provision is not a strong incentive
- Take-up will probably be higher in households where mothers are high earners.

Current leave policy (April 2007)

- Parental Leave (1999)
 - 13 wks per parent unpaid, for under 6yr child
- Flexible Working (2003)
 - Legal right to request (M/F), for under 6yr child
 - Very popular 25% - of parents made request. Mostly accepted but higher decline rate for fathers.
- Early years care/ education- all 3 & 4 year olds 12.5 hours per wk
- Expansion of children's centres (pre-school)- targeted at poorer neighbourhoods. 'wrap-around'

Benefits of leave taking- for some?

- Emergent evidence of paternal leave taking boosting father involvement at 9months (Tanaka and Waldfogel, 2007) and in reading to child at 3 years (Dex, 2007)
- Potential for 'parental leave rich' and 'parental leave poor' polarisation - children in poor households may receive less maternal and paternal investment (caring and economic).