



EMPLOYER FOCUS ON WORKING PARENTS

Parental leave and pay
and childcare policies

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The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has almost 160,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Employer focus on working parents: parental leave and pay and childcare policies

In this report (which draws on the [CIPD's Labour Market Outlook data](#)), we explore current practice in relation to supporting working parents and, in particular, what provisions organisations provide around parental leave.

This survey was carried out with YouGov online in June and July 2022 and includes a total sample size of 2,000 senior decision-makers in the UK. The figures have been weighted and are representative of UK employment by organisation size, sector and industry. The CIPD last looked at [this issue in 2016](#). The questions on childcare provision were just asked of employers in England.

Key findings

- A third (33%) of organisations have a **maternity pay policy** that covers the statutory minimum requirement, while 18% offer between 4 and 13 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay. Around a sizeable fifth (21%) offer 26 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 13 weeks at the SMP rate or 90% of the average weekly earnings.
- Most organisations (49%) have a **paternity or partner leave policy** that provides the statutory one to two weeks' leave entitlement. A small proportion provide three weeks' leave (3%) and slightly more provide four weeks' leave (9%). A further 13% provide between 5 and 28 weeks' leave.
- Over a third (36%) provide the statutory minimum **paternity/partner pay** of £156.66 per week or 90% of an employee's average weekly earnings if that is less. While 16% provide two weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay, 8% provide up to four weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay. Almost one in ten (9%) provide between 5 and 28 weeks at or near the full rate of pay.
- Almost half (46%) of organisations would support **extending statutory paternity leave and pay**. A third (33%) believe this should be extended to four weeks, but a sizable number (29%) think it should be extended to either six weeks (15%) or seven weeks or more (14%).

- Very few new fathers/partners and mothers have taken up the right to **shared parental leave** in the last two years, according to our sampled organisations. If we compare our findings with [2016](#), we see a downward trend in take-up.
- Over a third (34%) of employers in England report the introduction of **30 hours' free childcare** per week for all 3–4-year-olds in 2017 has made a positive impact on the number of women returning to work. Over half (56%) believe the participation rate of women with young children would improve further if the **same level of free childcare support was extended to all children aged 0–2 as well as 3–4**.

Our recommendations for policy-makers

The UK Government should:

- Enhance the statutory paternity/partner provision to six weeks at or near the full rate of pay, to help deliver more balance and choice over the distribution of caring responsibilities and better reflect the changing nature of modern families.
- Provide affordable childcare from the end of maternity/parental leave to enable parents and often mothers to return to work more quickly if they choose to.
- Make the right to request flexible working a right from day one of employment. We also call on the UK Government to reconsider the stipulation that employees can only make a request every 12 months.

Maternity policies

A third (33%) of organisations have a maternity pay policy that covers the statutory minimum requirement.¹ In total, 18% offer between 4 and 13 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay. Around a fifth (21%) offer 26 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 13 weeks at the SMP rate or 90% of the average weekly earnings.

¹ Statutory maternity pay (SMP) for 39 weeks is paid at 90% of the average weekly earnings for the first six weeks. The following 33 weeks will be paid at the SMP rate or 90% of the average weekly earnings (whichever is the lower).

Table 1 shows there are significant sector differences here, with private sector employers (38%) more likely than voluntary (29%) and public (13%) sector employers to offer the statutory minimum requirement. Public sector employers are more likely than voluntary sector and private sector employers to offer 26 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 13 weeks at the SMP rate or 90% of the average weekly earnings.

This is more generous than when we surveyed in 2016, when 48% offered the statutory minimum requirement, 14% offered between 4 and 13 weeks of enhanced maternity pay, and 18% offered 26 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 13 weeks at the SMP rate or 90% of the average weekly earnings.

Table 1: Maternity pay policies in organisations (%)

	All	Private sector	Public sector	Voluntary
The statutory minimum requirement	33	38	13	29
4 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 35 weeks at the SMP rate or 90 per cent of the average weekly earnings	4	5	3	4
6 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 33 weeks at the SMP rate or 90 per cent of the average weekly	7	7	4	5
13 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 26 weeks at the SMP rate or 90 per cent of the average weekly	7	6	7	8
26 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 13 weeks at the SMP rate or 90 per cent of the average weekly	21	16	40	20
Other	5	5	3	8
Don't know	24	22	29	26

Base: 2,000.

Paternity/partner policies

Leave

Most organisations (49%) have a paternity or partner leave policy that provides the statutory one to two weeks' leave entitlement. A small proportion provide three weeks' leave (3%) and slightly more provide four weeks' leave (9%). A further 13% provided between 5 and 28 weeks' leave (see Table 2 for the breakdown).

If we compare that with the provision in 2016, 71% of organisations provided the statutory one to two weeks' leave entitlement at that time, 3% provided three weeks' leave, and 7% four weeks' leave. So entitlements have increased but perhaps not at the level that we might have expected or indeed need to support greater gender equality at work.

Table 2: Paternity leave policies in organisations (%)

	All	Private sector	Public sector	Voluntary
The statutory 2 week minimum requirement	49	50	47	45
3 weeks	3	3	3	2
4 weeks	9	9	9	9
Between 5-12 weeks	7	7	4	7
Between 13-20 weeks	1	1	1	1
Between 21-28 weeks	5	5	7	6
Other	5	5	5	6
Don't know	21	20	24	24

Base: 2,000.

Pay

If we look at pay provisions, over a third (36%) of employers provide the statutory minimum pay of £156.66 per week or 90% of an employee's average weekly earnings if that is less. Employers in the private (40%) and voluntary (35%) sectors are significantly more likely to provide the statutory minimum, compared with those in the public (24%) sector.

Our findings revealed that 16% provide two weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay and 8% provide up to four weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay. Almost one in ten (9%) provide between 5 and 28 weeks at or near the full rate of pay (see Table 3 for the breakdown).

In 2016, 49% provided the statutory minimum pay at the time, for up to two weeks, 6% provided one week's enhanced pay and one week at the statutory rate, 18% provided two weeks' enhanced paternity pay and a further 8% provided more than two weeks' enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay.

Table 3: Paternity pay policies in organisations (%)

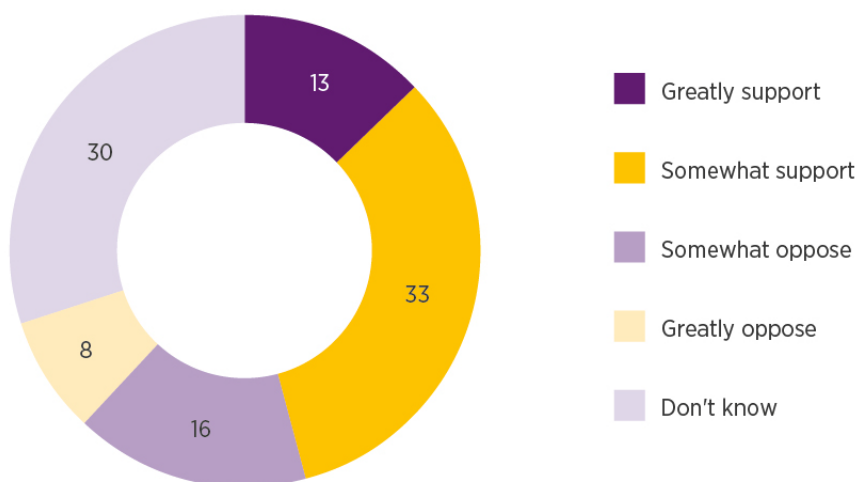
	All	Private sector	Public sector	Voluntary
The statutory minimum requirement	36	40	24	35
1 week of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by one week paid at statutory rate	3	3	3	1
2 weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay	16	14	25	12
Up to 4 weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay	8	8	8	11
Between 5–12 weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay	4	4	3	3
Between 13–20 weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay	1	1	1	1
Between 21–28 weeks of enhanced paternity pay at or near the full rate of pay	4	4	3	3
Other	4	4	2	5

Base: 2,000.

Support for extending statutory paternity/parental leave and pay

As Figure 1 shows, almost half (46%) of organisations would support extending statutory paternity leave and pay, and just under a quarter (24%) would oppose it. Employers in the private sector (27%) are significantly more likely to oppose this than employers in the public (13%) and voluntary sectors (18%).

Figure 1: Support or oppose extending statutory paternity leave and pay (%)



Base: 2,000.

When it comes to employer views on how long statutory paternity leave and pay should be extended for, a third (33%) believe this should be extended to four weeks, but a sizable number (29%) think it should be extended to either six weeks (15%) or seven weeks or more (14%) (see Table 4 for the full breakdown).

Table 4: How long should paternity leave and pay be extended? (%)

	All	Private sector	Public sector	Voluntary
2 weeks or less	12	13	11	9
3 weeks	8	9	6	5
4 weeks	33	33	36	33
5 weeks	3	3	3	3
6 weeks	15	13	17	22
7 weeks or more	14	14	13	15
Don't know	15	15	15	13

Base: 2,000.

Shared parental leave and pay policies

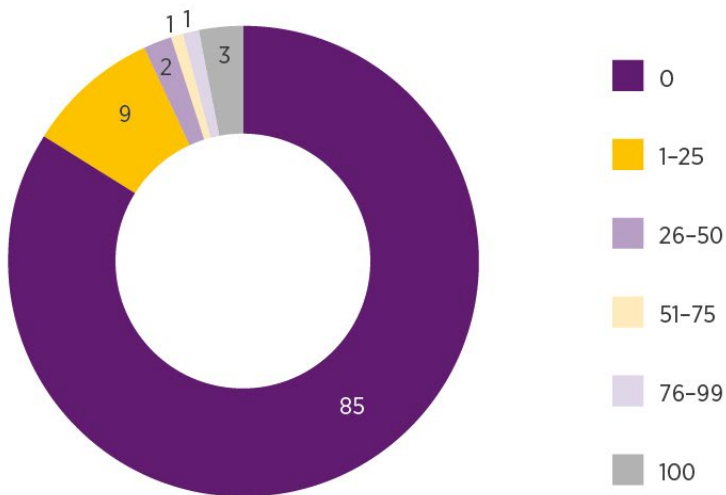
Very few new parents have taken up the right to shared parental leave (SPL) in the last two years, as Figures 2 and 3 show. According to our sampled organisations:

- 85% say no new fathers/partners have taken up SPL
- 9% say 1–25% have done so
- 2% say 26–50% have done so
- 5% say 51–100% have done so.

In comparison:

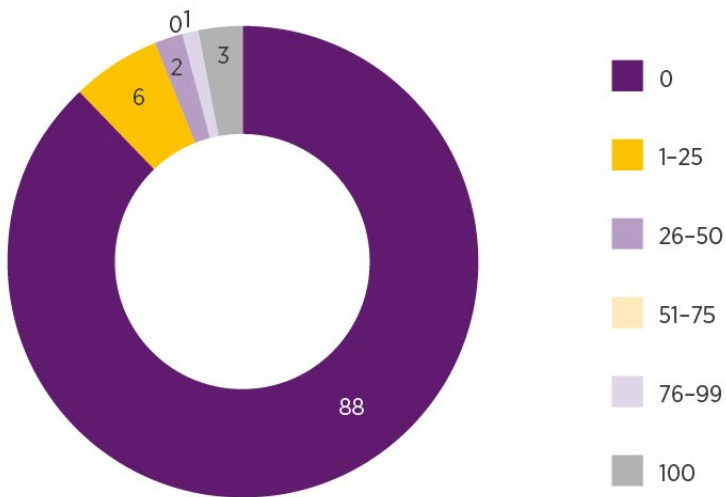
- 88% of employers say no new mothers have taken up SPL in the last two years
- 6% say 1–25% have done so
- 2% say 26–50% have done so
- 4% say 76–100% have done so.

Figure 2: Proportion of new dads/ partners who have taken up their right to SPL in 2022 (% of employees)



Base: 2,000.

Figure 3: Proportion of new mothers who have taken up their right to SPL in 2022 (% of employees)



Base: 2,000.

If we compare these figures with 2016, we see a downward trend in take-up. In 2016, 43% of organisations said that between 1% and 100% of new fathers/partners had taken up SPL and 32% of organisations said that between 1% and 100% of new mothers had done the same.

In our view, this underlines the fact that the current SPL policy just isn't working. Seven years on from its introduction, recent estimates² suggest that just 2% of eligible couples made use of shared parental leave last year.

The CIPD believes it is a better policy for the UK Government to prioritise reform of paternity/partner leave and enhance the statutory provision to six weeks at near or full pay, to help create greater support and fairness for new parents.

Planned changes to parental leave and pay policies

Our research found that over the next two years 15% of organisations plan to make changes to their parental leave and pay policies. Six per cent are planning to make changes to all of their parental leave and pay policies, 4% to SPL, 3% to paternity and 2% to maternity policies.

For those that are planning to make changes to their maternity policies, 73% are planning to enhance it and 9% are planning to decrease their policy. For paternity/partner policies, 70% are planning to enhance them and 11% are planning to decrease them. For SPL, 65% are planning to enhance their policies and 13% are planning to decrease their policies.

Keeping-in-touch days

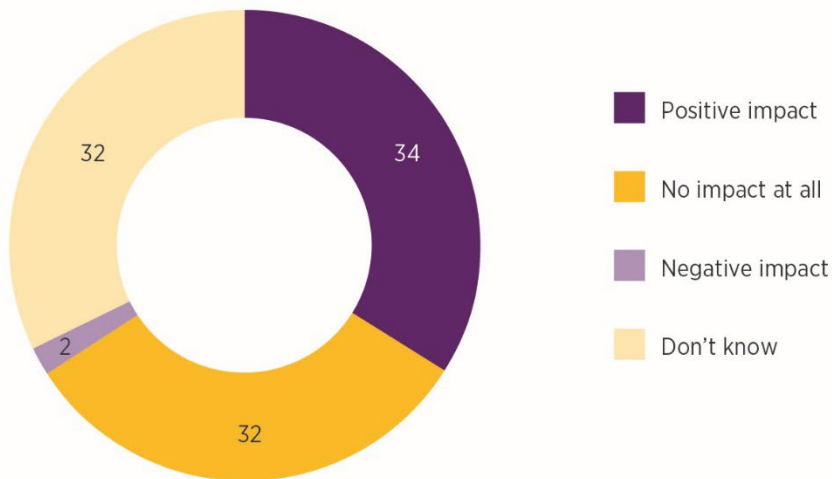
Around two-fifths (38%) of organisations encourage both women and men to take the optional keeping-in-touch days during maternity, adoption, shared parental leave or additional paternity leave. A further 35% leave it entirely up to the individual employee and 8% say they allow it but don't encourage it. A fifth (20%) aren't sure what approach their organisation takes in relation to keeping-in-touch days.

Childcare provision

Over a third (34%) of employers in England report the introduction of 30 hours' free childcare per week for all 3–4-year-olds in 2017 has made a positive impact on the number of women returning to work. Only 2% say it has had a negative impact, as shown in Figure 4.

² Howlett, E. (2020) Shared parental leave uptake still 'exceptionally low', research finds. *People Management*. 7 September. Available at: www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1747108/shared-parental-leave-uptake-still-exceptionally-low

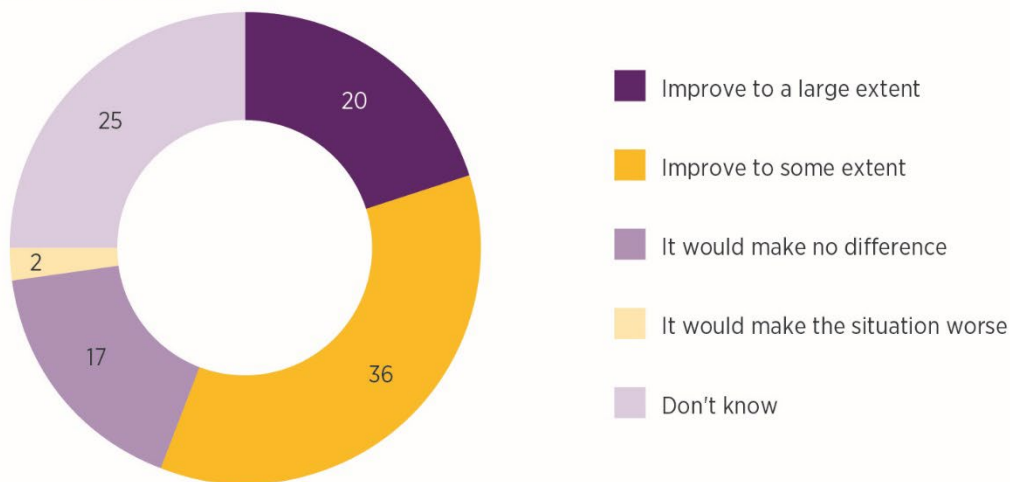
Figure 4: Impact of 30 hours free childcare on the number of women returning to work (%)



Base: 1,758.

Currently, some 2-year-olds in England are entitled to 15 hours of free childcare if they meet UK Government eligibility criteria. Over half (56%) believe the participation rate of women with young children would improve further if the same level of free childcare support was given for all children aged 0–2 as well as 3–4 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Likely impact of introducing 30 hours free childcare for 0–2 year olds, on the number of women returning to work (%)



Base: 1,758.

This is something that the CIPD has long campaigned for and is highlighted in our [previous public policy manifestos](#).

Support in place for employees with caring responsibilities

Over a third (34%) of organisations offer access to remote or hybrid working. As shown in Table 5, we found that 29% of employers support parents through providing flexibility in start and finish times to help with school drop-offs and pick-ups, and 28% proactively promote flexible working options such as job-share, term-time working and part-time hours. Another popular provision is health and wellbeing support for working parents, for example mentoring/counselling (25%). These last three flexible working and wellbeing options were also popular when we surveyed in 2016.

However, almost a quarter (24%) say their organisation does not have anything in place to support employees who have caring responsibilities.

Table 5: Support for employees with caring responsibilities (%)

	All	Private sector	Public sector	Voluntary
A childcare policy covering the range of support provided to working parents	10	8	13	13
A carers policy covering the range of support provided to carers who look after those who are older or disabled and unable to care for themselves	12	9	22	17
Proactively promote flexible working options such as job-share, term-time working, part-time hours	28	24	37	48
Offer access to remote or hybrid working	34	32	38	48
Health and well-being support for working parents, e.g. mentoring/counselling	25	23	30	31
Option to buy additional days' leave to care for their children	16	16	16	16
Support parents with school drop-off and pick-up, e.g. flexible start/finish times	29	28	30	44
Childcare search to help employees find suitable and affordable childcare places	4	4	3	1
Directly contracted childcare provision through salary sacrifice	8	8	10	4
An on-site nursery for working parents	4	2	11	2
Back-up childcare provision for when childcare arrangements break down	4	4	3	3
Other financial support, e.g. a one-off payment or 'money-off' vouchers	6	7	6	3
Subsidised places at play schemes in the school holidays	3	3	5	1
Other	2	2	0	2
Don't know	13	13	17	9
Not applicable - my organisation does not have anything in place to support employees who have caring responsibilities.	24	27	15	13

Base: 1,758.

Conclusion

The CIPD last explored [organisational approaches to parental leave and pay in 2016](#) and anticipated quite a lot of change in employer practice. However, our findings here show that not that much has changed over that period.

In particular, take-up of shared parental leave continues to be very low and very few new parents have taken up the right in the last two years. While most organisations (49%) have a

paternity or partner leave policy that provides only the statutory minimum leave entitlement and around a third provide the statutory minimum paternity/partner pay.

That is why we are calling on the UK Government to enhance the statutory paternity/partner provision to six weeks at or near the full rate of pay. Shared parental leave in its current form isn't working. A more effective way of starting to equalise parental leave and pay is to ring-fence paid paternity/partner leave. Of course organisations don't need to wait for any UK government change in this area but can start to enhance their parental policies where they are able to do so.

Reform is also needed to the current childcare/early years education provision. Our survey findings support our policy call to provide affordable childcare from the end of maternity/parental leave to enable parents and often mothers to return to work more quickly if they choose to.



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