

Are fathers being failed in the workplace?

Response to the inquiry of the Women and Equalities Committee submitted by Business in the Community (BITC)

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1. Equal earning, equal parenting: sharing responsibilities at work, at home

1. Equal earning can only happen if there is equal parenting. Women currently shoulder most of the childcare and household work and are thus unable to engage fully in the labour market. If employers want to tackle the pay gap, they need to create the conditions that give women and men the same opportunities, at work and at home.
2. Up until the age of 29, the split of men and women in the top 10% of earners is reasonably equal. The [average age](#) for a woman to give birth to her first child is 30 (ONS 2015). From this age onwards, the gender pay gap increases significantly as women take time out of the labour market, reduce their working hours or decide to work in occupations that will allow them to reconcile parenthood and employment but that [tend to be less lucrative](#) (e.g. teaching or healthcare).
3. Millennial women experience a gender pay gap of 5% [rising to 9%](#) by the time they are 30 and [to 25%](#) between 40 and 49. At current rates of progress, the Fawcett society predicts that it will take [62 years](#) to close the gender pay gap. Parenting through career breaks and part time work impacts women's careers and incomes across their lifetime, not just during the years spent caring.
4. [Fathers' involvement with their children](#) has grown significantly in just a few decades. The average man's input into childcare rose from less than 15 minutes a day in the mid-1970s to three hours each weekday by the late 1990s. Yet it remains considerably lower than women's involvement.
5. Sharing the double shift of childcare and housework would have a tremendous impact on women's progression and on men's wellbeing. Indeed, [research evidence](#) shows that when men participate fairly in the home, everyone benefits; children, women and men are happier and healthier.
6. For too long, employers' efforts have been focused on progressing women at work rather than supporting fathers to get more involved at home. This balance needs to be reversed if we are to achieve true gender equality in the workplace, and in society. By equalising [the](#)

[labour force participation rates](#) of women and men, the UK could further increase per capita growth by 0.5% per year, with potential gains of 10% of GDP by 2030.

2. The business case for supporting fathers in the workplace

7. Supporting fathers to take more responsibilities at home through gender equal leave packages and agile working would enable companies to:
 - (a) Contribute to men's wellbeing and reduce the costs related to sickness absence, reduced productivity at work and staff turnover;
 - (b) Retain their current male talent and progress their female talent;
 - (c) Attract millennials and the Generation Y.

(a) Reducing the cost of mental ill health and improving employees' wellbeing and productivity

8. [The cost of mental ill health](#) for workplaces is estimated at nearly £26 billion each year which is equivalent to £1,035 for every employee in the UK workforce.
9. In an indication of how [overtime](#) is firmly embedded into UK working culture, an [ILM report](#) found that 76% of employees reported routinely working late in the office or at home. Men are particularly at risk; British men still work some of the longest hours in Europe.
10. According to [the HSE/Labour Force Survey](#), 191,000 men a year report stress, depression or anxiety caused or made worse by work and [a recent survey conducted by Opinion Leader for the Men's Health Forum](#) showed that at least one in ten of the male workforce is significantly stressed, with 8% strongly agreeing that 'overwork and stress caused by a need to achieve on the job or in school affects or hurts [their] life'.
11. The culture of presentism and overtime is rife in the UK. It impacts individuals' physical health (e.g. [by increasing the risk of stroke](#)) and increases mental distress in the workplace. According to [the Modern Families Index 2017](#), 50% of parents agreed with the statement 'my work life balance is increasingly a source of stress' and many parents would consider absenting themselves from the workplace in order to deal with burnout, eg by taking sick leave (27%).
12. Breaking the culture of long hours and presentism and enabling employees to work in an agile way is key to increasing employees' wellbeing and productivity, and would allow both men and women to reconcile family life and work.

(b) Retaining male talent in a competitive environment

13. Research for [Salary Guides 2017](#) found that 30% of male employees would change jobs for a better working environment and 61% of them consider work-life balance a priority. Companies who are not already offering flexible working arrangements to employees will need to do so, where possible, in order to remain competitive.
14. According to [a Future of Work survey](#), a third of employees are currently experiencing problems with flexible working arrangements and 39% said that work-life balance was still under-developed within their company. As a result, a significant proportion of fathers are unable to fulfill their caring responsibilities.

15. [The average recruitment cost](#) of filling a vacancy per employee is £4,333, increasing to £7,750 when organisations also calculate the associated labour turnover costs. Offering agile working has been proven to reduce staff turnover, associated costs and reduction in lost knowledge, skills and experience.

(c) Attracting future parents with an agile working culture

16. Millennials and Generation Y want more flexibility at work and in their lives. If employers want to retain their younger workforce, they will need to cater to their needs and aspirations.

17. Millennial employees believe that [flexible working arrangements](#) lead to greater productivity while enhancing their personal wellbeing, health and happiness. Young men also share the view that [balancing work and family is an issue for their career choices](#), with 33% of men aged 25-34 saying that fathers are not supported at work compared with 22% of the total population of men. The same report showed that 65% of young women and 62% of young men say that when they think about their career choices they think about whether a job is likely to allow them [to balance work and family](#).

18. Besides, [attitudes towards gender equality](#) have changed. 75% of men aged 25-34 want the women in their lives to have equality of opportunity with them. Finally, in a [recent survey by Cisco](#), 45% of Generation Y employees claimed that they would accept a lower-paying job if it provided more flexibility on device choice and mobility.

3. Why gender inequalities persist at home and thus at work and how to tackle them by better supporting fathers

19. In 2014, 40% of economically inactive women in the UK cited “looking after the family or the home” as the primary reason for their inactivity. Although in the past 20 years the numbers citing this reason have fallen, it is still by far the biggest barrier to female employment and underemployment ([ONS data](#)).

20. Carers UK found women were four times more likely than men to have given up work because of [‘sandwich caring’](#) – multiple caring responsibilities – and that women aged 45-54 were more than twice as likely as other carers to have reduced working hours as a result of caring responsibilities.

21. That culture of motherhood creates the social expectation and preference for women to provide primary care for their children and do most of the housework. These longstanding cultural and normative views have a detrimental effect on women and their children.

22. [A recent Harvard study](#), based on a sample of 50,000 adults in 25 countries, found that sons of working mothers spent more time on childcare and housework and that their daughters completed more years of education, were more likely to be employed and in supervisory roles and earned higher incomes. It is good for society and business to have mothers who work.

23. The so-called choice that women make to reduce their engagement in the labour market [in order to care for their children](#) is heavily influenced by those traditional views of motherhood

and fatherhood. But it is also dependent on external factors which both companies and the government can influence, such as:

- (a) the availability and cost of childcare;
- (b) the incentive for the other parent to take leave;
- (c) the availability and perception of agile working arrangements.

(a) The availability and cost of childcare

24. The UK is the worst place in the OECD to be a couple with young children. [Research](#) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) revealed that the cost of childcare in the UK is one of the most expensive in the world, accounting for more than a third of a couple's average household income. It is more than double the average of 13% across all OECD nations, and more than three times higher than spending in certain European countries including France and Germany.
25. A survey conducted last year by [the Family and Childcare Trust](#) found that just 45% of councils in England had enough childcare for parents who work full-time. Both the cost and the lack of availability of childcare impact women's involvement in the workforce.
26. [The EHRC](#) also found that, in England, 28 percent of non-working parents say they are not working because of inadequate childcare provision. These inequalities increase when considering ethnic minority groups. For example, the parents of 73% of Black children, 72% of Pakistani children and 64% of Bangladeshi children take up the Government's free 3-4-year-old childcare places in contrast to the parents of 89% of white children. The report also indicates that only 23% of ethnic minority parents had used informal/family childcare over a six-month period compared to 36% of white parents, indicating that ethnic minority mothers are doing the lion's share of their childcare.
27. Further reform from the government is needed to bridge this gap which disproportionately affects parents from certain minority ethnic groups.

(b) The incentive for the other parent to take leave

28. [Shared Parental Leave](#) (SPL) was introduced so that fathers and partners in same-sex couples are able to share caring responsibilities. However, the take-up remains low. [The charity Working Families](#) estimates that between 0.5 and 2% of eligible fathers have made use of the provision so far. What are the reasons for this low uptake?
29. [The ILM research on shared parental leave](#) found that only 37% of employees believe that their employer is supportive of the idea of leave being shared between the mother and the father and 25% think that their employer is actively opposed to it.
30. In order to increase the take-up of SPL, employers need to provide formal training to the relevant members of the HR department and line managers to enable them to better support working parents considering SPL; ensure that information and guidance is readily available to all employees (e.g. via staff intranet; staff handbook; digital noticeboards; employee networks).
31. Research by [YouGov](#) and the [National Childbirth Trust](#) shows that men want to share parenting but the biggest barrier to them taking SPL is a financial one with a third of fathers not willing to take SPL for financial reasons. According to [Working Families](#), in 2016, half of

employers chose to meet statutory minimum requirements while a third matched SPL to their existing enhanced maternity leave.

32. BITC strongly recommends employers to consider offering enhanced pay and benefits to men on SPL, to mirror the benefits received on maternity leave and to ensure take up. Indeed, [research](#) shows that fathers' take-up of paternity and parental leave is highest when leave is paid at above 50% wage replacement and is longer than 14 days. Besides, normalising career breaks through SPL would reduce the detrimental effect of a career break on maternity learners, and allay the concerns of men considering SPL.
33. BITC's Gender Equality campaign member [EY](#) overhauled all their parental packages and are now offering one distinct parental package to all their staff. It is available to fathers, mothers, surrogate mothers and adoptive parents. By giving the same benefits to fathers and mothers, EY has made parental leave a gender-free issue. This is a best practice example that should be implemented by other companies.
34. Fathers are also worried about the impact of taking a break on their careers and negative attitudes from colleagues, managers or employers. [An Institute of Leadership and Management](#) report found that fewer than 1 in 10 men took more than their two weeks paternity leave and only 58% of employees thought that their employer was supportive of this leave.
35. [Research by Tina Miller](#) showed that even if men are committed to having hands-on fathering roles and sharing caring responsibilities with their wives before having a child, this commitment rapidly dissipates. Only a year after the child is born, they feel the need to 'fit fathering in' and to prioritise their professional lives over their caring responsibilities. Men who do wish to transgress traditional roles and become 'stay at home' fathers have to pay a high price for challenging cultural and social norms.
36. In order to increase the take-up of SPL and encourage men to take an active role in childcare, starting from birth, companies need to showcase role models so as to change social consensus on parenthood. They also need to have a support system in place for all parents, not just mothers, during and after the leave (e.g. KIT days; informing parents on internal vacancies; buddying; mentoring; agile work arrangements).

(d) The availability and perception of agile working arrangements

37. Employers need to offer more family-friendly policies and benefits such as agile working arrangements. Flexibility can allow both men and women to reconcile parenthood and employment. However, it is not yet common place and remains stigmatized thereby working against career progression.
38. [A 2016 CIPD report on working parents](#) found that just 30% of those surveyed said their organisation actively promotes flexible working options to employees who have caring responsibilities. Only 11% said their company has a childcare policy that covers the range of support available to working parents.
39. According to [the Modern Families Index 2017](#), fathers are less comfortable asking for formal flexible working arrangements and more likely to lie or bend the truth to their employer about their family responsibilities. Twice the number of fathers compared to mothers believe

flexible workers are viewed as less committed and over double the number of fathers believe working flexibly will have a negative impact on their career.

40. Our own [gender benchmark data](#) corroborates those figures and shows that, in the private sector, 35% of all female employees are agile workers compared to only 25% of all men. Besides, women are almost three times more likely to be agile workers than men – when looking at rates of formal agile working arrangements. This means that men may be reluctant to request formal agile working arrangements because of the stigma attached to it.
41. [Our project 28-40 research](#) – the largest ever study of women in work – highlighted the impact of the stigma attached to flexible working, often seen as a ‘mummy track’. We encourage companies to offer agile working arrangements to all employees, not just parents. This will help remove the stigma around flexible working being perceived as a ‘mummy track’ and associated with a lack of commitment and ambition.
42. Focusing efforts on progressing women in the workplace has proven to be insufficient. In order to tackle the gender pay gap, business need to focus on tackling the housework gap. Supporting fathers’ aspirations to be more present and involved in childcare and housework is key to redressing the balance of power. It is an innovative and efficient way to support women and will improve parents’ wellbeing, productivity and progression. Business will benefit and so will women, men and their children.