



# Cash or carry?

## Fathers combining work and care in the UK

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### Conclusions & Recommendations

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The current social, cultural, institutional and legislative framework for work-and-care in the United Kingdom amounts to social engineering. This brazenly and brutally directs women and mothers to invest in caring while prohibiting many men and fathers from investing substantially in it. This is out of step with the reality of most parents' lives and aspirations.

Despite this unforgiving context, fathers' aspirations to care directly for and be close to their children are changing rapidly, as are some of their behaviours. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, in many families such changes are 'round the edges', leaving the great majority of fathers of dependent children mainly responsible for earning, with their partner mainly responsible for caregiving.

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As documented in our Full Report, traditionalism in parents' gender roles incurs economic and personal costs. Where children are concerned, it is directly associated with negative developmental outcomes, with indirect effects including increased likelihood of family poverty and child abuse, as well as separation/ divorce. All of these present hazards for children. In addition, State support for mothers (but not fathers) as children's intimate caregivers, contravenes Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 7 accords children 'as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.' Countries like the UK that have ratified the UNCRC are therefore required to do everything 'possible' to enable care by both parents. In this respect, the British government is clearly contravening Article 7. (One would have to employ considerable sophistry to argue that 'cared for' could mean financial support alone, without reference to direct care.)

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: Fair Jobs for Fathers**

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In families with at least one working parent, only one mother in five (22%) brings home even half the family income. This is in part due to the Gender Pay Gap, which makes it difficult for fathers to work shorter hours or take leave for parenting, since family income is more likely to be compromised when they do. We therefore call on the Government to strengthen current efforts to eliminate the Gender Pay Gap by 2025. This will entail a radical shake-up of employment law to make it easier for fathers, as well as mothers, to care and earn for their families.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2: Employers to provide parity in paid leave entitlements to mothers and fathers**

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We recommend employers who wish to benefit fully from the loyalty and commitment of fathers in their organisation, to upgrade their policies to provide parity to mothers and fathers in leave entitlements, including taking immediate action to 'top up' Paternity and Parental Pay to the level of Maternity Pay they offer and actively promoting and facilitating take-up by fathers. By 2020, we would anticipate that progressive employers will, for expectant and new fathers, automatically schedule not only well-paid Paternity Leave but also well paid Parental Leave to match their offer to mothers (this leave to be taken during the first twelve months after the birth). Fathers not wishing to take these leaves could opt out.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: Require employers to publish 'care equity' information**

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Large UK employers are now required to publish 'pay equity' information (i.e. comparative pay levels for female and male employees). For more details see [ACAS' guide to gender pay gap reporting](#). Such employers should also be required to publish, by gender and parent-status, 'care equity' information: take-up of Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave and

flexible working ‘for family reasons’, as well as employer responses to flexible working requests.

## RECOMMENDATION 4: Redesign the UK’s parenting leave system

**1.A Eligibility for Paternity Leave and Pay** Fathers who will have worked for an employer for 15 weeks before their baby’s due date (rather than for 41 weeks, as currently) should be eligible for the Statutory two weeks Paternity Leave, bringing this in line with mothers’ eligibility for Maternity Leave

**1.B Self-employed and non-eligible fathers** Self-employed and ‘dependent contractor/ ‘worker’ fathers, as well as employed fathers not eligible for Paternity Leave and Pay, should be eligible for a period of leave for parenting as well as a Statutory Paternity Allowance payment (equivalent to the Maternity Allowance currently paid to comparable mothers).

**1.C Abolish the current Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Pay system** (i.e. Maternity Leave and Pay that eligible mothers can transfer to an eligible partner). This policy is ineffective and discriminatory: eligibility is seriously limited; the policy is too complex for most to understand; the statutory pay level is too low for most fathers to be able to participate in the scheme

**1.D In place of SPL, introduce a non-transferable 13-week leave (the ‘Father’s Quota’)**, reserved for fathers/ mothers’ partners to be taken in the first year of an infant’s life. Eligibility, as with current Paternity Leave, should rest solely on that parent’s own employment history, without reference to the mother’s

**1.E Improve pay for fathers’ leave:**

(i) Expectant/ adoptive fathers/ mothers’ partners are currently eligible for unpaid time off to attend two antenatal appointments. *This leave should be paid at 100% of salary* (with a ‘cap’ – see below for definition of ‘cap’)

(ii) Statutory Paternity Leave (two weeks) *should be paid at 90% of salary* (again with a cap)

(iii) The first four weeks of the new 13-week Father’s Quota *should be paid, in line with current Statutory Maternity Pay, at 90% of salary* (with a cap). The remaining nine weeks of the Father’s Quota *should be paid at the Statutory Minimum* (currently £140.98 per week), with the ambition to increase both the length and pay levels of the Father’s Quota as well as the pay levels of Maternity Pay steadily over time to the point at which each parent qualifies for six months’ non-transferable leave paid at 90% of salary (with a cap) to be taken in the first year of their child’s life. Mothers could still take longer Maternity Leave if they so wished, but at a cost to the family’s finances, since the Father’s Quota (and associated pay) would be lost.

**1.F Introduce a ‘cap’ on Maternity Pay** (i.e. the amount the employer is reimbursed by the Exchequer when an employed mother takes Maternity Leave): currently, there is no ‘cap’ on the level at which the Exchequer must reimburse the employer for mothers’ earnings when she is on the first six weeks of Maternity Leave. The Exchequer must reimburse the

employer for 90% of the woman's salary for six weeks, whether she is paid £15,000 or £150,000 per annum. Other jurisdictions almost universally 'cap' the pay level at which the employer can claim for an individual employee who is on Maternity, Paternity or Parental Leave. If Paternity Pay (with a cap) is introduced in the UK (see RECOMMENDATION 1E above), equalities legislation will require an equivalent cap on Maternity Pay. The Government should explore savings to be made by capping Maternity Pay, to establish whether savings would be sufficient to support a fairer parenting pay system for all.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5: Redefine sex discrimination to encompass negativity towards male caregiving**

Discounting, mocking and failing to protect men's/ fathers' caregiving amount to sex discrimination, and overburden women and mothers with caring responsibilities. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission should, in the next edition of the Equalities Act Guidance, name and respond to this. Gender equality/ unconscious bias training, gender equality impact and risk assessments and related activities and guidelines should also name and address this issue.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6: Require publicly-funded publications and initiatives to be 'father-proofed'**

When only mothers' care-taking is valued, traditional gender roles and the Gender Pay Gap are both reinforced. To counter maternalism, Government and Local Authority commissioned/ promoted research, policy, resources, tenders and guidelines relating to work/ life balance and other aspects of child and parental health, education and family life should be proofed for father-inclusion by experts before publication. In the short- and medium-term this will be necessary to ensure that resources/ initiatives do not, as currently, solely or primarily, address mothers' circumstances and concerns and ignore or diminish fathers'.

Download the Executive Summary and Full Report from our website.

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