

# Briefing: Giving fathers due consideration in the parental leave review

---

## Baroness Lister's proposed amendment to the Employment Rights Bill – April 2025

The [Employment Rights Bill](#) proposes several changes to the UK parenting leave system – to make statutory paternity leave (but NOT pay) and unpaid parental leave Day 1 rights, and enable fathers and others<sup>1</sup> to take paternity leave after shared parental leave<sup>2</sup>.

However, the Bill fails to address the bigger picture: namely *the failure of the wider parental leave system<sup>3</sup> to effectively support birth mothers and fathers/second parents to share their responsibilities for caregiving in their baby's first year – and thus help them participate on a more equal footing in the workplace.*

With this in mind, the proposed amendment calls for a new clause specifying that the **Government's proposed parental leave review must explore:**

- the introduction of a statutory period of reserved, non-transferable paid parental leave for fathers and other parents
- the level of pay available to such fathers/other parents via paternity leave and other forms of leave
- the inclusion of self-employed fathers and others not currently eligible to statutory support<sup>4</sup>
- the extension of full employment rights, including redundancy protections, to fathers who take paternity and any reserved leave considered by the review
- international examples of best practice in parental leave policy design.

The proposed amendment also specifies that the Secretary of State must publish, on an annual basis, gender-disaggregated data on take-up of all types of parental leave.

This briefing explains the reasons for the proposed amendment.

### For further information please contact

Baroness Ruth Lister [LISTERR@parliament.uk](mailto:LISTERR@parliament.uk)

Dr Jeremy Davies, Fatherhood Institute [j.davies@fatherhoodinstitute.org](mailto:j.davies@fatherhoodinstitute.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> Paternity leave and shared parental leave can be taken by fathers, mothers' partners (the 'other mother', not taking maternity leave, in a lesbian parent-couple), and 'second parent' adopters (the 'other parent', not taking adoption leave, in an adopting couple).

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the changes, see the [DBT Factsheet: Bereavement, Paternity and Unpaid Parental Leave](#)

<sup>3</sup> We use this as a 'catch-all' term for all leaves (and related pay) designed to support parents in their baby's first year – including maternity leave, paternity leave, shared parental leave and unpaid parental leave.

<sup>4</sup> Including individuals in insecure employment.

## Background

The UK has, through its failure to introduce substantive improvements to its statutory paid paternity offer, missed vital opportunities to reduce the gender pay gap<sup>5</sup>, stimulate economic growth<sup>6</sup> and boost family outcomes – by increasing men’s capacity to take an equal role as hands-on parents, and build closer relationships with their children.

The UK has one of the most gendered parenting leave systems in the world<sup>7</sup> – and its statutory paid paternity offer is the least generous in Europe, and 40<sup>th</sup> out of 43 countries in the OECD<sup>8</sup>. By 2023, 22 OECD countries were offering fathers more than six weeks’ earmarked leave paid at the equivalent of 100% of salary. A UK father gets just 0.4 weeks. Put another way, an average-earning, full-time working man in the UK taking his full entitlement of two weeks’ statutory paternity leave at the current statutory rate is more than £1,000 worse off, compared to what he would earn if he carried on working<sup>9</sup>.

As a result, take-up is low: the number of individuals receiving statutory paternity pay in 2023-24 represented just 31.6 men per 100 live births that year<sup>10</sup>, compared to an average of 57 men per 100 live births taking leave in the 18 OECD countries with available data<sup>11</sup>.

Aside from the two weeks’ paternity leave, the only other paid leave UK fathers have access to – in theory – is shared parental leave<sup>12</sup> (SPL). The previous Government’s own evaluation found that only 1% of mothers and 5% of fathers passing the eligibility criteria for SPL used it<sup>13</sup>; and an independent academic evaluation confirmed that the policy has had zero impact, overall, on fathers’ take-up of leave in their baby’s first year, or on the length of such leave - with the key barriers being eligibility, affordability and mothers’ need to ‘give up’ leave in order for fathers to take it<sup>14</sup>. More recent data also shows that the scheme is skewed against lower-earning families, with just 5% of SPL users coming from the bottom 50% of earners<sup>15</sup>.

Self-employed fathers are excluded from both paternity leave and SPL, and most take no time off when their babies are born<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> The UK’s gender pay gap for all employees was 13.1% in April 2024, and 7% for full-time employees. Source: [ONS, October 2024](#).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation has estimated that increasing the statutory paternity offer to 6 weeks at 90% salary reimbursement could deliver £2.6bn of long-term growth to the UK economy. Source: [Politics Home](#)

<sup>7</sup> Eligible UK birth mothers have an individual right to 52 weeks’ maternity leave, 39 of which are paid (the first six weeks at 90% of average earnings and the next 33 weeks at the statutory rate of £187.18 per week or 90% of average earnings – whichever is lower). Eligible fathers can take up to two weeks’ paternity leave, paid at this same statutory rate (which is less than half the National Living Wage: at £11.44 per hour, this works out at £400.40 for a 35-hour working week).

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/files/ugd/efff1d\\_4d71c418c2e44a6cb6ed84a11a15bcc7.pdf](https://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/files/ugd/efff1d_4d71c418c2e44a6cb6ed84a11a15bcc7.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> 2024 figures. The statutory rate for paternity pay was £184.03 per week (*it has since increased to £187.18 from 6 April 2025*). Two weeks’ statutory paternity pay was therefore £368.06 (2 x £184.03). The most recent data for two weeks’ pay at the UK average for a full-time working man was £695.60 per week (Office for National Statistics, April 2023: median weekly full-time pay for full-time men), giving total average earnings of £1,391.20 for two weeks. The difference was £1,023.04.

<sup>10</sup> Fatherhood Institute evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry on Equality at work: paternity and shared parental leave (2025).

<sup>11</sup> [OECD Family Database, p3](#)

<sup>12</sup> Misnamed, since it is, in fact, a *transferable maternity leave* scheme.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shared-parental-leave-spl-evaluation>

<sup>14</sup> The study, by Bath University, used a representative sample of 40,000 households and compared families potentially eligible to the leave (post 2015) with those who weren’t (before the policy was introduced). Read more in the policy brief available [online](#).

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg7k24i8ywo>

<sup>16</sup> A [2023 TUC survey](#) found that 69% of self-employed fathers took no time off.

## What might a better system look like?

Overall, international evidence shows that *giving fathers reserved, non-transferable and well-paid parental leave, rather than simply improving paternity leave*<sup>17</sup>, has the biggest positive impact on gendered inequalities in earning and caregiving. Policy changes that have resulted in both higher uptake of leave by fathers and their greater participation in infant care have been found across Scandinavia, in Germany, in California, in Spain and in many other countries<sup>18</sup>. Analysis of OECD data<sup>19</sup> found that 12 countries offering fathers more than six weeks' paid leave had a 4% smaller gender wage gap, and a 3.7% smaller gap between men's and women's labour force participation, than 26 countries offering less than six weeks. Eleven of these give fathers reserved, paid parental leave<sup>20</sup>.

Researchers have found multiple other benefits resulting from such 'daddy months'. As well as helping to narrow the gender wage gap, through mothers returning to work earlier<sup>21</sup>, mothers' increased earnings<sup>22</sup> and fathers' continuing hands-on involvement in childcare<sup>23</sup> and housework<sup>24</sup>, they have been found to contribute to child educational outcomes<sup>25</sup>, child cognitive development<sup>26</sup> and father-child relationship quality<sup>27</sup>; to improve both fathers' and mothers' wellbeing<sup>28</sup>; to increase fertility<sup>29</sup>; to reduce separation and divorce<sup>30</sup>; and to change gender norms, including among grandparents<sup>31</sup>. Specifically, paternal engagement in the first year of parenthood is important for fostering ongoing engagement until the child is at least age eleven, and this positive effect builds over time<sup>32</sup>. Given fathers' tendency to be the main or sole breadwinner, high rates of wage replacement (80%+) are key to high take-up<sup>33</sup>, but recent estimates suggest an improved paternity offer could help the UK increase economic output by £23bn or 1% of GDP<sup>34</sup>; 6-weeks' statutory leave for fathers paid at 90% of usual earnings, could contribute £2.6bn to the economy in the near-term<sup>35</sup>.

---

<sup>17</sup> Leave to support the mother's recovery, taken after the birth and coinciding with her maternity leave.

<sup>18</sup> References available on request.

<sup>19</sup> Centre for Progressive Policy/Pregnant Then Screwed/Women in Data. (2023). [Leave in the Lurch](#).

<sup>20</sup> In several of these countries, paternity leave does not even exist. Fatherhood Institute [blog](#), June 2023

<sup>21</sup> Boll, C., & Nikolka, T. (2024). [The Impact of a Parental Leave Benefit Reform on Parents' Leave-taking, Labor Supply and Childcare Arrangements](#).

<sup>22</sup> Johannson, E.-A. (2010). [The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings](#). This study explored the effect, in Sweden, of parental leave - own and spouse's - on subsequent earnings. Each month the father stays on parental leave increases the mother's earnings (four years later) by 6.7%.

<sup>23</sup> Pragg, B., & Knoester, C. (2017). [Parental Leave Use among Disadvantaged Fathers](#). *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(8), 1157-1185.

<sup>24</sup> Tamm, M. (2019). [Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation](#). *Labour Economics*, 59, 184-197.

<sup>25</sup> For example, in Sweden introduction of a 'daddy month' increased the probability of girls' doing a maths-intensive programme in upper secondary education. See Mikkelsen, S., & Peter, N. (2024). [More dads at home, more girls in maths-intensive studies? Evidence from a parental leave reform](#). *Economica*.

<sup>26</sup> Huerta, M. C., Adema, W., Baxter, J., Han, W.-J., & Waldfogel, J. (2013). [Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related? Evidence from Four OECD Countries](#).

<sup>27</sup> Communication, closeness, involvement. See Petts, R. J., Knoester, C., & Waldfogel, J. (2020). [Fathers' Paternity Leave-Taking and Children's Perceptions of Father-Child Relationships in the United States](#). *Sex Roles*, 82(3-4), 173-188.

<sup>28</sup> Korsgren, P., & Lent, M. v. (2022). [Earmarked Paternity Leave and Well-Being](#); Lidbeck, M., Bernhardtsson, S., & Tjus, T. (2018). Division of parental leave and perceived parenting stress among mothers and fathers. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 36(4), 406-420. doi:10.1080/02646838.2018.1468557

<sup>29</sup> For example, increased progression to second and third births. See Puur, A., Abdullayev, S., Klesment, M., & Gortfelder, M. (2023). [Parental Leave and Fertility: Individual-Level Responses in the Tempo and Quantum of Second and Third Births](#). *European journal of population*, 39(1), 22.

<sup>30</sup> Arnalds, A. A., Eydal, G. B., & Gíslason, I. V. (2022). Paid Parental Leave in Iceland: Increasing Gender Equality at Home and on the Labour Market. In C. de la Porte, G. B. Eydal, J. Kauko, D. Nohrstedt, P. t Hart, & B. S. Tranøy (Eds.), *Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Olafsson, A., & Steingrimsdottir, H. (2020). [How Does Daddy at Home Affect Marital Stability?](#) *The Economic Journal*, 130(629), 1471-1500.

<sup>31</sup> For example, in Germany, following the introduction of reserved leave for fathers, grandparents' attitudes were found to be considerably less sexist than before this policy change. See Unterhofer, U., & Wrohlich, K. (2017). [Fathers, Parental Leave and gender norms](#).

<sup>32</sup> Norman, H., Elliot, M., & Vanchugova, D. (2023). How Important Is Early Paternal Engagement? Deriving Longitudinal Measures of Fathers' Childcare Engagement and Exploring Structural Relationships With Prior Engagement and Employment Hours. *Journal of Family Issues*, 0(0), 0192513X231214642. doi:10.1177/0192513X231214642

<sup>33</sup> Koslowski, A., & O'Brien, M. (2022). Fathers and family leave policies: What public policy can do to support families. In M. Grau Grau, M. las Heras Maestro, & H. Riley Bowles (Eds.), *Engaged fatherhood for men, families and gender equality* (pp. 141-152).

<sup>34</sup> Centre for Progressive Policy (2023). [Fair Growth: opportunities for economic renewal](#).

<sup>35</sup> Crowther, Z. (2025). [Improving Paternity Leave Provision 'Could Boost The Economy by £2.6bn'](#). *Politics Home*, 29 January 2025.

## Why support this amendment?

The Government has – despite polls suggesting high public support, prominent campaigns for a better paternity deal<sup>36</sup> and several opportunities to do so in Parliament – given no assurances that its parental leave review will:

- a) explore the possibility of introducing reserved, non-transferable paid parental leave for fathers – well-known internationally to be most effective way of achieving desired gender equality outcomes
- b) look at ways to enable more fathers to take paternity and any other reserved leave through improved statutory pay – again, shown internationally to be key to improving take-up and achieving higher paternal involvement\*
- c) extend statutory paternity rights to self-employed and other currently ineligible fathers
- d) consider extending full employment rights to fathers who take paternity leave (who currently, unlike mothers taking maternity leave, lack [redundancy protections](#)) and any reserved leave the review might consider.

*\*We also note, with disappointment, that in its current form the Employment Rights Bill does not propose making the current, derisory statutory paternity pay a Day 1 right, despite proposing to remove the 26-week qualifying period for statutory paternity leave.*

The proposed amendment aims to ensure this much-needed review does a thorough job, by *pushing for clarity that these key elements will be 'on the table', and evidence about international 'best practice' considered; and calling for publication of annual, gender-disaggregated data on take-up of all types of parental leave moving forward* – to keep track of the impacts of any policy changes over time, and to inform future policymaking.

---

<sup>36</sup> Pregnant Then Screwed '[Let's Talk about Six](#)'; Fatherhood Institute '[6 weeks for dads](#)'; [The Dad Shift](#). An October 2024 poll found 81% of UK people agreeing that giving fathers a decent amount of paid paternity leave would be good for families and the country.