

Work Life Balance

Knowing Families: what families need to balance work and family life

Healthy, resilient families are the backbone of UK society. Supported by the right policies, they enable strong communities to be built; raise aspirational children who strive to do well both in education and employment; work hard to support family members across the generations economically, emotionally and physically; and together create a diverse and vibrant society.

Increased rights to flexible working and improved leave arrangements following the birth of a child are two areas that the new coalition government has committed to improving. The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) fully supports these intentions but we would urge the coalition government to do more:

Work life balance - what families want

- Flexible working for all
- The right to request flexible working from day one of employment
- Well paid part-time work opportunities across occupations – for men and women
- Maternity and Paternity Leave paid at least at minimum wage level
- A leave system that has gender neutral employment outcomes
- Better informed employers about flexible working – not just part time or reduced hours
- Universal childcare services for all families

This briefing is part of the Family and Parenting Institute's **Knowing Families** series. **Knowing Families** is a major FPI project which aims to reveal the concerns and needs of British families themselves. We will be mapping the issues of elder care and flexible working, public transport, and benefits, as our key areas of work over the next year.

There have been substantial improvements over the last five years in improving the reconciliation of work and family life commitments. And yet, too many families still struggle to find a job that can be combined with family life. Caring for dependents makes finding work difficult and is an area of stress for many families. Reconciling the need to provide financial support and being able to care emotionally and practically for dependents is a crucial element in maintaining good family relationships.

Having the right to work more flexibly will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work life balance - what families want

Flexible working for all

“When our daughter was born, it was assumed that I would go back to work part time after my maternity leave finished (only six months then) and my husband would continue to work part time. We didn’t really consider any other options but when our son was born, three years later and we were struggling to find a childminder to take them both, we seriously looked at other options. We were lucky that we could afford for us both to work part time and share looking after the children but we are in a minority.”

Mother of two, West Yorkshire

The coalition government has committed to consult on extending the right to request flexible working to all. This is great news for families of all shapes, sizes and ages and will make a real difference to families’ lives.

Rights to flexible working are not just parent friendly, they are **family friendly**. Across the life cycle, the need to change working patterns to accommodate caring responsibilities will affect a significant part of the work force.

Britain still has a working culture that assumes that flexible working is primarily for women with caring responsibilities. Men do not request flexible working through fear it will harm their career prospects¹, inadvertently reinforcing that it is women’s career opportunities that are curtailed and their pension contributions that are reduced.

Twenty-two per cent of fathers and 11 per cent of mothers are worried about the impact working flexibly could have on their career². However, one in ten requests for more flexibility is to enable more free time³.

Flexible working is an essential part of being able to maintain good relationships with family members for older people. Early retirement is often precipitated by the need to care for a relative or close friend⁴. Older workers still have caring (and financial) responsibilities for children, especially those with disabled adult children or caring for grandchildren.

Three steps towards flexible working for all

- All applicable public sector jobs across the range from frontline staff to managerial posts should be offered with flexible working options
- Jobcentre Plus workers should ask all employers whether a current vacancy can be offered as a part-time position, or is suitable for job share
- Legislate to increase rights to flexible working for all workers.

Flexible working options for all will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work life balance - what families want

The right to request flexible working from day one of employment

"I have brought up my son single-handedly for the last ten years, he has Asperger's syndrome (albeit mildly). For the last four years I have worked at his primary school as my options re returning to employment were limited due to my situation."

Mother of one, London

The coalition government has committed to consult on extending the right to request flexible working to all. This is great news for families of all shapes, sizes and ages and will make a real difference to families' lives. Both men and women employees with dependent children working in **family friendly** environments have higher levels of job satisfaction than those who do not^{5 6}.

Women are more likely to request to work flexibly than men and rates of request for flexible working are also much higher for women with dependent children under the age of six than men⁷.

Currently employees need to have been in continuous employment with the same employer for 26 weeks to be entitled to request flexible working. As the demand to move off benefits and into employment increases, having the right to request flexible working from day one of employment will give people increased options for finding work. Lack of jobs with flexible working or suitable hours of work is currently a barrier for parents returning to the job market⁸.

Giving unemployed parents re-entering the workplace the right to work flexibly at the start of employment enables them to achieve a better balance between family and professional duties⁹. It will also help both mothers and fathers spend more time with their children¹⁰.

Three steps towards the right to request flexible working from day one of employment

- Flexible working needs to be available from day one of employment for all those currently eligible
- All staff in Jobcentre Plus need to have knowledge of current rights to flexible working
- Flexible working should include part-time working, ensuring that there is equal access to well paid part time work.

Having the right to request flexible working from day one of employment will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work life balance - what families want

Well paid part-time work opportunities across occupations – for men and women

“Struggling mothers on low incomes are often poorly rewarded for the hours they put in – and to boot they are denied the joys of spending time raising their children.”

Mother of four, Wiltshire

One of the best ways for families to work and care for dependents is to work part time. Many mothers choose this option while their children are young and at school. For older people it can be a way to ease into retirement. However, further effort is also needed to make all our workplaces **family friendly**.

Part-time arrangements are disproportionately concentrated in lower skilled jobs¹¹ and mainly filled by women with family responsibilities¹² many of whom are working below their skill level¹³. There needs to be more part-time jobs at a senior level to ensure that employment in Britain is really **family friendly**¹⁴. Many younger children with lone mothers want to have more time with their mothers, wanting them to only work during school hours and term time.

Flexible working arrangements, especially part-time work arrangements near retirement, help to keep older, experienced staff in work longer reducing recruitment costs for employers¹⁵.

Part-time working is just one form of flexible working. Men prefer flexitime working, a compressed work week or working from home¹⁶. Wages across all types of flexible working need to be equitable with fulltime equivalents.

Three steps towards more well paid part-time work opportunities across occupations

- All applicable public sector jobs across the range from frontline staff to managerial posts should be offered with flexible working options including part-time working
- Jobcentre Plus workers should ask all employers whether a current vacancy can be offered as a part-time position, or is suitable for job share or other flexible working arrangements
- Businesses should be required to undertake a pay audit to ensure that part-time workers are not being paid at a lesser amount than full-time equivalents and that no pay gaps exist.

Well paid part-time work opportunities for both men and women will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work life balance - what families want

Maternity and Paternity Leave paid at least at minimum wage level

“What about the real choice not to work? Many parents are forced to go back to work due to lack of financial support. All the financial incentives are aimed at women returning to work and on top of that it is also society's expectation these days to (return to work).”

Mother of one, Hertfordshire

Having a baby is an expensive time for any family and parents have to make choices about how to take time off to care for a young baby. Fathers on low incomes are less likely to receive full pay during Paternity Leave and are less able to afford Additional Paternity Leave¹⁷. Fathers with long service records are more likely to take Statutory Paternity Leave, but the overriding factor determining the use of Paternity Leave relates to financial circumstances. High earners are more likely to take Additional Paternity Leave¹⁸. In 2005, 20 per cent of fathers took no Paternity Leave¹⁹.

Paternity Leave has gained in significance as evidence of the importance of father involvement in children's early years has accumulated. Paternity Leave is an excellent means of promoting greater father involvement with his child²⁰. Around 12 per cent of mothers receive no Maternity Pay; they tend to be mothers in workplaces with no family friendly arrangements or in occupations with a low hourly gross pay and working fewer than 15 hours a week²¹. Women without continuous employment with the same employer for a continuous period of at least 26 weeks before the qualifying period are ineligible.

Feeling the pinch following childbirth also affects when mothers decide to return to work after Maternity Leave. Seventy per cent of mothers re-enter the job market earlier than originally intended because of money concerns²². Increasing both Maternity and Paternity Pay ensures that fathers can take Paternity Leave²³ and that leave entitlements following the birth of a baby are truly **family friendly**.

Three steps towards paying Maternity and Paternity Leave at least at minimum wage level

- Remove the qualifying period for eligibility for Maternity Pay so that all pregnant women in work have access to pay following the birth of their child
- Ensure that all male employees know what leave they are entitled to following the birth of their child
- Implement rights to Additional Paternity Leave and Pay legislated for in the Work and Families Act 2006 from April 2011.

Paying Maternity and Paternity Leave at least at minimum wage level will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work life balance - what families want

A leave system that has gender equitable employment outcomes

“The gender equality debate seems to be a no-go area – why? Why are people so defensive about discussing it? The 50s are long gone - we now have a much healthier society in which men and women share responsibilities more and more – but we have somehow forgotten to factor in the value of unpaid care and raising children.”

Mother of four, Wiltshire

Rights to request flexible working have been instrumental in helping many women find **family friendly** employment opportunities. There has been a general trend towards a decline of the male bread-winner household and a corresponding rise in both dual-earner and lone-parent households²⁴.

Numbers of female breadwinners in families are set to reach 28 per cent by 2030²⁵. Sharing parental leave between parents will allow families to make the best financial decisions about who cares for their young child in the first year of life – one of the most expensive periods for parents.

Sixty-five per cent of parents feel the government should introduce a shared parental leave that can be split between mothers and fathers²⁶.

Three steps towards creating a leave system that has gender neutral employment outcomes

- Implement rights to Additional Paternity Leave and Pay legislated for in the Work and Families Act 2006 from April 2011
- Government and business should work together to ensure that all fathers who are entitled to the Additional Leave take up their entitlement
- Businesses should be required to undertake a pay audit to ensure that part-time workers are not being paid at a lesser amount than full-time equivalents. They also need to ensure that pay is equitable between men and women.

Creating a leave system that has gender equitable employment outcomes will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work life balance - what families want

Better informed employers about flexible working – not just part time or reduced hours

"I would like to see my role as a father to my children treated with the same importance as my partner gets treated as their mother – when they're off school sick, it's always her that stays home as it wouldn't be seen as acceptable for me to do that, my manager wouldn't allow me that time."

Father of three, Cambridgeshire

It is difficult to define what a typical working day looks like – many families now work at weekends; do shift work; split hours; condensed hours; term time working to name just a few options. Yet more can be done to make employment more **family friendly**. In a recession increasing flexibility within the work force makes economic sense.

Two-thirds of parents are concerned about making a request to work flexibly to their current employer²⁷ in case they appear uncommitted or will miss promotion opportunities. Seventy-one per cent of fathers and 69 per cent of mothers say that their family do not have their preferred working arrangement²⁸. Fewer men than women make requests to work flexibly, fewer have their requests granted, and fewer who take their cases to tribunals are successful²⁹. Fewer fathers than mothers are aware that they have a right to ask for flexible working³⁰.

Employers are often more willing to accommodate flexible working in respect of highly valued technical or managerial staff³¹. The ability to achieve the flexible working rests on bargaining power with highly skilled, professionals in higher paid occupations more likely to request and be granted flexible working³².

During a recession, flexible working for all employees may be the only way many employers will be able to deliver services. A flexible workforce can be a way for employers to increase productivity through having workers prepared to work part-time, or irregular or anti-social hours³³ which will benefit employers in a competitive economic environment³⁴.

Three steps towards better informed employers about flexible working options

- Government should work with unions and voluntary organisations to ensure that business is aware of flexible working rights
- Jobcentre Plus workers should ask employers about their flexible working policies and ensure that they know about all current employee rights to flexible working
- Businesses should include plans for a flexible workforce in their plans for surviving uncertain economic times.

Better informed employers about flexible working options will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work life balance - what families want

Universal childcare services for all families

“Where we live the nurseries are almost unaffordable – now we’ve got two children, we are at the point of thinking is it really worth us both working as most of my salary goes to the nursery. Although I only work part time, I would miss it but we’re not sure what we should do.”

Mother of two, Cumbria

To be truly **family friendly** childcare needs to be centred on families and not providers. Fifty-four per cent of Family Information Services say that parents had reported a lack of childcare in the previous 12 months. In a recent survey less than a quarter of all local authorities reported that they have sufficient services for disabled children or those aged 12 and over³⁵.

Safe and reliable activities for older children are important for all families with children but are particularly important for lone parents. Lone parents with a child over the age of ten are now required to look for work, making the provision of wraparound care for school-age children an urgent priority.

All schools should offer an extended service that includes childcare from 8am until 6pm, which should be free for low-income families. Cross Europe studies show that high-quality universal childcare can improve social mobility later in life³⁶.

There is currently a gap between the end of Maternity Leave and the entitlement for free childcare when the child is two or three. Parents should be able to use parental leave on a flexible basis to extend into this period, so that they have the option of returning to work part-time. Eventually, this parental leave should be paid and be available to both parents³⁷.

Three steps towards universal childcare services for all families

- The offer of 15 hours free childcare for nursery children should be protected and maintained. Sure Start services that offer childcare should continue to be invested in
- Activities offered as part of the extended school services should be safeguarded and extended to all local areas. Local authorities and schools should work towards this becoming a free offer for all families on low incomes
- The entitlement for free childcare should be extended from 15 hours to 21 hours as part of a genuine offer to help a return to employment. Flexible paid Parental Leave should be introduced to bridge the gap between the end of Maternity/Additional Paternity Leave and the entitlement for free childcare

Universal childcare services for all families will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

Work Life Balance

What families need to balance work and family life: Summary

The coalition government has committed to review employment and workplace laws for employers and employees to maximise flexibility for both. It also intends to support the provision of free nursery care for pre-school children. This is good news for families.

Prior to the election FPI commissioned Populus to conduct a poll on what British families really think about family policy. The respondents had a poor view of Britain as a family friendly society, with the country scoring only six out of ten in terms of family friendliness. Just six per cent of respondents viewed Britain as a 'very family friendly' society. Our poll asked people what should be the priority of the next Government to make Britain truly family friendly. The second-highest concern highlighted in the poll was the issue of flexible working.

Flexibility is not just good for families; it is good for businesses too. The qualities required to achieve a good work life balance are also essential for employers during financially uncertain times. It requires lateral thinking; organisation and commitment and investment for the future - all essential in providing services when resources are short.

There is a growing body of evidence which shows that flexible working enhances work life balance, increases organisational performance and quality of life for employees³⁸. Employees identify flexible working as a benefit when their companies are facing tough times and as a way to keep working through difficult financial circumstances³⁹.

Challenging economic times can be used as an opportunity to both enhance workplace effectiveness and to increase family friendly working⁴⁰.

Having the right to work more flexibly will help to make Britain a more family friendly place to work

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The knowledge gained will be shared with Britain's key decision makers and influencers through a major series of seminars and briefings. **Knowing Families** will provide accessible and relevant information summarising the best available evidence, brought to life with families' own experiences. Practitioners will be provided with the knowledge to respond to the real needs of families. **Knowing Families** will help to inform our **Family Friendly** initiative, which sees FPI assisting the Department for Education in ensuring services are fully family friendly.

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