

Women and Equalities Select Committee inquiry into fathers in the workplace

Family and Childcare Trust response, March 2017

Parenting and gender equalities

We welcome this inquiry as we have long recognised the gender inequalities that deepen after the arrival of children. While there is rightfully a strong focus on enabling women to continue to progress at work after becoming parents, there is less focus on the steps that are needed to enable men to be able to balance the roles of parenting and working. Activities that help fathers will mean more satisfied workers and better parenting for the next generation. It can also help reduce the gender pay gap, as more men adjusting or reducing working hours to fit with caring responsibilities could help to reduce the ‘part time penalty’ and enable couples to share responsibilities more equally.

There are two key areas where the Family and Childcare Trust can bring expertise to this inquiry. Firstly, we will provide evidence on the role of childcare affordability and availability in determining parental working patterns. Secondly, we provide feedback from young fathers on the particular challenges they face in balancing work and caring responsibilities. We host the Young Dads Collective which works to reduce levels of poverty and isolation experienced by young fathers aged 25 and under, while developing the skill sets and employability of all the young dads who are members. Young fathers are amongst the most socially excluded parenting groups in the UK, and so it is particularly important that this inquiry considers their needs in staying in work and managing their caring responsibilities.

Availability of affordable childcare

For parents to be able to work, they must be able to access childcare that they can afford. If families are not able to access suitable childcare they will have little choice but to cut back their hours or give up work. In practice, these limited childcare choices can mean couple and separated parents decide to have just one parent in employment so as to avoid the need for childcare. In practice, this often freezes mothers out of the workplace and puts additional pressure on fathers to earn for the family, which in turn can limit their time for parenting.

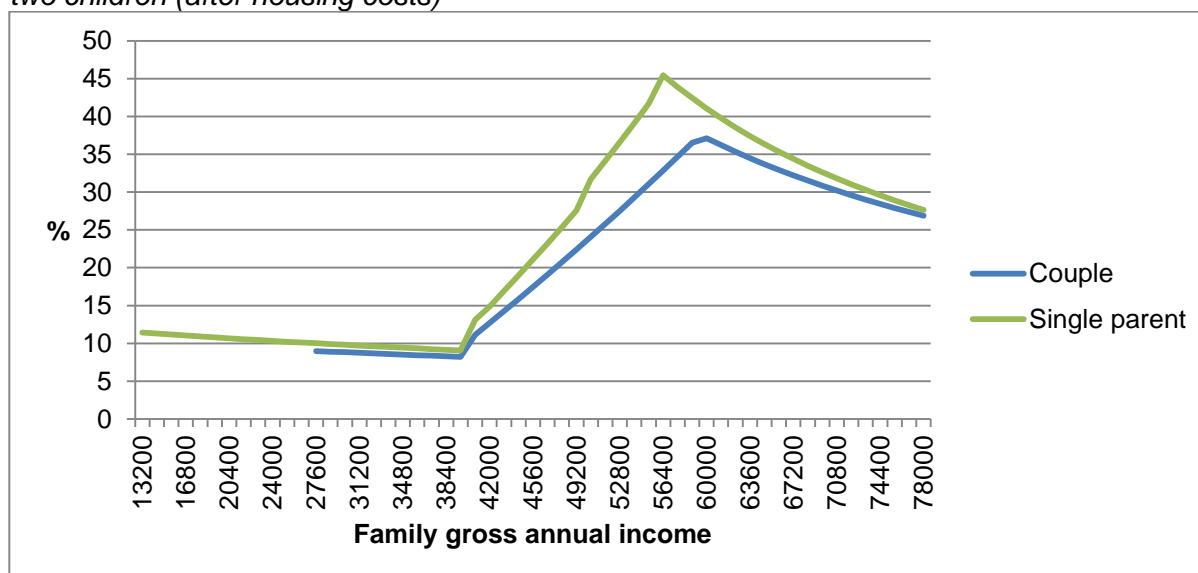
Our *Childcare Survey 2017* found significant shortages in childcare availability, with only half of local authorities in Britain having enough childcare for parents working full time, and the shortages are even more acute for parents with disabled children or working atypical hours.

Chart 1: percentage of local authorities reporting that they have sufficient childcare in all areas, (Childcare Survey 2017)

	England	Wales	Scotland
Under 2s	54%	29%	21%
2 year olds entitled to the free offer	47%	44%	64%
3 and 4 year olds entitled to the free offer	64%	50%	82%
After school for age 5-11	33%	12%	18%
After school for age 12-14	12%	0%	4%
Disabled children	18%	0%	18%
Parents in full time work	52%	17%	25%
Parents working atypical hours	13%	0%	11%

In addition, many families will struggle to pay high childcare costs. The graph below shows the proportion of disposable income that different income households would pay for average childcare costs for two children, peaking at 45 per cent of disposable income. For some households, childcare costs will be higher than one parent's earnings, meaning that it does not pay for them to work.

Chart 2: Percentage of disposable income spent on childcare by families in full-time work with two children (after housing costs)¹



Improving childcare options for families will mean that they have genuine choices about how to share work and care between parents. Every family should be able to access the childcare they need, at a price they can afford – and no parent should be worse off by going to work.

Feedback from young fathers

We ran a focus group with Young Dads Collective members to hear their feedback on how they managed balancing working and caring responsibilities. Their attitude towards working and learning changed when they became fathers and felt the responsibility to be earning for their children: *“You’re not earning for yourself any more. You’re earning for your children. You want to give them to best possible future in whatever they want to go into.”* This meant that they felt additional drive to get where they wanted to be, but also that their new responsibilities made it harder to get there.

Differences between young fathers and older fathers

When asked about how their experiences were different from older fathers, the young dads talked about older fathers having greater stability. They thought it was likely that they would be established at work and so be more likely to have the resources they needed to parent and work, such as having a car. They also thought that older parents were more likely to have stable housing, and so not having to deal with the stress of having to move frequently with a child. They also thought that older fathers might have more confidence, especially in the work place and so be better able to negotiate with employers if they needed time off to look after their children.

Training and apprenticeships

¹ Universal Credit rates for 2016/17 are used (but a 63p taper is applied). Both parents are working full-time and are aged over 25, and neither is earning more than £50,000. Housing costs are based on the rates paid by Local Housing Allowance. One child is under two, and one is at primary school, and both are using a childminder during term time. During the holidays, the older child attends a holiday club.

The young dads talked about the dilemma of knowing where it was that they wanted to get to, but not being able to progress on the path to get there: *“What you want to do becomes clearer, but how to get there becomes harder. This is the battle that we’re on.”*

While many of them wanted to undertake training to help them build their skills so that they would eventually be able to earn more, the urgency of earning for their family made this harder to do. In particular, some felt that apprenticeships did not work for young parents: the low pay rate meant they would be working but unable to support their families. They felt it was too difficult to commit to low pay for two or three years when they had a child to support. This inability to access learning opportunities could leave them trapped in low paid work rather than building skills and progressing: *“You’re pushed into anything that’s available. You’re grabbing as much opportunity as available, and it can stop you having direction and it’s trying to find the time to get there.”*

Role of employers

The young dads felt that very simple changes could make it easier for them to get on at work: they wanted employers to recognise them as fathers. They thought that the role of being a dad could be celebrated more, through simple steps such as emailing round information about being a parent at work. This would make it easier for them to talk about their responsibilities as a parent and work with their employer to balance these responsibilities.

Mentoring

Given how difficult young dads found it to access training that would help them progress at work, they were interested in other things that could help them progress while earning a decent wage. They thought that mentoring could be really effective. This would help them understand different career paths and make realistic plans for how to access them. They thought that employers could encourage employees to become mentors, helping young people to understand employment sectors that could otherwise remain a mystery: *“They need to come out and integrate and actually meet us. We need to be able to see. They’re so distant these city people, creative people, fashion designers.”*

Parental leave

Some of the young dads also thought that longer parental leave could help them to get to grips with the new and complex role of being a dad. They felt that a bit more time learning about how to parent in the first weeks of the child’s life could then help them to feel more confident and better balance both roles when they returned to work.

Recommendations

We ask that this inquiry:

- Considers the particular challenges that young fathers face, particularly looking at mechanisms to support them to progress in work, recognising that the current skills development offer does not work for young fathers. This could include gathering best practice from employers offering mentoring to young people and looking at ways to encourage other employers to take this forward.
- Calls on Government to develop a childcare strategy that creates a simple and efficient system that encourages quality, promotes child development, supports working parents and delivers for employers and the economy
- In the short term, calls on government to commit to make sure that every parent will be better off working after childcare costs

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