



All-Party Parliamentary Group for Parents and Families

Parents' Experience of Returning to Work

Tuesday 1st November 2016, 14:00 – 16:00

Committee Room 18, House of Commons

Attendees

Earl of Listowel

Bishop of Durham

Anne McLaughlin MP

Drew Hendry MP

David Russell

Rhian Coekin

Rachel Bossuk

Hayley Creasey

John Metcalfe

William Griffiths

Felicity Stephenson

Patricia Alert

Natalie Yelton

Professor Linda Hantrais

Marie Peacock

Beverly Sharma

Sarah Jackson

Ros Bragg

Jennifer Liston-Smith

Michael Lewkowicz

Beth Wheaton

Megan Jarvie

Nhung Vu

Megan Poole

Rahel Geffen

Minutes

Welcome and introductions from the Treasurer, The Earl of Listowel

Ros Bragg (CEO, Maternity Action)

- Two new pieces of evidence into maternity discrimination from EHRC/BIS and EHRC
- Strong evidence that levels of maternity discrimination is higher than 10 years ago whilst there has been a decrease in the number of women taking action
- Need a comprehensive government strategy; individual women do not feel they can make change
- Employers need to consider the longer term costs of maternal discrimination rather than short-term savings

- Women and Equalities Select Committee have also conducted an enquiry maternity discrimination and made recommendations

Jennifer Liston-Smith (Director, Head of Consultancy & Coaching, My Family Care)

- Shared parental leave is important in promoting equality at home and work
- Very low UK take-up of paternity leave indicates persistent cultural barriers. Must tackle cultural barriers for there to be high take-up. Case study of Japan which has generous paternity leave but cultural norms have resulted in low take-up
- UK could follow Nordic model in which partner has specific quotas of leave which they lose if they are not taken up; this has led to a higher intake of fathers taking leave
- There is a lack of awareness of options among employees, with even HR department struggling to understand parental leave policy.
- Simplified guidance for managers is needed and they must do more to promote shared parental leave e.g asking employees to blog about their experience

Sarah Jackson (CEO, Working Families)

- Flexible working is often available but not advertised. Flexible working needs to be more visible and become a norm, not an exception
- 'Happy to Talk Flexible Working' initiative to boost confidence of prospective applicants in talking about flexible working options and encourage employers to think about flexible working options before advertising. Scottish government has adopted this initiative.
- Higher income earners are more likely to have flexible working options
- Difficulty for parents of children with a disability to maintain work, particularly at the point of diagnosis. Introduction of 'Adjustment leave' could enable parents to stay in work
- Supply of childcare for disabled children very poor

Open Q&A session, led by the Earl of Listowel, with questions from the floor to speakers. The following points were made during the discussion:

- Structure of shared parental leave can discourage take up as mothers are set as gatekeepers and have to give up their maternity leave
- Childcare cost and availability can act as a barrier to return to work
- Employers need to be aware of common issues parents face, for example, children are likely to get ill during their first 6 weeks in childcare
- Grandparents can play an important part in providing care, especially for single parents. Need to be put back in policy agenda
- Concern for children being left in childcare settings for too long each day and around pay levels of childcare workers
- Call for Childcare Vouchers to run alongside Tax Free Childcare scheme to give families maximum flexibility
- Need to look at the triple agenda of the benefits to individuals, businesses and society as whole of supporting parents to work
- Many employers have excellent policies, but they do not put these into practice
- More policy discussion on lower paid women's experiences of returning to work needed
- Maternity leave very low paid, making it difficult for mothers to take full leave

Thank you and conclusion from the Earl of Listowel