



March 2017

Written evidence submitted by **Fathers Network Scotland** to the **Inquiry on Fathers and the workplace** by the Women and Equalities Committee of UK Parliament

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fathers Network Scotland (www.fathersnetwork.org.uk), is a young, dynamic and respected charity funded predominantly by the Scottish Government as part of its commitment to gender equality in both the home and workplace.

The success of Year of the Dad (www.yearofthedad.org), a national awareness-raising campaign broadly embraced across Scotland in 2016, showed that supporting dads' important role ripples out far beyond the proven benefit to children:

- Women's equality improves when fathers are empowered in their caring role. "Women are not going to be equal outside the home until men are equal in it." (Gloria Steinem)
- Employers also benefit, gaining efficient, motivated and loyal employees when they support the fathers to balance home and family life through flexible working arrangements.
- Even the economy benefits, with the [OECD predicting](#) that equal participation of women in the labour market would boost economic growth by 12% over the next twenty years.

However, most employers remain wedded to the stereotype of women as default carers, creating a "fatherhood forfeit" which tacitly dissuades dads from requesting more flexible conditions.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

By way of a remedy, Fathers Network Scotland recommends:

- Revised legislation should introduce a "use-it-or-lose-it" portion of "daddy leave" as in Nordic countries to accelerate fathers' uptake and the necessary culture change.
- All fathers should be offered well-paid paternity leave (80% of salary with a cap) whether they are self-employed or on PAYE, in line with maternity leave.
- The UK government should support a [Year of the Dad](#)-style awareness-raising campaign across the UK to help dismantle gender stereotypes and encourage men to claim their leave.
- Employers should be explicit in their commitment to flexible working and fathers in particular, offering [new dads workshops](#) like those piloted with Scottish Government & Police Scotland in 2016.
- Trailblazing father-friendly organisations should be encouraged to reap a PR dividend by showcasing best practice and employee case studies in mainstream media.
- Small businesses, low-paid/freelance/casual workers and other vulnerable groups should receive particular support to help the transition to a more family-friendly economy.

FULL SUBMISSION by Fathers Network Scotland

3. INTRODUCTION

Fathers Network Scotland (www.fathersnetwork.org.uk) is a young, respected and gender-balanced charity (charity no. SC041341) which is funded predominantly by the Scottish Government as part of its commitment to gender equality in both the home and workplace.

Our vision is for a safe and compassionate Scotland where all children, their families and communities are enriched and strengthened through the full and welcome involvement of their fathers (or other father figures). Our mission is to drive positive cultural change by inspiring organisations, communities and individuals to engage, support and empower men to be the fathers they want to be.

In 2016 we ran the first Year of the Dad campaign (www.yearofthedad.org) in partnership with the Scottish Government and a raft of organisations, aimed at “celebrating the difference a great dad can make” by issuing a rallying call to services and employers to support dads, embrace family-friendly, inclusive practice and highlight the importance of fathers in child development.

The year was hugely successful in raising awareness of the issues now being investigated by the Women and Equalities Committee, deliberately avoiding the traditional polarities of gendered roles in favour of a win-win approach that was embraced by men and women alike.

Among its achievements:

- **95 events** put on by **56 organisations** across Scotland, reaching **14,800 people** directly.
- **500,000+** people reached through **46 articles** in both Scottish & UK media.
- **25,000+ views** of **32 YouTube films** on the FNS channel, highlighting individual stories.
- **30,000+ visits** to our websites offering **40+** downloadable resources & research papers.
- **184** dad-friendly organisations, services & groups signed up to our online directory.

From our experience working with organisations and individuals we would like to provide evidence on the following issues:

4. SPECIFIC QUESTIONS POSED BY THE INQUIRY

a. How well do fathers feel their current working arrangements help them to fulfil their caring responsibilities for children of all ages?

Poorly. While a few enlightened employers are embracing change and recognising the need to support fathers (see below), the majority seem wedded to the stereotype of women as default carers and totally unfamiliar with the needs of hands-on fathers, as illustrated by the experience recounted to us by one family (names changed):

When five-year-old Ailsa Brown was taken sick in the classroom, her school phoned her mum Jenny to collect her. But Jenny was a plane-flight away on business when the call came in, and the child-minder wasn't available – so she called her husband Dave at work and asked him to go instead.

“Dave called me back saying his boss had told him he couldn’t leave,” recalls Jenny. “When he asked his boss what he was supposed to do, the answer was “it’s not my problem”.

Such attitudes are sadly far from uncommon and the episode still rankles with the couple. “My husband is a fantastic father and supports me as much as he can, and that should be the norm,” says Jenny. “This whole taboo that it’s a mother’s duty to be responsible for looking after sick kids or attending school events should be a thing of the past!”

This is backed up by our own research paper [Fathers In the Early Years](#) among fathers who told us they would rather pretend to have a dentist appointment than admit they were leaving to collect their children or watch a school play.

The Fawcett Society had similar findings in their 2016 report [Parents, work and care: Striking the balance](#): At present 38% of dads feel they don’t spend enough time with their children – and dads are more likely than mums to lie to their bosses in order to do so.

Flexible working remains something for managers and high-paid/skilled workers to access, leaving low skilled and low paid workers working long hours and in shifts where unpredictability makes it difficult to organise childcare. This has most impact on poorer families – the very ones whose children could potentially benefit the most by raising attainment.

b. Are there employment-related barriers to fathers sharing caring roles more equally?

In our paper [Fathers In the Early Years](#), fathers told us they were concerned that a request for flexible working would be interpreted as a sign of low commitment towards the job and adversely impact on the likelihood of being promoted.

This was backed up by the experiences of those who had requested flexibility (eg above) from less-than-sympathetic bosses. Asked what might help change this culture, fathers we interviewed suggested:

- having a supportive and informed line-manager
- a work environment in which employees feel encouraged to share family experiences
- an "employee-friendly" culture in general not just in the context of parents
- working alongside other parents who serve as role models by using such arrangements themselves.
- they chose public sector because perceived “father-friendly” conditions were more important than high salary

While all fathers who were interviewed for this project were aware of their statutory paternity leave entitlements, there was confusion over other types of leave for parents, so there is a clear information gap.

c. Do fathers have the financial support to enable them to fulfil their caring responsibilities?

Financial support is patchy at best. Often paternity leave is not paid, and there is evidence that fathers will not take leave unless it is well paid at 60% of their salary.

Among fathers interviewed for [Fathers In the Early Years](#), financial constraints were the biggest obstacle for sharing leave between the father and the mother. Some believed that, with [more men](#)

[than women in dual-earner families bringing home the higher income](#), and with no substantial economic compensation available for the leave taker, it is unlikely that many fathers will actually extend their time off from work after the birth of a child, even following introduction of the Shared Parental Leave scheme.

However, in situations where mothers have the higher income in a couple, there is evidence that fathers happily embrace longer periods of leave if the perceived working culture allows it (see case study of [John and Nikki Duncan](#))

d. Are there social or attitudinal barriers to fathers in the workplace which need to be challenged?

While legislation is theoretically in place to enable men to take a more equal role in parenting, culture lags behind, both among employers and in society at large.

[Recent research by the University of Plymouth](#) suggests fathers face a negative bias and suspicion from managers when seeking a better work-life balance or applying for part-time employment. Jasmine Kelland, lead researcher and lecturer in HR management said: “If, as a society, we are to reach a position of equality for parents, it is crucial that modern workplaces address the issue of the ‘fatherhood forfeit’ to reduce the disparities that exist in the workplace.”

The culture of “presenteeism” persists in seeing long hours as a badge of commitment, regardless of [statistics showing that long hours reduce efficiency](#). “Probably it has never entered the heads of most employers...that hours could be shortened and output maintained,” says John Hicks, a British economist, in [a revealing article in The Economist](#).

Some women also admit that they are reluctant to reduce their traditional nine months or maternity leave by sharing part of it with their partners, as is necessary under the current Shared Parental Leave system (eg “Actually, I have to say that I would jealously guard my maternity leave, but that is a side issue” – Gillian Martin MSP for Aberdeenshire East in [Scottish Parliament members’ debate on Year of the Dad](#) in Dec 2016).

But there is currently research going on at Hertfordshire University to understand these barriers perceived by women to share their maternity leave. Meanwhile in Sweden it was found that for every additional month of leave dads take, mums’ careers earnings increase by 6.7%!

Indeed, better shared parenting should help the economy as a whole: the [OECD predicts](#) that equal participation of women in the labour market would boost economic growth by 12% over the next twenty years.

e. Are there changes to the workplace – such as an increase in freelance, agency or casual working – which might have an impact on fathers? Are there challenges for fathers working in particular employment sectors?

As Shared Parental Leave is only available to those in certain long-term employment situations, the increasing numbers of dads working freelance or casually are unable to benefit at all from the new legislation. Estimates are that only 60% of fathers are eligible as it is not a right; the partner must be in employment and a growing number of men work on contractually and are not employees.

In addition, fathers don't have the statutory equivalent of maternity allowance, so if they are not employed through PAYE they don't even have a right to paid paternity leave or SPL.

Our partners [Family Friendly Working Scotland](#) found in [research published earlier this year](#), from large data sets including [Growing Up in Scotland](#) and the [Millennium Cohort Study](#), that two groups in particular suffered under this system – low income families & those working in small businesses:

In 2011, fathers were much less likely to take paternity, parental and annual leave after the birth of their child if they work for a small employer or if they were own-account workers. Similarly, fathers in Scotland were less likely to take parental and annual leave (but not paternity leave) if their household fell into the lowest income quintile.

Male-dominated industries such as construction or industry as also likely to prove more resistant to family-friendly working for fathers, on grounds of unaffordability – by paying Shared Parental Leave at the level of maternity leave they are afraid it will encourage fathers to take leave, thus increasing costs.

The reality is by using such leave they increase engagement and productivity as shown by our [research with the University of Edinburgh Business School](#).

- f. What role can Government, employers and other stakeholders play in overcoming these barriers? What policy or legislative changes would be most effective in supporting fathers to fulfil their caring responsibilities?**

Our recommendations are as follows:

Shared Parental Leave legislation should be revised to include a “use-it-or-lose-it” portion only claimable by fathers to accelerate uptake and the necessary culture change.

This dedicated “daddy leave” in both Sweden and Iceland saw take-up rates soar from minimal when it was shared parental leave to almost universal. (Comparisons with nearly 40 other countries are available in the [2016 Annual International Review of Leave Policies and Research](#).)

While women may resent losing a portion of their maternity leave to fathers, this use-it-or-lose-it system has been shown to benefit gender equality across society, not only creating a generation of hands-on fathers right from the outset, but [in Iceland's case](#) rippling into such unexpected gains as increased fertility and reduced separation rates.

The UK has one of the highest percentage of single households which is a predictor of poverty and a reduction in childhood wellbeing – while our research on relationships of parents with their 10-year-old children indicates that mothers and fathers are equally important to childhood wellbeing.

All fathers should be offered well-paid paternity leave (80% of salary with a cap), whether they are self-employed or on PAYE.

This should be an independent right from day one of employment, in keeping with maternity leave.

The UK government should support a [Year of the Dad](#)-style awareness-raising campaign across the UK to help dismantle gender stereotypes and encourage men to claim their leave.

Our experience is that a positive campaign couched in collaboration, gender equality and win-win solutions encounters few of the hurdles faced by more negative strategies and encourages buy-in from employers, service providers and families alike.

Employers should be explicit in their commitment to flexible working and fathers in particular, appointing a “fathers’ champion” in senior management and offering [new dads workshops](#) like those piloted with Scottish Government & Police Scotland in 2016.

The strapline “happy to talk flexible working” should be used on all job advertisements as recommended by [Working Families](#).

Trailblazing father-friendly organisations can be encouraged to reap a PR dividend by showcasing best practice and employee case studies in mainstream media, through award schemes such as those run by [Working Families](#) and their Scottish counterpart [Family Friendly Working Scotland](#).

Small businesses, low-paid/freelance/casual workers and other vulnerable groups should receive particular support to help the transition to a more family-friendly economy.

g. Are there specific issues facing fathers from particular groups or backgrounds, for example because of their income or ethnicity, or fathers of disabled children and young people?

Our partners Family Friendly Working Scotland found in [research published earlier this year](#) that low income families had more limited access to flexible working arrangements, and that fathers in particular were reluctant to ask:

“Low income parents in the qualitative research showed limited recognition of formal family friendly working policies within their workplaces. The most commonly cited policies, when prompted, that parents were aware of or had access to were flexible hours and time off (usually unpaid) if children are sick. Some had not heard of jobshare and other reasonably common opportunities, even when prompted. Those who had heard of such arrangements viewed them as more for ‘managerial’ staff than for people like themselves...

“The qualitative research found that among low income parents flexible working for family reasons was viewed as less of an option for fathers. Some indicated that they would be reluctant to ask for this as it is not an accepted norm at their place of work, in their industry or more generally.” *Family friendly working and low income families 2017*

We also know that fathers of disabled children often need access to reduced hours and flexible hours which are still seen to be a right for women and not men in our society.

h. Are there examples (in the UK or internationally) of best practice amongst employers that could be taken up more widely?

Thankfully we have found a number of examples of UK employers who are embracing flexible working patterns for fathers and trailblazing best practice. We recognise these each year at the Scottish Top Employers for Working Families Awards, with our partners Family Friendly Working Scotland. Below are some examples:

West Dunbartonshire Council was recognised as early as 2015 as a top employer for family-friendly working through a range of father-friendly policies including enhanced paternity leave, special leave,

dependants' leave, personal days, and paid time off for antenatal appointments. This was modelled at Executive Director level by working dad Richard Cairns, who took on the role of the council's Fathers' Champion, sending a very clear message that flexibility is not just for women.

Barclays was recognised in 2016 as winner of the Fathers Network Scotland Best for All Stages of Fatherhood Award, in particular for its 'Dynamic Working' campaign recognising both genders' need for time, flexibility and energy to undertake both home and work roles. Events are run regularly focusing on different challenges faced by carers and parents, including a 'Working Father Group', to encourage take up of the many employee benefits.

Independent Living Fund of Scotland, one of the finalists in the 2017 Scottish Top Employers for Working Families, models father-friendly working by encouraging flexible working and offering a standard 6 weeks paid paternity leave, well above the statutory two weeks. A recent survey of its employees showed high levels of satisfaction and loyalty.

The Scottish Government has pushed uptake of Shared Parental Leave from the average 4 per cent to 11 per cent of eligible men, through its visible championing (and funding) of Year of the Dad, in which it joined Police Scotland in piloting [employer workshops for new dads](#), now to be rolled out across Scotland through Fathers Network Scotland.

Though these practices are commendable they are the exception and not the rule. We still have much to do to promote the business benefits of men taking leave and working flexibly, particularly for SMEs and sole traders.

At Fathers Network Scotland we believe dads taking leave and using flexible family-friendly policies is one step towards better outcomes for mum, dad, employers and more importantly the children - who are our future workforce.

Our experience in Year of the Dad tells us that the overwhelming majority of ordinary people – women and men alike – agree and want our society to change.

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