

Shared Parental Leave Policy Guide

This document is designed to be used alongside the Shared Parental Leave (SPL) policy we have created. It sets out what the key things are for you, as an employer, to consider when introducing a policy. It provides examples of what other companies have introduced and offers tips on how to roll out the policy to employees effectively.



Wellness Cloud
Incorporating Parent Cloud

Why it's important to embrace shared parental leave

The modern family is no longer always made up of a married mother and father. Families come in all shapes and sizes. Fathers want to play an active role and mothers want the choice and opportunity to build a career. Bringing up a child is hard work, especially during the first year, when everything is new and often scary. Families, where both parents are actively engaged in looking after a new baby, can share the stresses and the joys.

During the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown there has been a sharp rise in the amount of childcare undertaken by men, reaching the highest levels since records began. Those that have been working at home, have had the flexibility to help more and be there when needed to do the school run or cook the evening meal. Sustaining this involvement when restrictions are lifted could improve family life and take the pressure off working parents, supporting them to achieve a healthier work/life balance.

If we are serious about creating gender equality in the workplace, shared parental leave must be part of the mix. It makes sense for employers to engage with and embrace the topic, providing appropriate support and encouraging their employees to find the solution that works for them and their family. Recent events have highlighted how important family is and striking the right balance, so employees can bring the best of themselves to work and to home, benefits everyone.

What are the key things to consider when implementing this policy?

- This is not about gender; it is about parents. It's important to include everyone in the conversation.
- Becoming a parent should be one of the most positive and joyful things in anyone's life. Employers should be there to provide support, not make life harder.
- No two families are the same, and every parent will have their own requirements. This is a very personal issue which requires understanding, particularly from line managers.
- The take up of SPL is still low. Figures from HMRC reveal that just under 4% of eligible couples took up the policy(ii). Take up is slowly increasing, in 2023/4 according to HMRC figures, there were a record 24,700 claims for parental leave but this is still a small minority.
- The main reason for this is often cited as financial. Research suggests four out of 10 fathers cannot afford to take it and live on the statutory pay of around £600 a month.
- Other countries have different solutions. In Sweden, there is a one leave policy. They are entitled to 480 days of leave, 390 of which are paid at 80% of salary. Each parent has a use-or-lose quota of 90 days. The remaining 300 days can be shared. In 2017, Swedish fathers took almost 28% of that leave(iii).
- The low take-up rate of SPL is not down to a lack of desire from fathers. 85% say they would be willing to do anything to be involved in the early weeks and months of caring for their newly born or adopted child(iv).
- The three barriers identified that prevented this from happening were pay, restrictive gender norms and government support. By looking to address the first two of these, we can hopefully help change the third.

Shared parental leave policies from other organisations

Aviva

Aviva is a multinational insurance company with around 33 million customers across 16 countries. It has over 30,000 employees with about half of these working in the UK. Their policy offers UK employees the right to a full year off work, including 26 weeks on full pay, regardless of gender. As a result, in 2020 more than 99% of new fathers took parental leave and 84% took at least six months.

<https://www.aviva.co.uk/aviva-edit/your-life-articles/equal-parental-leavepolicies/>

ABB

Leading global technology company, ABB has almost 100,00 employees worldwide. It has announced it will launch a gender-neutral parenting leave programme as part of its drive toward more diversity and inclusion. Every employee who is having a child, whose partner is having a child, who adopts a child or has a child through a surrogate is eligible. The primary caregiver can take 12 weeks of paid leave and the secondary caregiver can take four weeks of paid leave. Eligible employees are granted the right to return to the same job as before or a similar job which has the same or better status and terms and conditions.

<https://new.abb.com/news/detail/79553/abb-introduces-new-global-genderneutral-parental-leave-program>

John Lewis

The John Lewis Partnership is the UK's largest employee-owned business. It's two brands, John Lewis and Waitrose have 80,000 partners. From autumn 2021, all employees who have been working at John Lewis for a year will be offered 26 weeks of paid leave when they have a baby, regardless of how they become a parent. 14 weeks will be at full pay and 12 weeks at 50% of their contractual pay.

<https://www.johnlewispartnership.co.uk/media/press/y2021/jlp-launchesnew-support.html>

The University of St Andrew

The University of St Andrew in Scotland has around 1,500 employees. They offer all those who become a new parent 14 weeks of full pay, 23 weeks at ShPP and 13 weeks of unpaid leave. They also have a Parental Leave Policy, which all parents are entitled to access, that provides 18 weeks unpaid leave, which can be taken any time before a child turns 18.

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/policy/staff-annual-leave-and-other-absencefamily-friendly-leave/shared-parental-leave-policy.pdf>

Deloitte

Deloitte is the first of the big four accountancy firms that is equalising parental leave, giving fathers the same paternity pay as maternity pay for mothers. The new policy of 26 weeks' fully-paid family leave for all new parents will come into effect on 1 January 2025 and will be a right from day one. <https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/about/press-room/deloitte-uk-equalises-paid-parenting-leave.html>

How will a shared parental leave policy benefit employers?

Impact on the bottom line

- Shared Parental Leave is one element that will help improve gender equality in the workplace.
- Research has shown that more gender-equal companies have a happier workforce, lower job turnover rates and higher levels of employee satisfaction and productivity(v).
- Employees are actively looking to work for those employers who encourage diversity and inclusion. 79% of employees say that working somewhere with a diverse workforce is an important factor for their happiness at work(vi).
- Any budget spent on offering enhanced shared parental leave could help improve employee retention and ensure key employees don't leave for an organisation that does offer these benefits.
- New research from YouGov, commissioned by Deloitte found that family leave is a crucial consideration for employees, with 87% saying it is a major factor when choosing an employer and 85% saying it is key for staying put.

Becoming an employer of choice

- Policies like this signal to prospective and current employees that their lives outside work matter.
- It demonstrates an employer's commitment to supporting employees outside of work as well as inside it, helping to increase diversity and inclusion.
- Becoming a thought-leader in this area signals a willingness to challenge gender stereotypes and reflects a more open, tolerant society.

Tips on how to communicate your shared parental leave policy

- Make a conscious effort to ensure all employees know about the policy and where to find it.
- Find someone in the senior leadership team who is willing to be a spokesman for the policy and speak about it when appropriate both internally and externally.
- Work with your internal communications team to use a variety of methods to communicate the policy.
- Combine the launch of the policy with training on gender equality and managing parents, especially for line managers.
- Promote the policy on a regular basis, so anyone who is affected knows where to turn to for help.
- Understand that many people may want to explore their options in their own time, so make sure employees can access the policy at any time and on any device.
- Use awareness events, like National Work Life Week in October to remind employees about the policy and talk about the issue.
- Make sure this and other policies supporting health, wellbeing and inclusion are included in company materials, such as your website and job advertisements.
- Encourage line managers to highlight this policy when employees first inform them of a pregnancy or adoption.

Tips on how to measure the impact of your shared parental leave policy

- Survey employees regularly, for example every six months, to see if they know about the policy and understand what it contains.
- Encourage employees to share ideas about how to improve the policy and provide better support for working parents.
- Speak to anyone in the organisation who has taken up shared parental leave to understand if more support could be provided.
- Make sure feedback can be given anonymously to protect people's privacy.
- Review what others are doing and update your policy if you see an appropriate initiative that would suit your employees and your organisation.

References

- i <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2020/mens-childcare-up-58-during-lockdown-makes-case-for-father-friendly-jobs/>
- ii <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/four-in-10-dads-cant-afford-shared-parental-leave/>
- iii <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/oct/05/shared-parental-leave-seen-as-weird-paternity-leave-in-decline> iv <https://men-care.org/2019/06/05/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2019-report-launch/>
- v <https://www.guidantglobal.com/news/gender-equality-in-the-workplace>
- vi <https://bdaily.co.uk/articles/2020/09/11/uks-workforce-calls-for-more-action-on-diversity-and-inclusion>