



# The 2020 Parental Fog Index

Why employers need to be radically transparent about their support for working parents



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## Executive summary

Welcome to the second edition of the Parental Fog Index. Last year our inaugural report highlighted the unique needs of working parents and what employers can do to better support them.

The report gave employers a clear rationale to be more transparent in the support they offer working parents, and insight to prepare to meet the requirements of the Parental Leave And Pay Arrangements (Publication) Bill, then working its way through parliament.

Much has changed since then. The bill has been subsumed in the government's Good Work Plan, and coronavirus hit, bringing profound change to the way we work and live.

Employer and government priorities have pivoted to deal with the crisis. As yet, it is unclear what the 'new normal' will look like, or how recovery plans will impact the Good Work Plan.

One thing is certain, the government cannot achieve economic recovery or boost productivity without the full economic participation of women. And for that to happen it must work with employers to solve the gender work/care share gap.

Looking at this year's results, I am encouraged to see greater transparency and innovation from many employers. At the same time, progress to

close the Gender Pay Gap, and get more women on boards and into senior roles, remains slow.

Yes, we have more working mothers than before in the workforce, but they are overrepresented in lower level, lower paid jobs. Companies have done well to retain more women in the workforce and now need to address the apparent slow down of women's careers and pay once they become parents.

This report calls for employers to not just be transparent about the support they offer working parents, but radically transparent about the impact that support has on the pay and progress of women's careers, and for men to equally share work and care.

The results in this report represent a snapshot in time, January 2020. We recognise employers may have updated their websites since then. Our plan to publish this report in March was overtaken by the Coronavirus pandemic. By holding back publication we have been able to include learning from this period which continues to have a profound impact on working parents.



**Geraldine Gallacher**  
CEO, Executive Coaching  
Consultancy

# 1 Why did we repeat the Parental Fog Index?

What a difference a year can make! Last year we launched the first Parental Fog Index to help employers prepare to meet the requirements of the Parental Leave and Pay Arrangements (Publication) Bill.

Timed out of parliament by Brexit, the key recommendation of the bill, that companies with 250 plus staff publish an annual statement of their employees' entitlement to parental leave, including statutory pay, and any pay and benefits they'd get while on parental leave, was subsumed into the government's Good Work Plan.

## What is the Government's Good Work Plan?

Last summer, the UK Government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), launched a consultation with employers on the cost and benefits of various proposals to support working families.

Boiled down, the consultation explored options to address three issues:

1. Which parental leave and pay arrangements would best help parents balance the gender division of parental leave?
2. New leave and pay entitlements for parents that require neonatal care after birth
3. Transparency of flexible working and family related leave and policies – should employers have a duty to consider if a job can be done flexibly, and make this clear when advertising a role?

Addressing these issues would enable employers to create ways of working that better support modern life today.

## What problems does the UK government want to solve?

In simple terms, it wants to increase national productivity by ensuring the full economic participation of women. In particular, equality to progress career and earnings, which tend to flatten out after they have children. We must find gender neutral solutions to enable parents to raise a child successfully to adulthood whilst at the same time achieving fulfilling career progression

## What does this mean for employers?

To date, solutions such as flexible working, enhanced maternity leave and Shared Parental Leave have been effective at keeping more women than ever before in the workplace but less effective at enabling mothers to progress career and pay after children.

The government's emphasis has shifted from simply keeping women in the workforce after the start of motherhood to enabling them to have full and successful careers whilst continuing to care for their children. This has moved the focus from supporting working parents to a search for solutions to the lack of female progression into senior roles.

While transparency of support will continue to be important in candidate attraction, it will no longer be sufficient. Employers must now show their support is effective to give both men and women a real choice to care for their children and progress their career and earnings.

## Impact of coronavirus on the Good Work Plan

The world of work, government and policy making has been turned upside down by the coronavirus pandemic. At the time of writing employer and government efforts are focused on bringing workers safely back to the office, the recovery of businesses and the wider economy.



It is unclear what impact this will have on the publication of findings from the consultation or the progress of recommendations through parliament. What is clear is that the problems the Good Work Plan sought to address have not gone away.

Coronavirus has shown employers that it is possible for employees to work from home, and in more flexible ways, but they need explicit support from their employer to do so. The unprecedented expectation that employees work from home, provide childcare and support their child's learning has highlighted how difficult many parents, men, in particular, find it to ask their employer for help. At the same time, this unique situation has provided a golden opportunity to peek behind closed doors, and better understand the barriers that prevent parents from sharing work and care more equitably.

### **What are the aims of the second Parental Fog Index?**

With this in mind we've revisited the report to:

- Measure progress on the transparency of parental support
- Celebrate positive improvements
- Identify new ways employers have found to address parents' needs as well as limitations
- Consider the impact of coronavirus on the sharing of work and care
- Open a discussion among employers on what they can do to ensure their support for working parents meets its intended objectives.



## 2 How did we create the Parental Fog Index?

We replicated the experience of a prospective job applicant searching an employer website for information on the support it offers to working parents. We used the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers list as our research sample.

To ensure consistency, we used a researcher with no prior knowledge of what specific employers do to support working parents. We asked them to search each website using the following terms:

- Talks about commitment to working parents
- Awards – e.g. best / top employer for parents or women
- Shared Parental leave policy
- Maternity leave policy
- Paternity leave policy
- Flexible working
- Shared Parental leave policy – with pay and duration
- Maternity leave policy – with pay and duration
- Paternity leave policy – with pay and duration
- Flexible working – policy
- Showcase support – written / video / podcast
- Role model testimonies
- Reference to tracking pay and career progress of flexible workers

### Scoring

Each found term scored 1 point. We totted up the scores and allocated a visibility rating as follows:

Score	Visibility Rating
12-13	Beacon
8 -11	Fully Visible
4 -7	Visible
1-3	Foggy
0	Invisible

**We define each visibility rating as:**

Label	Descriptor
<p><b>Beacon</b></p>	<p>Support for working parents runs through this company’s DNA.</p> <p><b>Evidence – meets Fully Visible criteria plus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Website showcases support with case studies that demonstrate policy in action. This may include written, video or podcast content</li> <li>● Role model testimonies</li> <li>● Employer tracks pay and career progress of flexible workers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fully Visible</b></p>	<p>This company publishes full details of policies that support working parents on its website including terms of pay and duration of leave.</p> <p><b>Evidence – meets Visible criteria plus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Policies published include details of pay and duration of leave.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Visible</b></p>	<p>This company publishes policies that support working parents but these policies do not include terms of pay or duration.</p> <p><b>Evidence – meets Foggy criteria plus:</b></p> <p>Policies published:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shared Parental Leave</li> <li>● Maternity</li> <li>● Paternity</li> <li>● Adoption</li> <li>● Flexible working</li> </ul>
<p><b>Foggy</b></p>	<p>This company supports working parents but provides no detail on how it does this. It references support for working parents e.g. blogs, relevant awards but does not publish policies.</p> <p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Refers to commitment to working parents in general terms i.e. “a generous maternity package”, enters best employer awards but does not publish policies on website.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Invisible</b></p>	<p>No reference to support for working parents</p>

## 3 The results a year on: what progress has been made?

### About this year's data

We reviewed the websites of organisations on the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers list, as these employers are known for marketing their employer brand competitively to prospective employees.

The Times list is updated annually which limits the year on year comparisons we can make. However, 89 employers in last year's report, appear in this year's, with 11 newcomers which means it is possible to spot patterns and trends.

### 1. Ratings change: year on year

Rating	2020*	2019*	YOY change
Beacon	9	4	+5
Fully Visible	15	14	+1
Visible	32	36	-4
Foggy	18	15	+3
Invisible	26	31	-5

#### Key to YOY change

+ increase on last year

- decrease on last year

= no change from last year

### Five key findings

1. There was a small increase in the number of organisations that publish policy details, including pay and duration of parental leave and flexible working arrangements, from 18% in 2019 to 24% in 2020.
2. The total number that publish generic (32%) or no details (44%) of parental benefits decreased slightly from 82% in 2019 to 76% in 2020. This shows a small improvement in the direction of travel toward employers publishing details on their websites, but progress is slow and incremental.
3. The number of employers in the top rank beacon group rose from 4% last year to 9%. In addition to publishing full details of parental policies, these employers actively market their support to working parents as core to their employer brand.
4. Of the employers ranked "Visible" (32%), "Foggy" (18%), and "Invisible" (26%), all would rise to "Fully Visible" with one simple change to their websites, the addition of parental policies, including terms of pay and duration.
5. A total of 21 companies improved their ranking year-on-year while 12 organisations fell in their ranking. Three organisations that slipped a rank have introduced Virtual Recruitment Assistants since the last report but not included policy details in the AI script.





## 2. Year on year change by employer

Rating 2020	Employer	2019	YoY change
<b>Beacon</b>	Civil Service	Beacon	=
	Deloitte	Fully visible	+
	EY	Beacon	=
	Grant Thornton	Fully visible	+
	Johnson & Johnson	Fully visible	+
	KPMG	Fully visible	+
	PwC	Beacon	=
	Santander	Fully visible	+
	Unilever	Visible	+
<b>Fully visible</b>	Accenture	Beacon	-
	Admiral	New	New
	Bain & Company	Visible	+
	Barclays	Visible	+
	British Army	Fully visible	=
	Enterprise Rent-A-Car	New	New
	Irwin Mitchell	Fully visible	=
	John Lewis Partnership	Visible	+
	Lloyds Banking Group	Visible	+
	NHS	Fully visible	=
	P&G	Visible	+
	RBS	Fully visible	=
	Shell	Fully visible	=
	Teach First	Visible	+
	UBS	New	New

Rating 2020	Employer	2019	YoY change
<b>Visible</b>	Allen & Overy	Visible	=
	Amazon	Visible	=
	ASOS	Invisible	+
	BAE	Visible	=
	BlackRock	Visible	=
	Boston Consulting	Visible	=
	BT	Visible	=
	Citi	Invisible	+
	Deutsche Bank	Visible	=
	DLA Piper	Visible	=
	Facebook	Invisible	+
	GCHQ	New	New
	Goldman Sachs	Visible	=
	Google	Visible	=
	HSBC	Visible	=
	Jaguar Land Rover	Visible	=
	JP Morgan	Visible	=
	Linklaters	Fully visible	-
	NGDP for Local Government	Fully visible	-
	M&S	Foggy	+
	M15	Visible	=
	Mars	Visible	=
	Microsoft	Visible	=
	Nestle	Foggy	+
	RAF	Fully visible	-
	Rolls-Royce	Invisible	+
	Royal Navy	Visible	=
	Siemens	Visible	=
	Sky	Visible	=
	Slaughter & May	Visible	=
Vodafone	New	New	
Wellcome	Visible	=	
<b>Foggy</b>	Atkins	Visible	-
	Bank of England	Foggy	=
	BBC	Foggy	=
	BDO	New	New
	Bloomberg	Invisible	+
	BP	Foggy	=
	CMS	Visible	-
	Exxon Mobile	Foggy	=
	GSK	Invisible	+
	Herbert Smith Freehills	Foggy	=
	Hogan Lovells	Visible	-
	McDonalds Restaurants	Invisible	+
	Mott McDonald	New	New
	Network Rail	Foggy	=
	Norton Rose Fulbright	New	New
	Pinsent Masons	Invisible	+
	Tesco	Foggy	=
	White & Case	Foggy	=

Rating 2020	Employer	2019	YoY change
<b>Invisible</b>	AECOM	Invisible	=
	Airbus	Invisible	=
	Aldi	Foggy	-
	Apple	Foggy	-
	Arup	Invisible	=
	AstraZeneca	Invisible	=
	Baker McKenzie	Invisible	=
	Boots	Invisible	=
	Charityworks	Invisible	=
	Clifford Chance	Invisible	=
	Dyson	Invisible	=
	Freshfields	Invisible	=
	Frontline	Invisible	=
	Huawei	New	New
	IBM	Invisible	=
	L'Oreal	Visible	-
	Lidl	Invisible	=
	McKinsey & Company	Visible	-
	Morgan Stanley	Invisible	=
	Newton	Invisible	=
	Penguin Random House	Invisible	=
	Police Now	Visible	-
	Think Ahead	Invisible	=
	TPP	Invisible	=
	Unlocked	Invisible	New
	Virgin Media	Invisible	=



### 3. Climbers to celebrate

An impressive 21 employers featured in last year's report have moved up at least one ranking. Unilever was the most improved employer leaping from Visible to Beacon.

All rises from Visible to Fully Visible, and Fully Visible to Beacon status were due to the employer including pay and duration details of parental policies. By making this small change the majority of employers currently ranked Foggy would leapfrog to Fully Visible.

#### Climbers in alphabetical order

- ASOS**

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- Bain & Company**

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- Barclays**

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- Bloomberg**

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- Citi**

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- Deloitte**

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- Grant Thornton**

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- GSK**

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- John Lewis Partnership**

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- Johnson & Johnson**

---

- KPMG**

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- Lloyds Banking Group**

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- M&S**

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- McDonalds Restaurants**

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- Nestle**

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- P&G**

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- Pinsent Masons**

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- Rolls-Royce**

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- Santander**

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- Teach First**

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- Unilever**

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## 4 What's new this year?

**Virtual Recruitment Assistants** – are on the rise, noticeably among larger, global recruiters. Our researcher found that few were programmed to provide details of parental policies such as parental leave or flexible working beyond confirming the employer has one.

It is significant that twelve organisations dropped rank this year. In some cases the employer had included copy of policy details the previous year. It would appear this copy has been removed without being transferred to the VRA.

**Badges** – more employers are using “stamps of trust” to signal their commitment to working parents such as, Working Families’ “Happy to talk flex” and “Working Families Employer”, or the Timewise Power 50 awards. Others include the statement, “Please ask what we do to support working parents”.

**Creative ways to publish policy details** – many more employers now provide policy details showing how easily it can be done. Some provide an automatic link to a policy document, others present the information graphically.

At the same time we noticed a rise in employers who, rather than publish T&Cs, invite applicants to discuss these at interview stage. It's worth

bearing in mind that most candidates say they would not ask for this information at interview stage for fear that doing so will raise questions about their commitment to their career. Stating details including pay and duration of parental benefits on an employer's website makes the recruitment process fairer for men and women.

**More employers are talking directly to working parents** – through a dedicated webpage. Personal accounts of what life is like as a working parent in your organisation help parents decide whether they can comfortably manage life in and out of work. Be sure to showcase the full range of support you offer from helping new parents transition to working parents, through infancy, teenage years and exams.

Several employers say they have **working family affinity groups**. It would be even more powerful if they gave a flavour of how these groups support working parents.

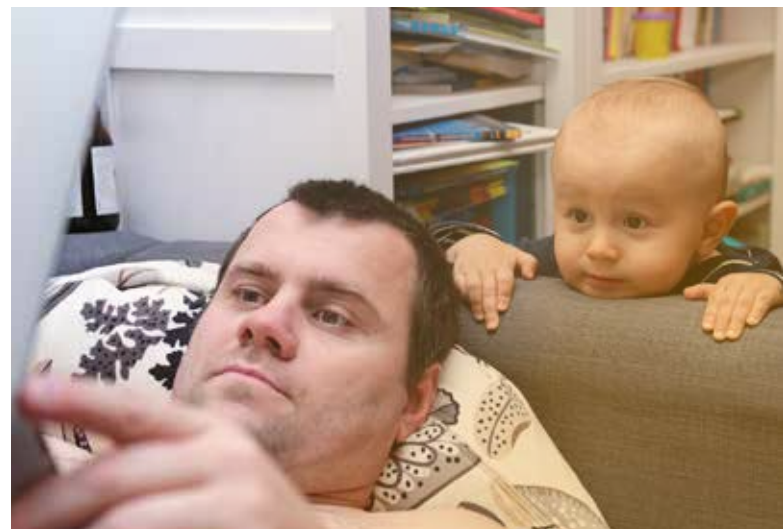
**Good Business** – global employers are using their scale to roll out family policies in countries where support is poor or local statutory requirements fall below those of the UK / EU. Similarly, FMCG brands are leveraging their advertising voice to campaign for better support for working mums and dads across territories where support is low.

## 5 Additional Insight

For top tips to reach beacon status and insight on what employers can do to strengthen their support for working families read our first Parental Fog Index report:

***Why employers must shout about their support for working parents***

<https://executive-coaching.co.uk/ecc-articles/the-parental-fog-index-why-employers-much-shout-about-their-parental-benefits/>



## 6 The case for radical transparency

### Discussion: How can employers ensure their support for working parents meets its intended objective?

The rationale for employers to support working parents is evolving. At the turn of the millennium organisations began to implement measures such as flexible working to stem the tide of mothers exiting the workforce.

Fast-forward twenty years and the UK has the highest number of women with dependent children in the workforce, since ONS records began.

With the introduction of reporting on the gender pay gap and the numbers of women on boards, researchers were able to join the dots from data gathered and emphatically say that while employer support is great at keeping working mums in work, it is less effective at enabling career and pay progression.

Today, female retention is improving for UK employers. The problem has evolved. It is now clear that the real issue is getting more women on boards and into senior roles. The root cause of which is that women still have to choose between care and career.

Employers will not be able to close the gender pay gap or create gender-diverse leadership in

a way that is sustainable, unless they can create a culture where childcare is no longer a gendered issue.

### Redefining employer support for working parents

It's with this aim in mind that employers need to revisit the rationale for supporting working parents and ask the question: Are we giving parents, both men and women, a real choice to care, and progress career and pay, if they so choose?

Employers asking this question tend to take a gender-neutral approach to:

- Parental leave
- Enabling parents to balance work with child care, recognising that support needs change at each stage of a child's life
- Career development pathways

This moves the discussion on from employers being transparent about the benefits they offer to the need to be transparent about what works and what gives parents real choice.



### **Time for radical truth and transparency**

This requires employers to evaluate the extent to which each parental policy enables or hinders this aim and make necessary adjustments.

To aid that discussion, here are some of the unintended consequences of parental policies that many employers experience.

### **Shared parental leave**

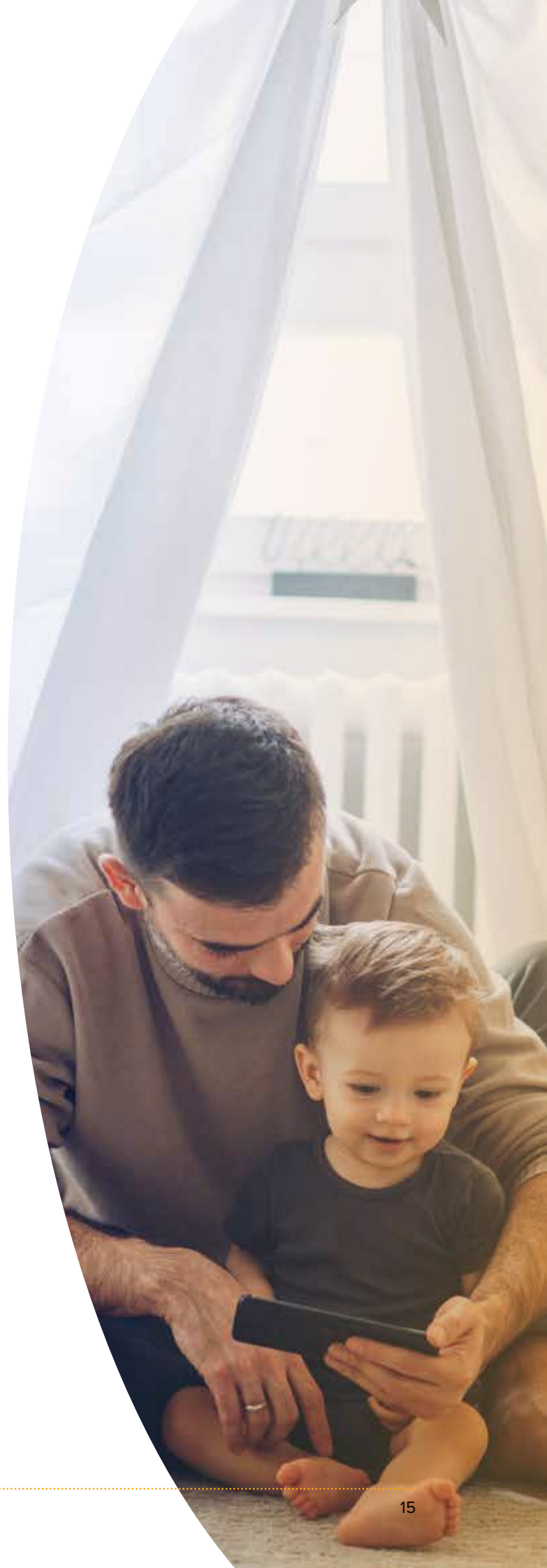
In theory, this policy should enable both parents to take an extended period of leave to care for their infant in their first year. Strong take-up would normalise fathers as carers, de-gender care responsibilities, and give women, who know their career could be harmed by an extended period away from work, the choice to return to work earlier.

In practice, with take-up hovering at 2% this policy needs critical mass to realise these benefits. In effect the policy continues to reinforce gendered-care stereotypes.

Barriers to take-up are commonly cited as a lack of enhanced pay, which takes this option out of play for many families, and gendered attitudes toward baby-care in wider society.

The effectiveness of this policy to meet its stated aims also depends on how leave is shared. Research shows that when leave is shared consecutively, the mother returns to work earlier and the father benefits from a period of sole parenting. It develops confidence and competence in his ability to parent and fosters greater engagement with his child.

The research suggests that fathers benefit most from a period of leave that lasts at least three to four months. Where the mother takes the early period of leave and the father takes part of his leave to coincide with her return to work.



Employers leading on this issue address both wallet and heart. Many offer enhanced paternity pay which puts shared leave back on the table as a realistic financial option.

Others offer **Parental Transition Coaching** to help parents think through the adjustments they will need to make at work and at home if they are to truly share work and care.

It's not enough to offer this support purely to mothers. It needs to be extended to fathers and managers too in order to have an impact.

### Flexible Working

In all its forms works well to keep mothers in the workplace, less so to help them advance. Widely regarded as a benefit to help working mums balance work with childcare, the trade-off between flexibility and career progression has until recently remained largely unquestioned. This is changing as employers realise they cannot close the gender pay gap or create diverse boards unless they enable both men and women to care and progress their careers.

Organisations that offer flex by default, for all jobs, where possible, find it helps to shatter the myth that flexible working is for women. It also encourages them to design jobs in a way that they can be done flexibly, but allows the jobholder to progress.

Far more needs to be done to shift performance assessment away from input to outputs. The period of enforced home working during lockdown may help some companies known for presenteeism learn to assess performance via outputs.

Check also that your strategy for developing talent doesn't hinder the progress of flexible workers. **A career development path** that enables potential leaders to step on and off the career ladder, allows parents to calibrate their commitment to work at times when their child needs extra parental input, for example, during adolescence or public exams.

We need to rethink career progression from climbing a vertical ladder to a lattice where people can tack sideways and then progress upwards. Career patterns are changing as the number of families with dual-career parents and responsibility for elder care rises. A lattice approach better accommodates parents to calibrate their commitment to work at times when their family needs extra support.

### Challenge Government Policy

It is worth noting that without radical transparency the government's ambition to enable women to achieve their full economic potential and in order to boost national productivity and recovery will falter.

While the government's recent consultation with employers on parental support policies is to be encouraged, the paper can be critiqued for framing issues in a way that at best overlooks this government's failure to provide affordable, sufficient and quality childcare. Concerns that take up of Shared Parental Leave would be low could be addressed through a national education campaign, or a stipulation in law that employers must offer the same enhanced pay for SPL as for Maternity Leave.

**A recent court ruling found in favour of Leicestershire police that enhancing maternity pay but not Shared Parental Leave is not discriminatory. This allows employers to offer enhanced maternity pay without providing the same benefits under SPL. In effect this undermines gender-neutral parenting and perpetuates the idea that care is a woman's responsibility.**



## 7 Lessons from the Coronavirus crisis

The world's biggest experiment in remote working has shown employers they have the necessary technology and cyber security for employees to work from home.



In turn, employees have shown they can be trusted to work not shirk at home. In theory, greater flexibility to work when and where they choose will help parents share work/care responsibilities.

In practice, while working from home, with children at home, has been an eye-opener for many fathers, women in dual-income families have continued to do more childcare and support home learning. Fathers in particular, say they find it difficult to ask their boss for support.

Employers have a golden opportunity to harvest insight from dads, to better understand how to encourage them to ask for help, and remove the fear that doing so will incur a “motherhood penalty”.

Without equal share of work and care there is a real risk that professional women will opt out of promotions or step off the career ladder entirely. We have already heard early warning signs of this from the women we coach.

Employers need schools to open and stay open for dual-income parents to sustain pre-Coronavirus levels of productivity. Until a vaccine is available, open schools remain a precarious ambition. In line with government guidelines, children will be taught in smaller class sizes and in cohorts.

This means, for the foreseeable future schools will operate a reduced service. Children will attend school on a part-time basis, and if a member of their cohort shows symptoms, all in that cohort will be sent home to self-isolate for two weeks. Further outbreaks of Coronavirus are anticipated, particularly during the winter months, that may require schools to close again.

Employers should understand that it will be some time before working parents can rely on regular school hours.

Many pre-school nurseries went into administration during lockdown. Help from grandparents is out of the question for the foreseeable future and this means many parents will be left without childcare. Coronavirus has hit single parents hard without any contingency or typical avenues of support.

Fathers as well as mothers will have productivity losses because they're looking after children.

Don't assume mothers are in a position to look after the children. Beware that appraisals do not reward 'go the extra mile' behaviour that precludes parents.

Be hyper-vigilant about promotion decisions to ensure that 'availability' does not win over talent.

Coronavirus has disrupted life, but it's also given employers a unique and not-to-be-squandered opportunity to better align working practices with the needs of modern society.



## About ECC


ECC has 25 years' experience helping employers support working parents as they progress through the different stages of parenthood.

We also help employers remove the barriers that contribute to women's careers flat lining; barriers that are now understood to contribute to the gender pay gap.

We work both nationally and internationally, tailoring content through our understanding of local markets.

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