

# PM calls for greater equality in parental leave

Prime Minister Theresa May has today launched a consultation calling for views on changes to parental leave entitlements to ensure they better reflect our modern society and the desire to share childcare more equally.

It asks questions on whether statutory Paternity leave for fathers and same sex partners should be changed and for suggestions on ways in which the shared parental leave policy introduced in 2015 could be improved.

It also sets out how the government is looking to introduce a new Neonatal Leave and Pay entitlement, for parents of premature and sick babies who need to spend a prolonged period in neonatal care following birth.

Parents would receive one week of Neonatal Leave and Pay for every week that their baby is in hospital. This would be available to mothers, fathers and partners.

The new entitlement would mean that fathers and partners will no longer need to rely on taking annual and unpaid leave if their child is in hospital for longer than their paternity leave period. It would also provide them with additional time at home with their child to make up for the time spent in hospital.

In the UK, an estimated 100,000 babies are admitted to neonatal care every year following their birth. For fathers and partners, typically their whole 2 weeks of Paternity Leave is spent with the mother and baby in hospital. Where a baby is kept in neonatal care for longer than 2 weeks, a Bliss survey found that around 36% of fathers and partners were signed off sick while their baby was in neonatal care.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

The experience of parenting has changed almost beyond recognition over the past 40 years, with fathers wanting to share caring responsibilities more equally from the outset.

In introducing shared parental leave, we have taken significant steps to support parents to do this, but all too often it is still mothers, not fathers, who shoulder the burden of childcare. It is clear that we need to do more and that's why today we have launched a consultation calling for views on how we can improve the current system.

We also want to look at further specific support for parents who are already dealing with the unimaginable stress of their babies needing special neonatal care. Parents have more than enough on their plates without worrying about their parental leave running

out and having to return to work before their precious newborn comes home.

That's not fair and it's not right. So we're also proposing a new Neonatal Leave and Pay entitlement to make this time a bit easier for parents whose babies need to spend a prolonged period in neonatal care.

Minister for Women & Equalities, Penny Mordaunt, said:

Shared parental leave is hugely advantageous for both men and women and forms a key part of the government's equalities agenda. It allows men to spend more time with their child, helping them to develop that paternal bond, and provides women with vital support at home during such an important time in their child's life.

This announcement is another step in the right direction, towards giving parents even more choice about how they manage work and parenting responsibilities. Fathers should not have to rely on annual and unpaid leave if they want to be involved in the first months of their child's life.

We also want to make sure that potential parents have the information they need about their potential employers from the outset so they can make the choices that are right for them. That's why we're also consulting on whether employers should publish their leave and pay and flexible working policies and whether there should be a requirement for employers to consider advertising jobs as flexible.

The government's consultation aims to challenge the assumption entrenched in our parental leave entitlements that the mother must be the primary carer in the early stages of a child's life.

The active involvement of both parents in parenting duties at home has clear benefits for families, for relationships, for childcare, for business and for wider society.

The government believes that changing paternity leave could have an important impact in promoting better gender equality in work and at home. The UK is below the OECD average in terms of length of dedicated paternity leave offered, though highest on length of maternity leave, demonstrating the size of the current discrepancy.