


MANAGING EXTENDED PATERNITY LEAVE

Insights for employers
based on employees'
experience of taking and
returning from extended
leave



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Report

Managing extended paternity leave: insights for employers based on employees' experience of taking and returning from extended leave

Contents

Executive summary	2
Key findings	3
Introduction	4
Barriers to taking extended paternity leave	5
Benefits of taking extended paternity leave	8
Supporting the return to work	10
Conclusions and recommendations	16
Research methodology	18
References	19
Appendix: Campaigners and relevant organisations	19

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Glossary

Extended paternity leave	A period of at least three months away from work for dads to look after their child.
Shared parental leave	UK government scheme which allows mums to end maternity leave/pay early so that dads can take an extended time to care for their child during the baby's first year.
Flexible working	Scheduling work to suit an employee's needs, for example having flexible start and finish times, or working from home.
Gender pay gap	The average difference between the remuneration for men and women who are working.
Focus group discussion	A gathering of people of similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. In this case, the group was made up of dads who had volunteered to participate after completing the survey.

1 Executive summary

This report presents recommendations from dads on what more employers could do to support extended paternity leave, as well as insights based on their experiences of both taking extended paternity leave and returning from it. It also recommends ways in which employers can ensure they are promoting an open culture where men feel they can take extended paternity leave.

The report has shown that men want to be treated the same as women when it comes to taking leave and returning to the workplace following time out to care for their child. They want to be covered while away, to have KIT days, phased returns to work, and conversations about how they might work flexibly upon their return. Where returners do receive a good level of support from their employer, this results in them being more loyal, motivated and productive.

Ninety-five per cent of dads said that working flexibly has increased the likelihood of them remaining with their current employer. Seventy per cent of dads said that working flexibly has increased their motivation at work. Eighty-three per cent of dads said that working flexibly has benefited their productivity at work.

Support for returning dads therefore has the potential to contribute to organisational goals, such as employee retention, effective talent management and productivity improvements, and to address wider issues, such as the gender pay gap.

Although we primarily refer to dads and men in this report, we do so for ease of reference, since the focus group discussions were conducted with dads. The recommendations which stem from our research apply to same-sex partners too, who, like dads, are eligible for paternity leave.

The research questions were based around the following topic areas:

- barriers and opportunities for taking extended paternity leave
- the role of employers
- attitudes towards flexible working
- the return to work.

The findings are based on data from a CIPD survey which was conducted online in January/February 2020, and completed by 631 working dads from across the UK, as well as two in-depth focus group interviews with 15 dad returners, which were conducted online in February 2020.

COVID-19 note

The survey and focus group discussions referenced in this report were conducted prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, and therefore do not reflect the significant social changes which the virus has influenced. Even so, the views and opinions expressed remain relevant, since employers who have been reacting to the pandemic must now adopt a proactive approach to the desired culture change around flexible working (see the CIPD's [Working from Home: Assessing the research evidence report](#) and [Flexible Working during the Pandemic and Beyond guide](#)). Understanding the views held by men before the pandemic will help to influence the post-COVID-19 flexible working culture, allowing organisations to adapt and evolve in a more sustainable way.

2 Key findings

Taking extended paternity leave and returning to work in a way that allows dads increased parental involvement has wide-reaching benefits for dads themselves, their children, and employers (who gain a more engaged and loyal workforce). This also creates a positive effect on the gender pay gap, as time away from work to care for a child is more equally split.

Despite this, various logistical and attitudinal barriers prevail which prevent dads from taking extended paternity leave and/or work in a way which allows them adequate time to take care of their children.

The survey data reflects wider gender pay gap literature (for example, [UK Government Equalities Office 2019](#)), where dads (usually the higher earners) tend to return to work earlier than mothers, and work more, after starting a family. This leads to mothers doing a greater share of childcare and a 'downgrade' in women's career pathways.

Here, we outline a set of key findings from the report, which you can explore over subsequent pages.

Men face barriers in taking extended paternity leave

- 73% of men surveyed believe there is a stigma attached to taking extended paternity leave.
- 95% of men surveyed agreed that workplace culture needs to be transformed to normalise men taking extended paternity leave.
- There appears to be a general lack of knowledge about shared parental leave schemes, a perception that shared parental leave schemes are complicated to execute, and that employers are unable or unwilling to widely promote them.
- 66% of men who had considered taking extended paternity leave cited money being a concern, with financial drawbacks mainly linked to statutory paternity pay.
- 56% of men currently on extended paternity leave said they felt anxious about returning to the workplace.
- Only 35% of dad returners felt confident they would get the same level of support from their employer as a female employee returning from maternity leave.

Initiatives exist that can help dads return to work after a break

- 73% of men surveyed said that having information from employers on employment policies and rights would be appealing to them.
- 59% of men surveyed said that scheduled conversations with line managers about the realities of parenting and the effect on work would be appealing to them.
- 57% of men surveyed said that parents' networks or forums would be appealing to them.

Flexible working not only supports returning dads, but has substantial benefits for employers

- 95% of dads said that working flexibly has increased the likelihood of them remaining with their current employer.
- 70% of dads said that working flexibly has increased their motivation at work.
- 83% of dads said that working flexibly has benefited their productivity at work.

3 Introduction

The CIPD has been working for more than 100 years, championing better work and working lives by setting professional standards for HR and people development, as well as driving positive change in the world of work. Recently, the CIPD [Parent Returner Programme](#) supported a group of employers to help improve their ‘returner’ policies and practices for people who take extended time off to care for their children. The CIPD wanted to capture the male perspective to see what dads’ experiences and needs were when it came to both taking extended paternity leave and returning from it, and to share this information with employers to help them develop both their policies and culture – not just for dads, but for all working parents.

Recent studies have shown that dads who take extended paternity leave and return to work in a way that allows them increased parental involvement, produces benefits for not only the child and the dad, but also the employer, who acquires more motivated and loyal employees. What’s more, these choices demonstrably reduce the gender pay gap by balancing out childcare responsibilities, enabling women to return to full-time employment ([World Economic Forum 2020](#)).¹

Despite these positive findings, there are still prevailing attitudes within the workplace that might dissuade men from taking extended paternity leave or that hinder dads’ satisfactory return to work. One survey respondent remarked that there needs to be ‘*a culture where both male and females don’t fear taking time off for family*’, with another suggesting that employers should ‘*treat returning dads more like returning mums*’.

This report aims to give employers insight into the challenges and opportunities surrounding extended paternity leave, looking at the barriers to taking extended paternity leave (Section 4), the benefits of men taking time off to look after their children (Section 5), as well as sharing some of the insights from the focus group participants about their return-to-work experience after extended paternity leave (Section 6). The conclusions section of the report (Section 7) outlines the authors’ conclusions and recommendations for both employers and policy-makers.

Background to the research

Finances, awareness of legal rights, stigma and undue complexity are interlinked and self-reinforcing factors that put multiple barriers in the way of dads taking extended time away from work to look after their children. This is despite much research and feedback that shows the significant benefits to both employees *and* employers of parents, who have more choice over how caring responsibilities are split.

The University of Birmingham recently published a ‘[Fathers in the Workplace Toolkit](#)’,² which shows that by communicating and encouraging the usage of flexible working and parental leave policies to working parents, employers can better support dads in the workplace, leading to a significant number of benefits for families, children, workers and the organisation.

This positive rhetoric is backed up by [2018 research commissioned by the UK Government Equalities Office](#),³ which found that:

- Early paternal involvement has been shown to have a positive impact on the child’s IQ, emotional IQ, educational outcomes, career success, mental and physical health, and overall happiness in the future.
- Increased involvement from dads at an early stage is beneficial for not only the child, but also the dad, as well as the parents’ relationship.
- Evidence suggests that dads being more involved in the care of their child is associated with greater marital stability and greater marital satisfaction in midlife.
- Involved dads are also more satisfied with their lives, feel less psychological distress, report less substance abuse, experience fewer hospital admissions and are less likely to die from accidental and premature deaths. In the long term, there even seems to be a modest, positive impact on work and career success.

Given this evidence on the positive impact of paternal involvement through easily accessible leave and policies, this report aims to provide employers with insight and views from dads so that they can consider the male perspective when addressing their parent returner policies and culture. This will enable both male and female employees to attain the right work–life balance for their situation, and feel confident doing so.

4 Barriers to taking extended paternity leave

This section examines the barriers to taking extended paternity leave, including the culture and attitudes within organisations, lack of awareness around paternity schemes, and the personal challenges faced by some dads.

Stigma

Almost three-quarters (73%) of men believe there is a stigma attached to taking extended paternity leave (Table 1).

Table 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There is a stigma attached to taking extended paternity leave. (%)

Strongly agree	43
Agree	30
Neither agree nor disagree	16
Disagree	9
Strongly disagree	1
Don't know	1
<hr/>	
Net: agree	73
Net: disagree	10

The existence of stigma was also referenced in the focus group discussions, where one participant commented: *‘I was initially scared about talking to my boss. I thought it was naughty to even suggest it.’* Another reported that after returning to work after two and a half years away looking after his children, his boss said, *‘So your balls have grown back’* on

his return. He went on to say, *‘Imagine the effect this will have on other dads who might be considering extended paternity leave.’*

Someone else stated, *‘When extended paternity leave becomes normal, it will reduce stigma for both the men who take it, and for the women who “allow” it. Sometimes women are stigmatised when returning to work and letting their child be looked after by the dad.’* This comment is backed up by [2017 research by the Fatherhood Institute](#), which showed that *‘the home-dad care option is considered, by the public at large, to be the worst possible option – inferior not only to nursery care, but also to care by other (unspecified) relatives’* (Burgess and Davies 2017).⁴ When there are more cases of dads taking extended paternity leave, notions such as this will likely reduce.

Workplace culture

Given that stigma around dads taking time off to care for their children exists, it’s unsurprising that the overwhelming majority of men (95%) agreed with the statement, *‘We need to transform workplace culture to normalise men taking extended paternity leave’* (Table 2).

Table 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? We need to transform workplace culture to normalise men taking extended paternity leave. (%)

Strongly agree	71
Agree	24
Neither agree nor disagree	4
Disagree	1
Strongly disagree	0
Don’t know	0
<hr/>	
Net: agree	95
Net: disagree	1

One participant in the focus group discussions reported: *‘When I was considering it [extended paternity leave], my boss told me no one would be employed to cover whilst I was away, whereas it always happens when a woman takes mat leave. So I thought I’d put a massive burden on my colleagues. And would my role be there when I came back?’* This indicates how employers aren’t necessarily considering extended paternity leave in the same way as maternity leave.

Another survey respondent reported success from his situation: *‘As a result of taking extended paternity leave and working compressed hours, two other new dads have done the same. Changing culture is key – it has to become the norm.’* As more men within an organisation take extended paternity leave, it sends a message to colleagues that it is also ‘okay’ for them to do the same, thus evolving workplace culture. Employers should consider highlighting these cases across the whole organisation via their internal communications channels, to help normalise dads taking extended paternity leave.

Lack of awareness

Many of the focus group participants reported that their employers were not forthcoming with their policies on paternity leave options. For example, one participant looked for, but did not find, information on paternity leave when searching in their ‘new recruits

handbook’. Another commented that information on shared parental leave (SPL) was not readily available nor actively promoted, though he knew it was a ‘theoretical option’. One participant mentioned that *‘in a 65-page employee T&Cs policy document, I eventually found the SPL policy, but our HR team was not familiar with it.’*

Another mentioned that although shared parental leave had been a policy in their workplace for a number of years, he was the first to request it, and therefore the HR team was not at all familiar with how to implement it. This caused *‘unnecessary stress and complication’* and exemplified that they were in no position to promote or champion it internally within their company.

In contrast, another participant, who worked for an organisation where shared parental leave was relatively commonplace, mentioned that *‘once the SPL form was completed it was quite a straightforward process. There was no admin overhead, once the original form was submitted.’* This suggests there is a discrepancy between employers’ familiarity with shared parental leave, which affects their ability to guide their employees through it.

Financial

Table 3: Money was a concern for me when considering extended paternity leave (%)

Strongly agree	39
Agree	27
Neither agree nor disagree	6
Disagree	22
Strongly disagree	5
Don't know	1
<hr/>	
Net: agree	66
Net: disagree	27

Sixty-six per cent of those who had considered taking extended paternity leave cited money being a concern. One survey respondent commented, *‘Many employers offer enhanced maternity pay; however, employees taking shared parental leave typically receive the statutory payment only. Financially this often means it is not the most affordable option to families.’* Enhancing shared parental leave pay would certainly make this a more attractive offering.

Section summary

These findings set the scene that the starting point for taking extended paternity leave is often a tricky one – attitudes and workplace culture can either help or hinder an individual’s experience. Clearly there is more to be done by employers to normalise this for men, such as creating a culture where people feel able and supported to take up the provisions that are offered. That means having senior leaders who are openly supportive of this and training line managers so that they know about shared parental leave policies and how to support working parents taking these options up.

Greater communication is needed so prospective parents understand all the options that are available to them. One useful suggestion is that information about shared parental leave is included on mothers’ MatB1 forms early in the pregnancy.

Despite the challenges raised in this section, for those who have gone on to take extended paternity leave, the benefits are notable, as explored in the following section.

5 Benefits of taking extended paternity leave

Benefit to families

Unsurprisingly, a benefit that was articulated often in the research was that *'extended paternity leave gives confidence to the family as whole'*. Dads felt the time spent being the main carer meant they were more confident in their ability to care proficiently for their children. One focus group participant mentioned, *'Taking time to be with my child [after adoption] has contributed to mine and my child's health and wellbeing... and has allowed me to concentrate on my child. Two weeks would not have been sufficient to really concentrate on building a strong relationship.'*

This has multiple positive effects for the:

- children, who build stronger relationships with their dads
- dads, who get first-hand insights into the rewards and challenges of looking after small children (*'I didn't need to follow my wife, I found my groove, my kids get me'*)
- mums, who, often assuming the main caregiver role, can turn their attention to work or other activities knowing their partner is an equal when it comes to parenting.

Another benefit was the effect that extended paternity leave has on mental and emotional health, with one participant saying, *'I'll return to work a happier person.'*

From the individuals within a family unit to addressing wider societal issues of gender parity, many benefits can be reaped from men taking longer periods of time off to look after their children. As discussed in Section 4, though, more needs to be done by employers to encourage men to take longer periods of leave for childcare.

Currently there is only a statutory provision of one to two weeks' leave in the UK. The UK Government consulted on parental leave and pay in 2019, and the CIPD's response called for the Government to consider introducing a period of between four to eight weeks' statutory paternity leave and pay; it was also recommended that at least two weeks of that time should be paid at a statutory enhanced rate. The outcomes of this are still awaited. In the meantime, employers are increasingly offering extended paternity leave. For example, at the CIPD, eligible dads are entitled to up to 13 weeks of paternity leave with enhanced paternity pay for the first six weeks, while insurance provider Zurich offers 16 weeks of paternity leave and Vodafone offers 16 weeks.

While there are clear benefits to taking extended paternity leave and a need to increase take-up and normalisation, it is also important that employers support returning dads back into employment in a way that is sensitive to their needs in order for them to make a successful transition back into working life. This is explored in Section 6.

A note on the gender pay gap

A [government briefing paper](#) published in March 2020 (Foley 2020)⁵ revealed the gender pay gap stood at 8.9% for full-time employees, and that a higher share of men than women were working as managers, directors or senior officials, with 14% of men in these roles compared with 8% of women. This is despite a steady rise, since 2008, in women who work full-time, and a comparative fall in women who work part-time. It also showed that female employees are more likely than men to be working in jobs paying the National Minimum Wage.

Research by [Baska \(2019\)](#) shows that men and women experience a ‘large divergence’ in their career paths following the decision to start a family (whereas up until this point men’s and women’s earnings show parity).⁶ Just 28% of women were in full-time or self-employed work three years after childbirth, compared with 90% of new dads. Also, a quarter (26%) of men had been promoted or moved to a better job in the first five years following parenthood, while that figure dropped to 13% for women.

This shows that the gender pay gap is still very apparent in the UK, and that it is caused in no small part by unequal time away from work following the birth of children – that is, long period(s) of maternity leave and short, if any, periods of paternity. The gap is further exacerbated by mothers continuing to take the lead in childcare to the detriment of their former employment career paths.

What is missing from these figures is the opinions of men on how they feel about working more and whether it is structural, rather than attitudinal, factors that instigate it.

Both the survey and the focus group discussions reveal that dads’ ability to take extended paternity leave is closely connected to their likelihood of being the higher earner. This leads to the situation where a dad’s ability to take extended paternity leave is curtailed by the gender pay gap, while also being a factor that could reduce it. That is, the lack of extended paternity leave is both a cause and effect of the gender pay gap. If the gender pay gap is to be meaningfully addressed, a dad’s usual income needs to be guaranteed while he takes extended paternity leave. This will allow more instances of extended paternity leave, which will in turn allow mothers to return to work earlier and progress in their careers, thereby helping to reduce the gender pay gap.

In recommendations to the UK’s Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ([CIPD 2019](#)),⁷ the CIPD encouraged employers to be more transparent about their employment policies (including maternity and paternity policies) as part of the CIPD’s gender pay gap action plans.

Fifty-nine per cent of men in our survey said that extended paternity leave either has positively or will positively impact on their partner’s career, highlighting how this issue can directly affect the gender pay gap, by supporting partners’ ability to work (83% of respondents were in heterosexual relationships, and 92% of respondents’ partners worked). Respondents said of their female partners:

- *‘She was able to return to work and get promoted as she was seen to be more work-focused.’*
- *‘Her company saw that she is committed to her career.’*
- *‘Me taking extended leave has enabled my wife to continue progressing in her career. If I didn’t take leave, she would’ve been held back.’*

One respondent mentioned that *‘extension of paternity leave rights radically improves a woman’s working situation’*. If desired, not only could women return to work earlier and thereby help address the gender pay gap, but *‘dads who have taken extended paternity leave will be more understanding of mums when returning to work if they’ve taken time out themselves, thereby becoming better managers and colleagues of mums’*.

6 Supporting the return to work

Supporting the return to work for dads

Returning to work following an extended period of time away can be daunting. One survey respondent commented, *‘Becoming a parent, particularly first time, is stressful and adding to that stress by returning to work can be distressing and affect confidence.’* This is supported by the data, where 56% of men currently on extended paternity leave said they felt anxious about returning to the workplace.

As with any employee who has been absent from work for a period of time, it’s important to reintegrate them back into work – whether that’s in a new role, a new company or their old role – in a way that is sensitive to their needs.

It was apparent from the research that for many dads, the return-to-work experience had been a less than positive one. One survey respondent remarked, *‘Support them [dads] on their return and don’t treat them like they have had a “holiday” for the time they have been off.’*

It is interesting to note that 49% of dads who had taken extended paternity leave felt they wouldn’t get the same level of support from their employer as a female employee returning from maternity leave (Table 4); 44% felt that asking for flexible working would inhibit their career (Table 5).

Table 4: I am confident I would get the same level support from my employer as a female employee returning from maternity leave (%)

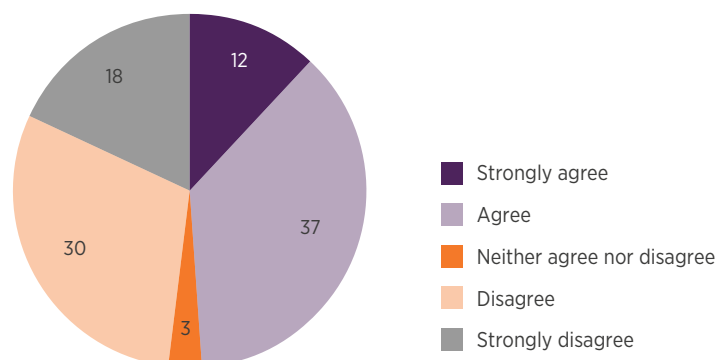
Strongly agree	16
Agree	19
Neither agree nor disagree	12
Disagree	33
Strongly disagree	16
Not applicable	4
<hr/>	
Net: agree	35
Net: disagree	49

Table 5: Asking for flexible working would inhibit my career (%)

Strongly agree	16
Agree	28
Neither agree nor disagree	19
Disagree	16
Strongly disagree	5
Don’t know	12
Not applicable	4
<hr/>	
Net: agree	44
Net: disagree	21

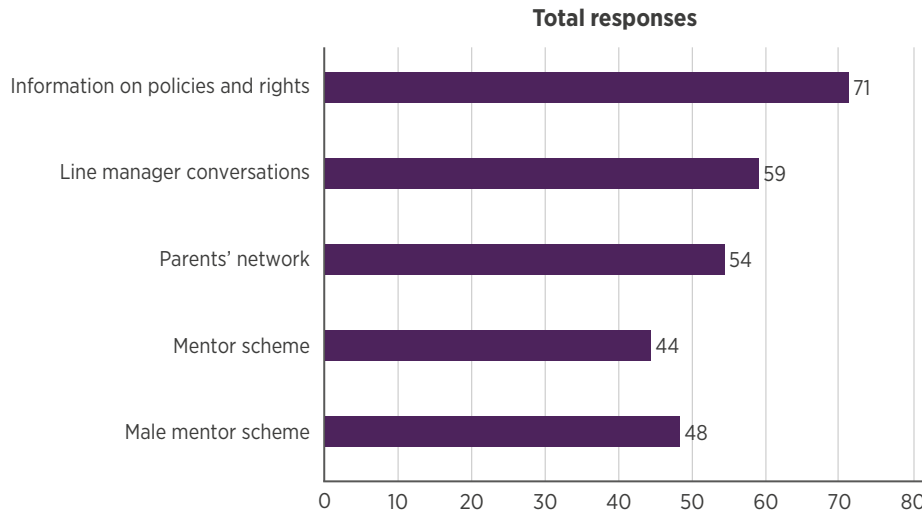
Figure 1 shows how easy dads found returning to work after taking extended paternity leave – be that to their old role and company, or a new job elsewhere.

Figure 1: Thinking back to when you returned to work, to what extent do you agree or disagree with ‘it was easy to return to work?’ (%)



The survey also gathered data on which employer-led initiatives might be beneficial to help dads re-enter the workplace after taking extended paternity leave. Figure 2 shows the results of the potential initiatives that would be most appealing to dads returning from extended paternity leave.

Figure 2: Which of these schemes/initiatives would appeal to you? (%)



The most popular response (providing working dads with sufficient information regarding employment policies and rights) is arguably the easiest and least resource-heavy to enact; it's also a comment on the lack of clarity men currently feel they have. Having scheduled conversations with line managers was the second most popular.

Creating employee support systems, such as buddying or parents' network sessions, can also help. This can support returners to build relationships with colleagues as quickly as possible and find co-workers who might be in a similar situation. Other suggestions include:

- **Tailored upskill sessions:** Returners need to be given the resources to get up to speed quickly. It's therefore important to talk to returners about where there might be gaps in their knowledge/skillsets and recommend suitable training or development opportunities.
- **Interim positions:** If employees have been out of the workplace for a period of time, interim positions can be a useful way for returners to transition back into the workplace. The roles provide a chance for individuals to 'test the waters' and see how employment fits with their lifestyle and skillset following a break. It is also a great way for organisations to access the wealth of skills and experience offered by returners throughout focused projects/timescales.
- **Return-to-work programmes:** Organisations can also offer dedicated return-to-work programmes; for example, Accenture offers 'Break|Through' – a ten-week paid internship programme aimed at those with previous managerial experience in technology returning to work after a break of two years or more.

The research also posed the question, 'What could employers do to improve dads' confidence when returning to work?', with 367 dads choosing to give free-text responses. This question came before any of the multiple-choice questions about flexible working and other types of support for returning dads, meaning the responses were not 'prompted' by these later questions. These were the most common themes:

- *'Provide full pay for dads taking shared parental leave, not only statutory.'*
- *'Provide "keep in touch" days (the same as mums on maternity) for fathers who take extended paternity leave.'*
- *'Provide the same support as mums returning from maternity leave.'*
- *'Offer a "phased" return to work.'*
- *'Provide cover whilst extended paternity leave is being taken.'*
- *'Make returner programmes non-gender-specific. It always seems aimed at mums.'*
- *'Line managers need extensive training in HR areas. Best practice and what is effectively common sense from decent people means nobody should lack confidence in returning to work.'*

All of the focus group participants (apart from one who was on three months' adoption leave at the time) had already taken extended paternity leave, so were able to discuss their experiences of returning to work and make suggestions on measures that would make the process more comfortable.

Keeping-in-touch (KIT) days were mentioned several times as something that would have helped them stay abreast of changes at work while they were away, and therefore helped when it was time to return: *'During my extended paternity leave there were lots of changes – new chief exec, change of premises, etc – so KIT days would have been very beneficial.'* It was pointed out that these are arranged as a matter of course for those going on maternity leave, but not for men.

One participant mentioned, *'My boss was not sure if I should be invited to a team away day. In fact, I would have liked to attend but he was not sure if he should have reached out to dads doing extended paternity leave.'* In both of these examples, it would have been easier for dads to return to work if a policy existed to facilitate these measures.

It was also pointed out that returning to work would be made easier if managers 'shut down' any unwanted comments straight away about taking leave. One participant heard *'alright part-timer?'* when returning to work and spoke of an unconscious bias even from women. *'I shouldn't need to explain myself, and as the person receiving the comments it is difficult to react neutrally.'* To address this barrier, organisations must focus on [building an inclusive workplace](#). An inclusive workplace culture allows all people to thrive at work, regardless of their background, identity or circumstance. A useful starting point is to first understand how inclusive the workplace really is. This could include reviewing company values and policies, looking at culture or engagement surveys, or reviewing communications on formal and informal mechanisms to call out unacceptable behaviour. The CIPD's [inclusion health checker](#) and [recommended actions to foster inclusion](#) are also useful tools and information for employers to develop their inclusion strategy and policies.

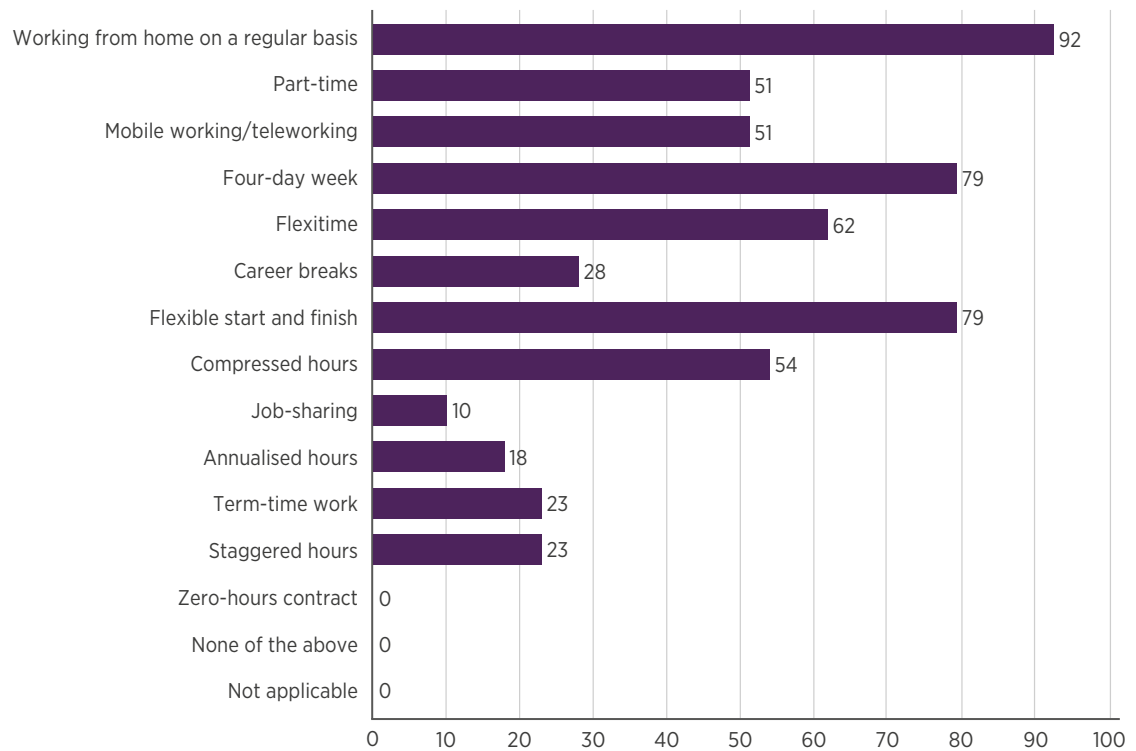
The opinions raised about returning to work, as well as many comments from the survey's free-text responses, support the views espoused in Lloyd's *[Family Friendly and Flexible Workplaces: Best practice guide for employers](#)* – namely, that support for dads can also act as a recruitment and retention tool.⁸

Ninety-one per cent of the men who were currently taking extended paternity leave said they would consider working flexibly when thinking about their return to work. However, of those who had already returned to work following a period of extended paternity leave, 40% did not work flexibly since returning. This suggests a disconnect between the desire to work more flexibly and the reality of being able to do so.

Working flexibly

Data from the survey and focus group discussions indicate a growing interest in working in a way that suits a more equitable distribution of childcare duties, and a decline in the traditional 9–5 office-bound working week. The survey didn't show a clear preference for one type of flexible working, but more of a blend of working patterns that would suit individual family circumstances (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Indicate the types of flexible working you would find useful (%)



The participants who took part in the focus group discussion all worked flexibly to some degree, doing either condensed hours, homeworking or flexible start and finish times. This allowed them to be at home for critical childcare times: *‘Working from home is useful so I’m there for the crucial times such as kids’ bed and bath etc.’* And there was a consensus that flexible working helped their partners: *‘not putting all the pressure on [them] to leave early to pick up kids from childcare’.*

Another participant mentioned that he returned to work part-time, doing a four-day week: *‘It’s been brilliant. Time spent with my sons means that it has offset the guilt of not spending time at other times during the week. A 0.8 full-time equivalent salary has an effect financially, though.’*

However, flexible working was not without its challenges, especially as it can be *‘perceived by colleagues as “slacking off”’*. This might be addressed by promoting trust and support for flexible working arrangements, thereby tackling myths surrounding flexible working (for example, if someone isn’t at their desk, they are skiving). Employers should develop managers to effectively manage flexible workers.

One participant noted that *‘if you have a “meeting culture” at work, you will miss out and might begin to feel alienated because flexible working sometimes precludes face-to-face meetings’*. Therefore, having a policy that asks for employees to work a certain number of ‘core hours’ a week can still allow well-planned meetings to go ahead. Organisations could,

for example, promote a core-hours approach, so that meetings can only be scheduled during times when everyone is expected to be working.

One participant noted that if an employer wanted to be truly supportive, it would allow *'flexible flexible working'*, whereby the type of flexible working an employee does changes with the development of their children. It incorporates their partner's changing working patterns and is sensitive to the school year and the timetable of nurseries. This highlights the point that not one type of flexible working will suit all families at any one given time. Employers can build in greater flexibility to make a significant difference to dads' ability to do the best job that they can as well as managing their family commitments.

Working flexibly when returning from extended paternity leave

A clear message to employers was that not only does flexible working benefit employees, it also bestows benefits onto the employer, who experiences a more productive and motivated workforce: 95% of respondents said that working flexibly has increased the likelihood of them staying with their current employer. Increased levels of loyalty to those employers who offer flexible working reduces recruitment costs and helps retain talent.

(Table 6 shows how 40 respondents answered regarding the impact of working flexibly after extended paternity leave. The results are shown as percentages.)

Table 6: The impact of working flexibly after extended paternity leave (%)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
Working flexibly has increased my motivation at work	25.0	45.0	27.5	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Working flexibly has increased the likelihood of me remaining with my current employer	40.0	55.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	2.5
Working flexible hours has benefited my productivity at work	22.5	60.0	15.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Working flexibly has benefited my career progression	5.0	7.5	42.5	32.5	7.5	5.0	0.0
Working flexibly has positively impacted my partner's career progression	27.5	35.0	22.5	7.5	0.0	2.5	5.0
Working flexibly has considerably reduced my childcare costs	27.5	35.0	12.5	7.5	7.5	2.5	7.5

The figures in Table 6 show that not only does flexible working benefit employees and their families (63% said it has considerably reduced their childcare costs, while 63% said that working flexibly had positively impacted their partners' career progression), but employers benefit from a more motivated (70% said working flexibly had increased their motivation at work) and productive (83% said that flexible working had benefited their productivity at work) workforce. This was supported in the focus groups, with one participant describing it as a *'loyalty bonus'* to his company, meaning he now feels better disposed to his company and *'less likely to move on'*. Along the same lines, another participant mentioned, *'Commitment to my current employer is sky high, making me a much more motivated and productive worker.'*

The only negative observation from these figures is the perceived impact on career progression. More people disagreed than agreed (40% as opposed to 13%) that flexible

working has benefited career progression, which illustrates the point that employers need to do more than just offer flexible working; organisations need to support people working differently and ensure their career prospects are maintained.

As well as the call for flexible working to be de-gendered (that is, men and women should be equally comfortable requesting it and eligible for it), it should also become available to all employees. Flexible working should not be granted only to parents, but promoted as a healthy and productive way of working for all.

The CIPD's stance on flexible working

We believe flexible working practices are central to the creation of inclusive and productive workplaces, and should be the norm – not the exception – for UK workers. For this reason, we're calling on:

- the Government to introduce legislation that makes the 'right to request flexible working' a day one right for all employees
- organisations to implement internal policies that allow employees to request flexible working from day one
- organisations to stipulate that jobs can be done flexibly in job adverts, attracting more candidates who are looking for flexible roles.

Stay tuned to the [CIPD website](#) for resources, news and updates as our campaign to change mindsets around flexible working gains momentum.

The broadening of flexible working options to all sections of the workforce reflects the sentiments of other current working conditions campaigns. Once viewed as a working-mother issue, these campaigns have since evolved to promote the advantages of flexible working for employees, employers and society at large. As such, the CIPD's own [cross-sector research into flexible working](#) shows that all sectors and industries should be able to accommodate some type of flexible working.

Finally, the [impact of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) has highlighted the potential of what is possible with the largest homeworking experiment the world of work has ever seen. It is difficult to imagine now a scenario where flexible working could not be accommodated for most settings.

Dad-specific issues

When asked about issues that pertain specifically to supporting men when taking extended paternity leave, what was noted was the lack of access to and knowledge about support schemes, and an underlying notion that men were excluded from them.

One focus group participant mentioned helpful 'mum-to-be courses' offered to pregnant women, which are signposted through employer maternity policies. There were not equivalent 'dad-to-be courses', which means that dads remain unclear of their entitlements. Another commented, *'There are too many internal groups focusing on working mothers returning to work but nothing focusing on dads' wellbeing. On joining these "mum" groups I have felt judged, either by a number of mums in the group or by those who are asking why I am attending. There should be working parent networks, with participants from all levels of the organisation.'*

Employers should make parental schemes and initiatives inclusive for both men and women, and perhaps talk about 'parental leave' instead of maternity and paternity leave.

Section summary

Many dad returners feel anxious and experience a lack of confidence when returning to work after extended paternity leave. If their employer is sympathetic to this, it can help with their re-integration back into work.

Treating men the same as women when it comes to parental leave – via cover while away, KIT days, offering flexible working and in-work support initiatives (such as parents' networks and buddy schemes) – makes things easier for returning dads.

Organisations that are 'returner-friendly', or that support their employees to achieve a desired work-life balance, derive clear benefits. The returners they employ are more likely to experience high levels of motivation and productivity.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

This report has shared insights from men on taking and returning from extended paternity leave. It has shown that despite advancements in paternal entitlements such as shared parental leave and enhanced paternity pay, widespread social perception of traditional gender roles remains a significant influencer on whether dads decide to take extended paternity leave, or request working patterns that would facilitate a more equitable sharing of childcare duties. Seventy-three per cent of men believe there is a stigma attached to taking extended paternity leave, and 95% of men agreed that workplace culture needs to be transformed to normalise men taking extended paternity leave.

The findings suggest that employers can do much more to break down these barriers through better communication, training of line managers to challenge negative attitudes when they arise, and through the open support for extended paternity leave by senior leaders. Indeed, building open cultures around taking extended paternity leave and adopting flexible working as a norm will not only better support working parents, but all employees.

Below we outline a set of our recommendations, based on our research findings, for employers looking to improve their offering to working dads and for government policy-makers.

Recommendations for employers

- Create an open culture where men taking extended paternity leave is a normal part of working life. There are several ways to do this:
 - Senior leaders must be openly supportive of extended paternity leave (and take it themselves where relevant).
 - Line managers should receive training on how to support working parents to take up the paternity options available to them.
 - When male employees take extended paternity leave, highlight their 'story' across the whole organisation to help normalise taking extended paternity leave.
 - HR professionals should commit to improving their understanding of all the options available to prospective parents to help them make informed choices.

- Financial barriers exist to men (often the higher earner in a relationship) taking extended paternity leave. Where possible, try to offer not only extended paternity or shared parental leave, but enhanced paternity pay.
- Treat dads taking extended paternity leave in the same way as mums taking maternity leave by offering 'keep in touch' (KIT) days, phased returns to work, and provide cover while extended paternity leave is being taken.
- Line managers should discuss preferred levels of contact during their time away from work with dads ahead of them going on extended paternity leave to set out expectations and preferences from both sides.
- In-work schemes and initiatives can be helpful; for example, a mentor or buddy, parents' networks and parents' forums (which are inclusive for both men and women) can help dads to navigate the practical and logistical aspects of arranging extended paternity leave, and speak to colleagues who are/were in a similar situation.
- Employers should build greater flexibility into working patterns, as this can make a significant difference to working parents' ability to do the best job that they can as well as managing their other commitments. This in turn builds employee loyalty, motivation and productivity.
- Be open to changing the type of flexible working arrangements for an employee as the needs of their family changes over time (for example, taking into account the transition from nursery to school hours).
- Develop managers to effectively manage flexible workers and ensure career progression is not hampered by taking extended paternity leave.
- Be transparent with rates of paternity leave, shared parental leave take-up and numbers of employees granted flexible working.

Recommendations for policy-makers

While this report has been aimed at employers, the CIPD also has the following recommendations for government policy-makers:

- Critically review and reform parental leave policies (including paternity and shared parental leave and pay) to deliver more balance and choice over the distribution of caring responsibilities and better reflect the changing nature of modern families.
- Provide affordable childcare from the end of parental leave to enable parents to return to work more quickly if they choose to.
- Increase transparency by requiring businesses of 250+ employees to publish flexible working and parental leave and pay policies/statements on their websites.
- Run a major communications campaign to encourage all employers to use the 'happy to talk flexible working' tagline in their recruitment and create a flexible working challenge fund. This could be used to:
 - pilot flexible working initiatives in different sectors
 - create new guidance and toolkits to boost provision and uptake of flexible working.
- Make the right to request flexible working a day one right.

8 Research methodology

An online survey entitled 'Parental Leave: The male perspective' was conducted in January and February 2020. The survey aimed to collect data that could be used to help employers to support men balancing their family and professional commitments after becoming dads. It covered several themes, including:

- barriers to and opportunities for taking extended paternity leave
- the role of employers
- attitudes towards flexible working
- the return to work.

In total, the online survey was completed by 631 dads from across the UK. The dads were reached through various online methods, including the CIPD's networks, dad bloggers, LinkedIn communities, dad community groups, and other social media channels.

The survey was designed so that only those who had direct experience of taking extended paternity leave had access to questions pertaining to this (136 respondents), whereas other, more general, working-fatherhood questions were answered by all respondents.

Quantitative data was generated from the survey, which also included open-ended questions giving the opportunity for a wider scope of opinions to be gathered as qualitative data.

Dads who completed the survey were given the option of volunteering to participate in a focus group discussion to speak more about the themes of the survey and to delve deeper into some of the issues.

Two focus groups were conducted using online meeting software, where 15 dads volunteered to speak about their experiences of taking extended paternity leave. The discussions aimed to provide more qualitative data on the benefits, barriers and perceptions surrounding working-fatherhood issues and to complement the results from the mainly quantitative data from the survey. Many of the opinions and sentiments from the respondents are not surprising and align with what we know from existing research, but they are lived experiences that articulate current workplace attitudes, and therefore add weight to the findings.

Limitations of the survey

The survey respondents and focus group discussion participants were a self-selecting cohort, and therefore unlikely to be wholly representative of UK dads. For example, the social media channels the survey was distributed through had already, in many cases, a bias toward supporting increased paternity rights and advocating for better work-life balance for fathers.

The online social networks through which the survey was shared may have been likely to contain men of a similar socio-economic class, and again will not represent UK men as a whole. However, the survey demographics show that there is a good spread of respondents from across the country, from different employment sectors and from different levels of employment seniority.

Perhaps surprisingly, two-thirds of respondents (67%) who had taken – or were about to take – extended paternity leave were from the private sector (as opposed to the public or third sector). This could reflect an increasing awareness from private businesses that family-friendly working conditions create a more motivated, loyal and productive workforce.

9 References

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10 Appendix: Campaigners and relevant organisations

Business in the Community	www.bitc.org.uk
Dad Blog UK	dadbloguk.com/
Daddilife	www.daddilife.com/
Dads in Business	www.dadsinbusiness.co.uk/
Dads on SPL	www.dadonspl.co.uk/
Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Working Forward	www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/working-forward
Fatherhood Institute	www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/tag/for-employers/
Government Equalities Office	www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-equalities-office
GPS Return	www.gpsreturn.co.uk/

Managing extended paternity leave

Inspiring Dads	www.inspiringdads.co.uk/
Leeds Dads	leedsdads.org/
Mother and Papa Pukka	www.motherpukka.co.uk/
Papa Penguin	papapenguin.org/
Pregnant Then Screwed	pregnantthenscrewed.com/
The Parent Mentor	www.theparentmentor.co.uk/
Timewise	timewise.co.uk/
Who Let the Dads Out	www.careforthefamily.org.uk/training/who-let-the-dads-out-training
Women Returners	womenreturners.com/



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