



***Q. Do you think that the current parental leave and pay entitlements supports these objectives (Yes or No):***

No - in relation to the government's objective of "Ensuring adequate resources and leave for parents to facilitate the best start in life by supporting the healthy development of young children".

**Q, Briefly explain the reasons for your selection above. Please provide any evidence (including links) to support your view.**

Parental leave that is accessible, sufficient in length, and financially viable supports good child development. It is associated with:

- [Stronger parent-infant bonding;](#)
- [Improved maternal and paternal mental health;](#)
- [Higher breastfeeding rates and better early nutrition;](#)
- Increased uptake of immunisations and early health checks;
- Reduced infant mortality and preterm births;
- [Improved child cognitive and behavioural outcomes.](#)

Parent-infant relationships are essential for a baby's long-term health and wellbeing. However, many parents are being forced back early because they cannot afford to take up unpaid or poorly paid maternity or paternity leave.

Income is the key factor to accessing leave. Mothers who earned less than £20,000 per annum are more likely than those on higher incomes not to take any form of leave. This needs to be addressed to ensure that income is not a barrier preventing bonding in these early days. Supporting maternal attachment [could deliver at least £900m benefit each year to the exchequer.](#) Meanwhile, [analysis of programmes like Sure Start that support parent-infant bonding find they generate substantial economic benefits.](#)

[Most working fathers do not use all or part of their leave due to eligibility and affordability issues](#). Less than 10% of fathers in the UK take more than two weeks' paternity leave, and 40% of fathers do not take paternity leave at all. This reduces opportunities for early involvement and bonding. Fathers involvement can have a protective effect on babies. Uptake of paternity leave is higher in countries with more generous paternity leave/pay arrangements. [In Sweden paternity leave uptake can be as high as 85%](#). The [benefits of longer paternity leave on the baby and the father are supported by research](#).

Just two weeks of low-paid statutory paternity leave, is wholly insufficient. This arrangement places a disproportionate burden on mothers, that can negatively impact maternal mental health and women's employment prospects, as well as impacting the father-baby relationship.

We support enhancing statutory paternity leave, including:

- Six weeks of non-transferable leave for the father or second parent, paid at 90% of earnings;
- Extending day-one eligibility to all parents;
- Supporting cultural change in the workplace to normalise and encourage leave-taking by all parents.
- Enhancing paternity leave should not be done at the cost of reducing maternity leave.

We note these changes are supported by Parliament's Women and Equalities Select Committee, who [recommend creation of a Paternity Allowance for self-employed fathers that mirrors the Maternity Allowance](#).

We also endorse the [Fatherhood Institute's "Six Weeks for Dads" framework](#), which models how such reform can work in practice to deliver high return on investment, including £12.8 billion in annual social value through improved family outcomes and maternal workforce participation.

**If you have any additional comments, evidence or suggestions that you have not had the opportunity to provide elsewhere, please do so below. Otherwise, you may finish the survey.**

The annex of evidence published alongside the consultation helpfully cites evidence of parental views regarding the impact of parental leave policy on their ability to bond with their baby. However, while this is an important metric, it provides just one perspective, from the view of the parent, on babies' development. This [measure could be supplemented by identifying a correlation with population level ASQ data or by other data collected that provides a more rounded picture of babies' healthy development](#). In

the future, the unique child identifier and 'my children' health record could help with this.

While it is beneficial for a baby's development for both parents to have time to bond through the crucial early months of their life, [parental choice to return to work or share their leave must also be respected](#)... By definition this allows the father, or partner, to spend more time with their baby, but only 4% of fathers are currently accessing it.

The government should therefore look to further increase awareness and uptake of SPL, including reviewing the system, and considering financial incentives. This needs to happen in addition to improvements to paternity and parental leave.

Because SPL is a policy that disproportionately benefits more affluent, older parents with a higher educational background, [it is not helpful for every family or baby](#). Single parents and kinship carers also need support to bond with their baby, remain economically active and be supported to make real choices about their employment.

[As the Women and Equalities Select Committee recommends](#), the Government's review should consider options for single parents to reallocate some or all of the entitlements of co-parents to nominated family friends or relatives who can share caring responsibilities. With one in four mothers in the UK being single parents, this would impact a large number of babies.

## Other objectives:

"Ensuring adequate resources and leave for parents **and carers** to facilitate the best start in life by supporting the healthy development of young children".

## Explanation:

The needs of the babies cared for by kinship carers are important. A small, inclusive change to the language of the objectives to include 'and carers' in the 'Best Start' objective could provide clarity and reassurance to carers.

Parental leave reform must align with wider early years policy: baby room research shows childcare quality is critical, and parents need guidance to choose settings that support secure attachment. Leave entitlements will only deliver for babies if matched by childcare policies that prioritise quality and consistency.