

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Fathers and the Workplace](#), HC 358

Wednesday 1 November 2017

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 3 November 2017.

Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Angela Crawley; Philip Davies, Rosie Duffield; Eddie Hughes; Jess Phillips; Mr Gavin Shuker.

Questions 1–98

Witnesses

I: Witness A; Witness B; Witness C; Witness D; Witness E; Witness F; Witness G; Witness H.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Witness A, Witness B, Witness C, Witness D, Witness E, Witness F, Witness G and Witness H

Chair: Thank you, everybody, for coming in today to give evidence. As I said outside, this place was designed in 1850 so it really was not designed for the sorts of things we do today. I am so sorry it is not quite the right environment and is all a bit strangely set up. This is a very informal session. We are here to hear from you your experiences. We are really grateful for the time you are giving, because we know this taking a bit slug out of your day and we know you are time-poor people, so huge thanks for that. Before we kick off, could I ask the MPs to say who you are and where you represent, starting with Philip?

Philip Davies: Philip Davies, MP for Shipley in West Yorkshire.

Eddie Hughes: I am Eddie Hughes, MP for Walsall. I have only been here for 20 minutes so it still feels a bit odd to me.

Chair: I am Maria Miller. I am MP for Basingstoke and I have been here for more than 20 minutes and it still feels odd to me.

Jess Phillips: I am Jess Phillips and I am the MP for Birmingham Yardley.

Angela Crawley: I am Angela Crawley, MP for Lanark and Hamilton East. That is in Scotland.

Rosie Duffield: Rosie Duffield, MP for Canterbury and Whitstable in Kent.

Mr Shuker: I am Gavin and I am the MP in Luton.

Q1 **Chair:** Everybody else around the table is either a dad—you—or a member of our staff. We are really fortunate that we have people who help us do this work. The two ladies here are members of our staff. We then have other members of staff around here. The gentleman there with the headphones on is just making sure that we get an accurate record of what is said. Obviously that will be anonymised. It is really professionally done.

Thank you so much for coming in. We are really grateful for your help in this inquiry. We started the inquiry in March, when we heard from a whole load of researchers and organisation, who represent different sorts of groups, about the issues dads face in employment. This session is specifically designed for us to hear from dads themselves about their experiences. There are no rights or wrongs of it; it is just what you experience day in, day out, and whether you think the right support is available there, what you think about your employers and what you think the Government could be doing better.

This is a formal part of our inquiry, although we are holding it in private



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and we will anonymise it. The transcript, thanks to the gentleman with the headphones on, will be published afterwards but we will redact your names—that is take them out—and make sure that people cannot identify who has made what comments. We hope that means you can be a bit freer with what you say, but obviously that is up to you.

What you tell us today will really help us, particularly when we have the Ministers in that are responsible for these policies. They are coming in to see us before we finish the report in a few weeks' time. It will be really valuable evidence for us, but I am conscious that there are quite a lot of people here. My job is try to make sure that everybody else is able to ask their questions and that you are able to give answers. If you would like to contribute to any of the answers and you have not been able to do that, just show your hand and I will try to make sure that I make a little list. We are terribly formal here about the way we do that. We like taking turns.

Each member will ask some questions and then invite people to give an answer. You do not have to answer every one if you do not want to. That is up to you. We are starting off with Jess.

Q2 Jess Phillips: Hi there. We are going to start by going around and asking whether you have now or have had in the past any support from your employer or workplace to allow you to manage your childcare needs. Could you cover in how you answer that question whether it was offered by your employer and what the initial response was when you might have asked for it, if that is the case? Of course that might not be the case. I will start with you, Witness C. Sorry to throw you in at the deep end.

Witness C: I am Witness C. I work for [Company] and have done for the last 12 or so years. I have two children. Both were born while I was employed at [Company]. The first time around, in 2009, I accessed two weeks of paid paternity leave at full pay and then immediately went on to a formal flexible working pattern, where I changed from a conventional pattern to a nine-day fortnight. I worked a little bit longer on those nine days and had the tenth day off.

The second time around when my son was born, in 2013, I found out a lot more of the provisions that were available through [Company] and set up the Fathers Programme, which I may well come on to later. I accessed two weeks of full-pay paternity leave. I also accessed immediately after that, to run concurrently, a seven-week unpaid childcare break and then took a few days' holiday, so I had 10 weeks off the second time around. It was amazing.

Q3 Jess Phillips: Seven weeks of it was unpaid.

Witness C: Seven weeks was unpaid. As part of that scheme, I am then entitled to a £45 per week childcare allowance on returning back to work, for 48 weeks per year—so not covering periods of annual leave. I used that £45 per week to fund the childcare voucher scheme. I also



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used the childcare voucher scheme the first time around, for my daughter.

Q4 Jess Phillips: Did you have any resistance when you tried to ask for any of that?

Witness C: No, none at all. I was incredibly fortunate. I had great manager the whole time, and specifically looked for jobs with good managers.

Jess Phillips: Lucky you, Witness C. Witness D.

Witness D: I am Witness D. I do the [Community Project] and also I work at [Charity]— on the [Project]. I have four children. I have two of my own children and I am also a special guardian for my niece and nephew. In my family learning role, it has been really, really amazing. I am not sure if it is just because it is a children's centre that I am offered so much support around childcare, but, for example, if I need to bring my kids on a trip with me, I am allowed to. On weekends and during half term we have a lot of trips, and if their mum is working and I need to cover childcare, I can just bring them with me, which makes it much better. They get to have fun as well.

Also, I have spoken to the centre manager and she said to me that during half terms they have summer scheme clubs and things like that, and that, if I wanted to, I could bring my kids there and they can stay there while I am working. That is amazing, to be honest.

Q5 Jess Phillips: Are there any formalised childcare vouchers?

Witness D: At that job, I only do 17 and a half hours a week so I am not sure if I am entitled, but I could ask and see. I am pretty sure there is provision for that but I am not sure. I have never felt like I needed it: the childcare vouchers and stuff like that.

Q6 Jess Phillips: Is that for all four of your children?

Witness D: Yes. At the [Charity], it has always been great. If we are ever doing work and it runs beyond 3.30, they will pay for after-school club, so I can call and let the receptionist know I am going to need after-school club and it gets invoiced.

Jess Phillips: It is fairly flexible.

Witness D: Yes.

Jess Phillips: Okay, that is good.

Witness A: I am Witness A. I have a son and I am expecting my second boy in March.

Jess Phillips: Congratulations.

Witness A: Thank you. I work in retail. I am also a union rep for [Union]. When my son was born, I had two weeks' paternity off; that was at full pay, which was brilliant. I did not take any further time off



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because we could never have afforded that, unfortunately. When I came back to work, prior to going on paternity, I used to do pretty much all of the overtime under the sun. I am contracted for 19 hours, so that was how I made my money. I also had a second job doing a zero-hour contract in the public sector, which unfortunately was no longer viable.

Q7 Jess Phillips: It was no longer viable because of your childcare.

Witness A: Yes., basically. It was something where you would be rung up and asked, "Do you want to work such-and-such?" and obviously it was in the day.

Jess Phillips: It is difficult to do that.

Witness A: Yes. We have not put him in childcare at all. We simply cannot afford it. My employers do provide a voucher scheme but it still would not have made it viable unfortunately. My wife works full-time and is on a slightly higher wage, so it made more sense for her to stay in work and for me to, as I said, do part-time work, which has worked for just over 18 months. However, I have now had to go back and do a bit of overtime at night and in the evenings, because that is the only way to do it.

Q8 Jess Phillips: In the period where your partner will presumably be off for a period of time, because you cannot give birth—I do not hold it against you—would you be able to do extra overtime?

Witness A: Yes. When she is off, I would be able to do extra overtime. There is that. In terms of support from my employers, I personally have not had to ask for anything like emergency leave. My wife has paid emergency leave so, again, if that was the case, she would go off rather than me.

Q9 Jess Phillips: If there was an emergency though, and your wife could not go, and you had to turn up to work, would you feel comfortable asking for that?

Witness A: As I said, I am a union rep so I am aware of what the legislation is, so I am aware that I have a right to it.

Q10 Jess Phillips: Having a right and feeling comfortable are not necessarily the same thing though.

Witness A: I personally would feel comfortable. However, I have represented people who have had to take emergency leave, and at no point were they told what their rights to emergency leave were or that they could take it as shift swaps or as holiday, or what the company considered to be reasonable time off. This was all for a breakdown of childcare. That particular individual ended up on the receiving end of a disciplinary process, which should not happen as it is an automatic mitigating circumstance.



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I have found that individual managers do have a concept of what their responsibilities are and what the policies are, but equally there are some managers who have absolutely no idea of what the company policies are.

Q11 Eddie Hughes: Is it a question of ignorance on their part that they do not know, or is it, in some people's cases, that they might know but it simply is not convenient in terms of managing workloads?

Witness A: It is a bit of both. There are some who genuinely do not know and then, when I point it out, they are a bit more enlightened. There are others who are intentionally obfuscating and are just hostile to the idea, particularly where I work, which is a small convenience store. I can understand for them that it can be quite frustrating if someone is calling in and saying, "I cannot do today". The fact remains that there are some people who are completely and utterly unsympathetic. I remember one conversation that was all around the concept of what is reasonable.

Jess Phillips: It is a loose term. Thank you very much. Witness E.

Witness E: I am Witness E. I work in [Company]. I have two children: a four year-old and an 18 month-old. When my son was born, I took the two weeks of paternity leave when he was born. At the time, I was working in a different job. I was working in journalism. It is a not particularly family-friendly environment. That two weeks of paternity leave was all I really had. Three years ago I joined [Company], and when my daughter was born last year my wife and I talked about shared parental leave, so she did the first nine months of her maternity leave. After nine months, I went off for three months on shared parental leave....

Jess Phillips: She did nine months.

Witness E: She did nine months and I did the last three months. That was January this year.

Q12 Jess Phillips: Was that paid?

Witness E: No.

Jess Phillips: It was completely unpaid.

Witness E: I feel incredibly lucky that we were able to use savings in order to pay the bills for those three months but for me it was an opportunity that I did not want to turn down. I feel very grateful that I have been able to have that time. I went back to work in April, had two children in nursery three days a week, which was very expensive; it was twice the cost of our mortgage, so when our son went to school in September we were quite happy about that.

Jess Phillips: I know the feeling.

Witness E: I recently have had flexi-working signed off by my work, so I am now doing full-time hours within four days. Every Wednesday I get



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off with my daughter and I get to take my son to school and pick him up. Ironically, today is the first day of my flexi-working, which is bizarre. My work has been very supportive.

Q13 Jess Phillips: Do you feel they came to you with the solutions or did you have to ask?

Witness E: I went to them with the solutions. You have to fill in all the paperwork and stuff. We are doing it on a three-month trial to start with, to see how it works, and then we will hopefully formalise it in the new year. I feel quite lucky I have been able to do that.

Q14 Jess Phillips: Witness H.

Witness H: Hi. I am Witness H. I work in music, which is not a very family-friendly business. I have two daughters, one who is one and one who is seven. I have recently gone self-employed so that I could downsize, so that I could have more time to spend with my family. In terms of taking time off, when I was employed my employers were very flexible but I found that it was my clients who were less flexible. My employer said I could whatever I wanted; there was no formal agreement. He just said I could take as much time off as I wanted. It was the clients who were not as flexible. For example, a week into my paternity leave I had several clients calling me up asking me what I was doing and why I was taking time off, etc. That is one of the reasons why I decided to downsize, work with less clients and work for myself.

Q15 Jess Phillips: Okay, great. Thanks. Witness G.

Witness G: My name is Witness G. I currently work in retail. I am a [Union] rep as well. I have three children. I have one who is 13, one that is nine and one that is three. My current employer gives you the two weeks of paternity leave. That is it.

Q16 Jess Phillips: At full pay?

Witness G: At full pay, yes, but there is nothing after that. For all three of my children, I have had to take two weeks' holiday afterwards, obviously, because, as I am sure you ladies know, or most of you, giving birth to a child is not the easiest thing so you need to support your wife afterwards.

Jess Phillips: Thanks for the solidarity.

Witness G: It is alright. There is no flexibility with my employer. They just give you the two weeks' full paternity leave.

Q17 Jess Phillips: But you get full pay. You do not have to have statutory pay.

Witness G: It is full pay for the two weeks but after that there is nothing. There is now the flexible bit that has come in, where your partner can do some and you can take some, but with the previous two I have had before this one, that did not exist. You had two weeks' holiday



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that had to be bolted on to it so I could spend a bit of quality time with the wife and the baby in the first month.

Q18 **Jess Phillips:** Have you ever tried to ask for any other flexibility because of your kids?

Witness G: Yes.

Q19 **Jess Phillips:** How did that go?

Witness G: Not really, no. They probably would accommodate maybe another week if I pushed it.

Q20 **Jess Phillips:** In your general working pattern, could you ask for a Wednesday off and instead work longer hours?

Witness G: I can swap a day off, yes.

Q21 **Jess Phillips:** You can switch in a shift pattern.

Witness G: To an extent, yes.

Q22 **Jess Phillips:** I am feeling that is a no, Witness G.

Witness G: If I asked and I pushed it. Being an [Union] rep would help, and would push it a little bit to get it.

Q23 **Jess Phillips:** But there is general resistance.

Witness G: Generally there is a lot of resistance to getting any flexibility out of my employer.

Q24 **Jess Phillips:** Okay. Witness B.

Witness B: My name is Witness B. I work at [University] and I also work freelance with my own online business. I have a slightly different experience. I have four children, one stepson. They vary in ages. I will talk about the experience of my eldest son, who is 25 now. At the time, I was teaching within the local authority and I did not realise that I was entitled to anything, so I took annual leave when my eldest child was born.

Jess Phillips: You probably were not entitled to anything at that time.

Witness B: I probably was not entitled 25 years ago. It was tough. It was difficult but I thought it was necessary to do that. Moving forward to my younger children, who are 16 and 13 now, the experience was slightly different because I then decided to work freelance. As a direct result of working freelance, I was more able to spend time bringing them to school, doing the nursery runs and things like that—things that I thought were really important and also supportive of my partner at that time as well.

In regard to my eldest son, the experience as a father was awful. In regard to my younger children, it was much better.



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Q25 **Jess Phillips:** Good progress. That is what I like to hear. Witness F?

Witness F: My name is Witness F. I have two step-daughters, 21 and 19. I have a new daughter who is four now.

Jess Phillips: Are you from round my way, Witness F?

Witness F: Yes.

Jess Phillips: I can tell.

Chair: So am I.

Jess Phillips: She is from Wolverhampton but she does not sound like it, does she?

Witness F: I was 37 for the first one. The company I was working for at the time was in the print industry. I asked them what their policy was for paternity leave and they said they did not have one, as such. They went and downloaded the Government website and gave me that. I had two weeks off with statutory pay and took a week of annual leave as well, so I had more than two weeks basically.

Q26 **Jess Phillips:** You had the two weeks at £119 or whatever the threshold is.

Witness F: Yes. I cannot remember what it was.

Jess Phillips: Not a lot.

Witness F: And, as I say, I had a week out of my annual leave, but it was always awkward. For the scan, I was obviously going to go to the scan anyway but I had to take a day out of my holiday.

Jess Phillips: You know that that is illegal. You are entitled to go to the scans. We will not get into that.

Witness F: Really? When my partner had our daughter, after three days she had to go back into hospital. She got an infection, so she was in for five days. I seemed to not have any bonding time at the start with the baby. I spoke to my company about it and they were not interested. All they wanted to know was, "How soon are you coming back?" I said, "Come on; you can at least give me an extra five days. I have had to spend that back in hospital", and they just did not want to know. You have to treat people as humans.

Q27 **Jess Phillips:** Are there many blokes where you work? Is it mainly a male workforce?

Witness F: Yes.

Q28 **Jess Phillips:** Are there others who have tried to take the time and struggled?

Witness F: Yes.



Q29 **Jess Phillips:** It is not like you are the only person who has ever asked.

Witness F: No. It was awkward for everyone. After three months, my partner went back to work but redundancies came up at my place. I would have preferred to have two months' leave extra to spend with my baby but they would not do that, so I took the redundancy in the end. I put in for voluntary, took that, stayed out for a year, retrained and joined another company. I am a bus driver now with a big company. Talking to people there, it is the same for them. There is no leniency. Their paternity scheme is the same. It is just statutory pay. They do not even top it up. It just seems wrong.

Q30 **Eddie Hughes:** Is that for [Company]?

Witness F: Yes, as long as it does not get said.

Q31 **Eddie Hughes:** Of course. Nothing will be. [...] you might expect them to be slightly more progressive.

Witness F: I would, yes. There is basically no support.

Q32 **Chair:** Are you working amongst yourselves to swap shifts?

Witness F: Yes. I am trying to get next Wednesday as a later start or a rest day swap and they say their hands are tied and they cannot do anything. I have to see if I can find someone to swap with.

Q33 **Jess Phillips:** So you can negotiate on the shifts amongst yourselves and things.

Witness F: Yes. If the company do it, that is alright. Otherwise, you are dealing with the devil so you do not know what you are going to get back, do you?

Jess Phillips: Also if you have lots of fathers or mothers, everybody wants the same time, do they not? Everybody wants the Christmas play. Everybody wants the time.

Q34 **Angela Crawley:** There is a set of questions, but you have probably each touched on aspects of these questions, so we are going to try to freestyle it from here. You do not all have to answer every single question we ask you but if you have specific things you want to chip in, feel free. Now that we know you and you know us it should be a bit more flexible.

How did you find the support that was available, in your own examples, from your employer, your trade union or if you were a union rep yourself? How did you find out the information? Anyone can come in on this one. It is a bit of a free-for-all. I might bring Witness G in, because you were saying you had trouble finding the information in the first instance and you had to go out there and find it for yourself.

Witness G: Yes. I knew about the two weeks' paternity leave but they were not very forthcoming in being supportive as regard to any information. It was that you go to them, to your personnel manager, and they would say, "Here is a leaflet. Read that. That is your information."



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That is what we are telling you that you can do and you cannot do". That is as good as it got with my employer, especially with the first two. The last one has been a little bit different because, joining the union and being a union rep, once you become a union rep you know the ins and outs and what the policies are of the company you are working for. You can be a bit more aggressive towards them rather than them throwing it back at you.

Q35 Angela Crawley: Witness A, you look like you agree with that. Have you had similar experience?

Witness A: Yes. That is broadly what my experience is. In my workplace, there is no visible information on what the policy is. Most of the information I have has been from [Union]. We run parents and carers days and stuff like that. We have a book on paternity and maternity rights that we try to give to each member. As I said, that is where the information comes, not from the employer.

Q36 Angela Crawley: I am thinking of Witness C and Witness E, who work in more formal sectors, [Company] and [Company], where there are established policies and practices. Witness D, you have a primary example of a good employer. Are there examples of what you felt were good practices or good policies in your workplace that you thought improved your experience compared to that of Witness A or Witness G?

Witness E: Where I work has a flexible working policy, so it was fairly straightforward to download the form, fill out the form and have the chat with my manager. As far as shared parental leave goes, I was probably only aware about it from reading about it in the media. It is something that has only been going for two years. It took a bit of finding, but there were forms to fill out. When I mentioned it to the person in Human Resources, I was the first person in an organisation with 4,000 people—the first dad—that had taken shared parental leave. The person in HR was a bit like, "I do not know what to do here", because it was new.

I found that a bit shocking because it is something that has been going for two years. I do not think there is a lot of knowledge about it in the general public. The only way we are going to get more dads taking it is more people being aware of it and making it much easier. Not every dad is going to want to take it up but I do not think there is much knowledge about it at the minute.

Q37 Jess Phillips: Witness C, you were saying that there is lots of stuff about it where you work. Is that well advertised? I do not know if you have a canteen. Remember I work in Westminster where there are bars and things, so I have forgotten what it is like to work in a normal place. In the communal areas, is there stuff encouraging people to come forward?

Witness C: No, not really. There was not at the time. In 2009 when I became a dad for the first time, I did the usual thing: I asked my manager what was available. That is the first time you start engaging



with anything paternity-wise. There was an answer of, "Yes, there is two weeks' paternity. I think there is a form you need to fill out. I will find it". A couple of weeks later, he had the form and that was it.

Then, through my own sense of drive and also being a [Union] rep, which seems to be a common theme here, you tend to do a little bit more digging. I found the flexible working policy and pushed that a little bit. Fortunately, I had great line managers the whole way through, which made a difference. Flexible working was never a negotiated item. It was, "This is what I think I want to do and this is how I think I will make it work". Management said, "Yes, we will give it a go and, assuming it does work, we will continue it". It was always informally done and agreed. I now have a formal one in place.

Through 2011 and 2012 or so, I began to get a little bit more involved in the wider fatherhood practices within [Company], because I thought, "If I have had a good experience because of my line manager, conversely there must be people in [Company] who have not had that". I set up a programme for fathers in [Company] and started engaging with Working Families and the Fatherhood Institute, trying to find out what other organisations did.

I set up this programme and the first thing I did was pull together all the resources and policies that [Company] had, which are well established but were very well hidden in the depths of HR, intranets and all the rest of it. I pulled together literally a one-page summary saying, "Did you know you can have this, this and this?" I then set up some kind of communication structure where people would know where to find us. As soon as people got in touch, that was the first thing I would send them. I was trying to push it on people, but just saying, "Find your own way through it with what suits you".

Q38 Jess Phillips: In [Company], if you do not mind me asking, is it the same for everybody at every level? If you are out in the field in your van, you might be a on shift rotation or if you are in the offices managing the contracts, do you think that if you are a dad in either of those situations it is the same?

Witness C: In terms of the staff handbook, the provisions are exactly the same for all staff, contractually and legal.

Angela Crawley: My experience is different. I am not discrediting, but I think you were given a really positive example of where you got together all of the resources and information. You are an example of best practice for a company. If [Company] had the same kind of narrative or document, it would be far easier for Witness A, Witness E or Witness G's experience. I am conscious, though, that a few people said about taking redundancy or a demotion, and Witness H said about downsizing. That is a positive example. I am thinking more generally. Have you had to change jobs or take a demotion? Have you taken redundancy or not applied for a job in the first place because you wanted to spend more



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time with your children? I was thinking of Witness F as a prime example of somebody who has changed career and Witness H as well. Do you want to talk more about your experience from that side?

Witness H: It is pretty much what I said. I was in a job that had a lot of pressure on it to deliver for the company but also for the clients. It just got to the point where family life and business life were not compatible. It was about making a choice. I am privileged in the fact that I managed to downsize in a way that suits me. I did not have to take a big financial hit but could just work for myself with fewer clients. In the end, it is not a negative outcome but it is about adapting how I do my business. It is true that in my job, which I was in for six years, I had to make a choice at some point between my job and family life.

Q39 **Angela Crawley:** Witness F, would you say your experience was similar? Unlike Witness C, you did not have the procedures and practices so you had to make a choice for yourself.

Witness F: I had to make the decision. My partner and I made the decision, because she is the main earner so we were in a position where we could afford just to have one working. There are a lot of people who cannot. It was a choice for us. It was the best thing I ever did, to be honest. I was then on the other side where, as the main carer, I was not being recognised by services or anything. They were asking me questions to go back with my baby and ask my partner for the answers.

Q40 **Angela Crawley:** We have covered this previously: workplace bias and the idea that men in the workplace are treated differently from women, why that is and how you have to tackle that workplace cultural bias that exists. The assumption that your partner knows more about your child than you would is quite absurd.

Witness B, you have probably seen a difference. You spoke about your first experience of your son, who is now 25, to the present day. Do you have any experience that you want to bring into this?

Witness B: I want to say I am moved by what Witness C has done. You have been amazing in bringing that sense of awareness to your organisation. More of that needs to happen. What I had to do was leave work, set up, be more flexible and be more balanced with regards to how it fit into my family life. By being freelance I am able to do all the things that I need to do in order to cater for my children and my family as a whole. It has worked well for me. I am lucky in the respect that I am able to do that.

Q41 **Jess Phillips:** For all of you who have talked about your role with your partner or what made you make the decisions, if you want to briefly answer yes or no, what is the most important thing in making that decision with your family? Is it the desire to spend the time with your children or is it financial? Is it about what you can afford and how you can pay the rent?

Witness F: Mine is spending time with the children—family life.



Witness B: Me too, and to keep the relationship together.

Q42 **Jess Phillips:** If your wife or partner had less money than you, do you think you would have made the same decision?

Witness F: I would have had to stay at work.

Jess Phillips: You would have had to stay at work, so there is an economic consideration. Go on, Witness D.

Witness D: Touching on the previous question, I remember when we were going through the viability process for the special guardianship, it was my first job and it was a marketing job. It was commission-only. The demand to get your sales and keep going was really high. The local authority said that because the children were so young and were not in full-time education, both parents would have to be at home to look after the four children. I remember it was a shock because I had only been in the job for four or five months and I would have to give it up. I really loved it. It was so tough: it was either I keep the job and we do not take the special guardianship, or I give up the job.

I remember talking to my manager at the time and explaining the circumstance. I think I was quite valued there because she said, "Can't mum just look after the kids?" I explained to her what the local authority said to us. There was no way around it or anything, so I just had to leave the job. I remember walking home; I was so devastated. At the same time, it was a blessing because we were able to take on my niece and nephew and have a special guardianship. I thought it was a bit—I do not know—rude of her to say, "Can't mum just look after the kids and you stay".

Q43 **Angela Crawley:** Just on that point, did you feel in a position to be able to challenge the local authority's policy? That is probably not best practice for a local authority to make that suggestion but there are probably anomalies like your experience, where people are given the wrong advice. Did you feel in a position to challenge that?

Witness D: What the social worker said to us was that it would be a court order kind of situation, so until they are in full-time education, both of us would have to be there as main carers for all four children. I thought it made sense.

Jess Phillips: Were they expecting you to eat air?

Witness D: Thinking about it now, there should have been some provision for the local authority to have provided childcare.

Angela Crawley: There should be more discretion in their application of that as well. I agree.

Witness D: Exactly.

Q44 **Jess Phillips:** This is a question that you all could answer. Do you think



that there is particular workplace support needed by specific groups of fathers? You have a very specific case, Witness D, of a special guardianship. That is a niche experience, but there are fathers with disabled children; there are single fathers. Do you think at the moment that there are workplace practices that is good enough for those people? It seems to me that all of your experiences are, apart from yours, Witness C and Witness E, to a certain degree, the bare minimum of what you might be entitled to. Do you think that there is any support or help for people who might need extra and feel that they could ask for that?

Witness D: Speaking on behalf of another member of the [Charity] who is not here today, he has had quite a tough time because he is the main carer for his son, and he has given loads of examples and stories of where he has had to juggle situations around childcare.

- Q45 **Angela Crawley:** Is that because he is a single dad in his experience, so he has a different set of challenges, does not have a partner to support him and take on the burden of financial or emotional support and responsibility?

Witness D: Yes. He has had to navigate it all from scratch. Now he is at a stage where he will challenge anywhere he has to with regards to any needs around his childcare.

- Q46 **Chair:** Before we move on to Rosie's question, there is some research that suggests that dads cannot be honest with their employers about what they need to do on childcare. I think the same would go for mums, to be honest. Is that something you think is true? Do you have to duck and dive a bit in terms of what you might tell your employer, but it is related to the need for childcare? Is that something that anybody wants to comment on? Do you know what I mean?

Witness B: That is true. I think men and fathers feel embarrassed about asking their employers for paternity leave. That embarrassment is about whether they are going to be the only or first one to do it and how that would make them feel with regards to their peer group or their colleagues. Also, there is also an element of fear around what kind of response they will get back from their employers.

- Q47 **Chair:** What do you mean by "fear"?

Witness B: A fear of whether they are going to leave their job. Are they seen as soft? Is this the thing that men do? There is all that macho culture that exists when someone says, "I am taking time off to look after my baby that I have just had. I want to be there for him or her".

- Q48 **Chair:** Witness B has outlined something quite distinct. Does anybody else think that is not true in their workplace?

Witness E: I would echo the word "fear", because when you work full-time, if, for example, your child was sick one week and they could not go to nursery, and you were taking time off to look after your child because they could not go to nursery, you would feel that that would not stand



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you in good stead at work in terms of future promotions and that sort of thing. Where I work is very understanding. It is a lot more family-friendly than where I worked three years previously, but you do not want to mention it just in case.

Q49 Eddie Hughes: Do you think there is a natural presumption still on employers' parts that that might be the woman's responsibility?

Witness B: Yes.

Witness G: Yes.

Witness E: I would not say it is a workplace thing; I would say it is a cultural thing. We are in 2017 but we are not, as a nation, particularly progressive on this.

Q50 Jess Phillips: Do not worry. Women also do not get promotions. Do not worry. We are all in it.

Witness E: When I went on parental leave, people could not understand it. They said, "That is commendable". "Commendable" is a weird word to say given that you are just looking after your child for three months. I know it has only been two years but I am keen we get to a point where eyebrows are not raised when a dad wants to take time off to look after their child.

Angela Crawley: Women are guilty as well, saying, "My husband is babysitting". No, your husband is not babysitting. They are being a parent as well. We as a society are guilty of creating our own stereotype.

Chair: We have Ministers coming in, so any anecdotes that you are willing to share of things you have had to do to try to get that time to do something with your children, or if there is anything that anybody is burning to say, would be interesting and helpful—things like trying to get time to get to a school play or because your partner is ill.

Q51 Jess Phillips: Have you ever pulled a sickie because you wanted to go to the school play?

Witness D: Yes, on a few occasions. When the [Project] started up, we did it from scratch and our line manager had never been a manager prior to that job. She did not have any children and for that first week—the first two weeks, in fact—that the project started, my partner was studying. She was just finishing up her course. I saw the flexible working thing. I did not really know what it meant. I had the procedure and everything on a sheet of paper but I just mentioned it to my employer and they said to have that two weeks as paid annual leave and then get back and get it going.

I remember after that my line manager was subtly holding it against me every time I was sick or something like that. Every time I genuinely needed to go to a school play, sports day or anything like that, I had to second-guess whether I wanted to ask. She left halfway through the



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project and now my colleague, who was on the project, is now the manager. She has kids and I can see the total difference in terms of how she treats me. Her husband also works full-time, so she knows the struggles and knows how it can be difficult sometimes. I am a lot more comfortable asking and being honest around childcare needs with my current line manager.

Q52 Jess Phillips: It all relies on whether you have a decent line manager, it seems. For every single one of you, it relies on the person above you as opposed to the policies and practice in your environment.

Witness B: It is also about the sense of awareness, is it not? Having the policies and practice is the foundation, but then it is raising the awareness of what those policies and procedure mean and how you implement them in practice, to make sure that we all have that sense of mindfulness about how we go about our daily lives.

You said something about fathers who have disabled children. I know there is research on that that suggests that fathers who have disabled children are less likely to ask for leave. I know I read that somewhere. That was quite stunning for me, because I would imagine they would need extra support with regards to caring for their children who have additional needs.

Q53 Rosie Duffield: I wanted to concentrate more on what we have just touched on: the social and cultural traditional roles of mums and dads. We have just heard a bit about this idea of fear of asking for childcare support or leave. Do you think we have changed? Is that going in the right direction? Witness B, you have a lot of experience with that directly. Do you see a shift or do you think employers are pretending to keep up with things? What is your take on that?

Witness B: There has been a shift. More needs to be done. Employers are still ignorant of paternity leave. Fathers are still fearful of asking for paternity leave. Similar to what Witness C said earlier on, policies are there but you have to dig deep to find them. If we are going to have a really good debate and sense of change, there needs to be posters, literature and advertisements that reach a far broader section of our society, so that when you go to your manager, your manager has some sense of awareness about what needs to be done rather than you having to educate your manager about something that should be set in statute and in place already.

Witness C: It is an interesting term you use, in terms of culturally whether we are going in the right direction. We are, but snails are also going in the right direction. It is not going fast enough or anywhere near fast enough to keep up with the needs and desires of young men and fathers who are coming into a workplace and want to be actively involved with their kids and want to have an equal role in the relationship of home and parenting. The policies and provisions are always going to be a



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potential enabler if they are enhanced to full pay provisions or flexible working is completely embraced.

Witness B is right. That first conversation between an individual and line manager should not be the individual educating the line manager. If it was not for the likes of people such as myself or other union reps, who know what they are entitled to and push that agenda, we may still never have started going in the right direction.

- Q54 **Rosie Duffield:** It sounds like you guys are almost the lucky ones, because you have made yourselves get involved and have had the drive to do it. How can we communicate the rights and courage to get involved in that to other men, especially in more traditional roles, like the bus-driving culture?

Witness F: The younger fathers and younger lads are scared to ask. This information should be freely available. You should not have to ask for it.

- Q55 **Rosie Duffield:** Do you feel that you could spread the word by talking to other people?

Witness F: We have lots of noticeboards but there is nothing about it.

- Q56 **Philip Davies:** Witness E, you said you were the first in your [Company] out of 4,000 people or whatever to do shared parental leave. Since you have done it, has that opened the floodgates and lots of other people have now done it or are you still the only one to have done it in your organisation?

Witness E: I do not know about floodgates, but I know a couple of other men in the organisation who have since taken shared parental leave. It is about raising awareness. If you are a dad and want to be more involved in childcare and looking after your kids, you have to want to. At the moment, you have to try to ask questions and look up what your rights are. A lot of dads do not do that. It is about having access to all the information and knowing about the policies that are out there for dads.

- Q57 **Eddie Hughes:** You seem to be an exemplary example of dads, in as much as you are clearly progressive and involved in parenting. Do you think, from friends and family, that you are representative? Let us say we had a really well publicised policy that all dads knew about; would take-up increase significantly, or is it cultural in terms of people catching up with wanting to take that leave? Is it cool to be a dad that takes time off work?

Witness B: We can make it cool.

Eddie Hughes: Witness B, I think you could make anything cool.

Witness C: There is one thing I wanted to share because it is a brilliant lead-in to the question. When I started the Fathers Programme, the first



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thing I did was ask HR and the MI team for all of the stats over paternity-leave-takers for the previous three or four years before that. I did what I did with the Fathers Programme, pulled it all together and publicised it. You mentioned word of mouth and sharing the information. There was a massive spike in paternity-leave-takers within [Company], and it was sustained over a couple of years. Purely telling everybody what they were entitled to and word of mouth absolutely makes a difference.

Role models at the top of organisations championing and reinforcing that regularly was the missing piece of the puzzle that I did not get within [Company] culturally. We are always publicising stuff through our internal comms over teams and people who have gone above and beyond, worked longer and delivered this in exceptional circumstances. By nature, [Company] are engineers so when things go wrong, we all jump in; we are firefighters and we look fixing stuff. We are always championing those who are working above and beyond. We do not champion those who are working well and have that good work-life balance.

Witness A: It would be fantastic if taking time off to look after children did become cool for dads. I am aware—and Witness G will probably agree—that for a lot of us it is just not financially viable. It could be as cool as you want but if we cannot take that time then it is a bit of an empty liberty to have.

Q58 **Rosie Duffield:** Is this a class issue as well, then? It is emerging that it might be that if you work in a nice management role you are going to get a bit more support, or if you are working for yourself.

Witness A: I have to be honest. Since my son has been born, I have slowly watched myself creep further and further into my overdraft. As I said, I have had to work part-time, not necessarily through choice. I love spending time with my son but I also like the idea of being able to not worry about money. It has been a real issue. If paid support was there, I would take it in a heartbeat but it is not.

Chair: I do not think that that is prevalent at any level. It is not related to job type.

Q59 **Angela Crawley:** Can I throw something into the mix? I spent a period of time earlier in the year in Denmark and Sweden, which are countries that have really good standards and are leading the way on equality and the workplace. The Minister I met with at the time spoke about how he was leading by example by taking leave for the first time. Do you think here in the UK that we are leading by example, because this building is probably the least family-friendly institute in the world? Do you see an example of what we aspire to as a country? Scandinavia is obviously milk and honey, but do you see what you want in the UK?

Chair: Are there individuals you have seen who have done what you think men should do around taking time off? Can you think of any role



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models? I can remember Nick Clegg taking some time off when his baby was born, and David Cameron.

Rosie Duffield: Our colleague James Frith had a baby a couple of weeks ago. We were whipped to death and he had a baby that was 24 hours old and he was here the whole time.

Chair: Is there anybody in your consciousness who is doing this stuff? You are all looking very blank at me when I say this.

Jess Phillips: It is hard to think of an example of a trailblazer who said, "No, I am going to do this. I am going to be the dad".

Angela Crawley: You could say someone like David Beckham, but he is a man of financial means beyond anybody's wildest dreams. It is not the same.

Witness G: That is your problem. We can say David Beckham, we can say Mr Cameron but they all have financial backing. We have not.

Q60 **Eddie Hughes:** Is it slightly more realistic then, going back to Rosie's point, to ask where we think, other than the [Company], would be a very good place to work? Are you aware of other people who are good employers?

Witness D: I mentioned my experience and I feel like that should be normal practice within all sectors. You mentioned something about class and stuff. I do not know if it is because I am working in the community sector where people are more conscious and more aware of the community's needs and what families have to go through. I hear stories of you guys, for example, and people who have had tough times, and I question why it cannot all just be plain sailing. Mums get one year of maternity leave, is it?

Jess Phillips: Nine months.

Witness D: Is it nine months at full pay?

Jess Phillips: Not full pay.

Witness D: I was not working when both of my kids were born, so I never needed to take that paternity leave. I was at university studying so I had university loans to cover me. It should just be normal practice. Another side to it is that there are third-world countries where children are growing up and have the bare minimum and are happy and running around. There has to be a balance within yourself. Do you want to work your backside off five or six days a week and have no time with your kids, or do you want to maybe make some sacrifices and look after your kids? Maybe you are not going to be on a high income but it is the time you are spending with your kids that you have to think about; you have to make a balance.

Witness G: I was a manager and then I had to step down because I had no family life. I was working six days a week, 12 hours a day, taking



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home a reasonably decent wage, but every time I talk about it you can see in my daughter's eyes how upset she is that she never spent any time with her dad when she was younger, at three, four, five or six. She never had any of that. I made a decision with my nine year-old now. Even he had very limited time with me because I was still a manager. With this one, I had to step down as a manager and become a general assistance.

Witness H: I have a very similar experience to that as well. I was travelling all the time and working six days a week. At some point you just make the decision you want to spend some time with the kids. You will not get those years back.

Q61 **Eddie Hughes:** Witness H, what could have happened to make your clients more understanding? Was there an opportunity for you to give them more notice or educate them, or is it just the industry that you are in?

Witness H: I think it was just the industry. It is based on results. If you are not going to give results, someone else will give them results. The way for me to handle it was to take on fewer clients and therefore work for myself, so I did not have to share commissions with the company. In terms of educating the clients, no. I do not think that would have been possible.

Q62 **Eddie Hughes:** Let us not worry about just clients and managers then. What do you think we could do to educate your co-workers so that they do not feel that extra burden is being placed on them, or so that they think it is an acceptable and normal thing? It feels like the legislation has moved one step and we need attitudes to catch up. What could we do for that?

Witness B: Follow the examples that are happening in Sweden, Finland and all the other Scandinavian countries. They do it so well. The reasons that they do it so well is because there is no pressure on earnings and no pressure on money. Everything is very evenly balanced. Unfortunately in our country, it is all about earning, earning, earning.

If we had a more balanced system change, hopefully we will get this balance in regards to men and fathers feeling able to not have to worry about that message you get from a very early age: men earn. This is what you do. You go out, earn the money, bring it in and give it to your family. In the 21st century, we are saying that we want it a bit more balanced, where we can earn but also we can have that balance with regard to family life, where the earning does not take over and become the be all and end, as we have just heard from Witness G and Witness H.

Q63 **Chair:** What about this issue of co-workers? Do you find you are really supported when you want to take time off to care for your children by your co-workers as well as your managers? Do you find your co-workers supportive or not? I see some smiles here.



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Witness D: Currently, yes. My current line manager and colleague have kids. It is only three of us on the team. They both have kids so they are completely understanding if my daughter is throwing up in the morning and I cannot get in.

Q64 **Chair:** You have lots of support there. Has anybody had different experiences?

Witness G: You will get support from colleagues. They are supportive. It is the other side that is not supportive.

Chair: Unsupportive management, but not unsupportive co-workers.

Witness G: Yes. I can give you an example. The other day my daughter had to go for her three-year injections. I had to take a day's holiday for it. I was not offered any time. I took it unpaid. No disrespect to the retail sector but it is the lowest paid as it is, anyway. I cannot afford to take a day off. I had to take a day's holiday. I have had to use a day's holiday for my daughter to have her three-year injections. Those injections are critical. Any mum would know that.

Q65 **Chair:** Do you think that would have been different if you were a mum rather than a dad?

Witness G: In retail, no. It would not have made a difference if it was a mum or dad. If it is a hospital appointment and you can produce a hospital letter, you have the time paid that day. If it is a doctor's appointment for my daughter to have her three-year injections that are critical for her to have so she does not get ill later on in life, no.

Q66 **Chair:** Has anybody had experiences where, because they are a dad rather than a mum, they have had unsupportive co-workers? That is something I have heard others talk about.

Witness C: There is something culturally within [Company]. Being quite a bolshie or confident individual and knowing what I can and cannot do, it has not affected me. I work incredibly flexibly and I feel very fortunate and privileged, especially hearing your stories around the room, to do so. I put in my email signature the hours that I work and where I work. I put in my calendar my work location for that day. Because I work as a business analyst, I get put on project to project to project. In my first meeting with any new project management team, I say, "This is how I work. Do not invite me to meetings because I will not attend".

Q67 **Chair:** Does that get people's backs up?

Witness C: Initially it does, but when I work with them again, the second, third or fourth time—you tend to work with the same kind of people again and again on different things—they understand that maybe they need to make a little bit of a concession and not invite me to every meeting, but I get the work done. It is not necessarily in the way that I would conventionally think a business analyst would do the work. The same with my co-workers. When I pack up at 2.00 to drive home to get



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there for 3.00 to pick my daughter and son up from school, you get the odd, "Bye, part-timer". I could not care less what they think.

Q68 **Jess Phillips:** Do any of you ever get the mickey taken out of you for it at work?

Witness B: I have had that.

Q69 **Jess Phillips:** Has anyone been derided by their colleagues?

Witness B: Having someone say that to you, "Bye, part-timer", or "Are you working part-time again?" or "Oh, you're off early again".

Witness C: "Thanks for coming in".

Witness B: Exactly. Those are the digs that you get. After a while, you just become immune to it.

Witness E: I have never had it personally. I have never had anyone saying anything, but when I am in I feel that I have to work harder. Because I am having one day off a week flexi-time, in the hours that I do I am working manically to show that I am being productive.

Q70 **Rosie Duffield:** Is that a difference between non-parents' attitudes and parents' attitudes, because Witness D was saying that his line manager that was not a parent was really different to the line manager that was? Do you think people do not understand?

Witness A: No. The most hostile manager I can think of with regard to parental rights had children and simply did not care. Results were the thing he was interested in rather than anything else.

Q71 **Mr Shuker:** For the sake of this Committee, I am a long-standing member of [Union] [...] Government is quite clunky. What it does is it churns out policy and then asks employers to implement it. The silver bullet that the most recent Government have come up with is something called shared parental leave. How many of you feel you have a reasonable idea of what that looks like? Great. Fantastic. Was anyone here eligible for shared parental leave when they had a kid in the last couple of years?

Witness E: I was. I took it.

Q72 **Mr Shuker:** You took it. Fantastic. How did you split your time? What did that look like? I think you mentioned it.

Witness E: My wife did the first nine months and I did the last three. In hindsight, I would have loved to have done it 50-50, but I do not think my wife would have been ready to go back to work after six months. Physically and mentally, she was not there. Three months did not seem very long to me at all. It went very quickly.

Witness A: We did discuss shared parental leave but my wife was quite hostile to the idea of having less time with our son. That was the



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fundamental problem of that. Yes, you can share your leave but it will chip away at your partner's leave.

Q73 **Mr Shuker:** For you, it was because it was not a protected slot for you as a partner.

Witness A: If hypothetically it was six weeks, two months or anything that was for me that did not detract from my wife's leave, then I would have had it in a heartbeat and she would probably have been happy for me to do that, but because it took away, that was not an option.

Q74 **Mr Shuker:** For any of the others who have not had a child in the last couple of years, if you were to, heaven forbid, have another one now—surprise—would any of you have taken advantage of the policy from what you know about it?

Witness G: It is financial. Your wife has just had a baby, so theoretically she can go back to work after two weeks. That is not going to happen. Any woman is going to know that. That is not going to happen. They are going to want at least three or four months off. That is the full pay gone, so now you are down to statutory maternity pay. I am sorry: I do not know what world other people live in but I live in a world where that is not financially possible. Once you go down to statutory maternity pay, you cannot live on it. 90% of people have mortgages and bills to pay. They cannot do it. It is not feasible.

Chair: Presumably that is just what the mother is doing; she is just going on to statutory maternity pay. That is what happens to everybody. After three months, women go on to statutory maternity pay.

Jess Phillips: It is after six weeks.

Witness G: Yes, but I am the main earner in the house. I am on a higher income.

Chair: It is 90% of full pay for the first six weeks. After that, you are on statutory maternity pay anyway. Why is it different?

Q75 **Mr Shuker:** You are saying that in your set up, you are the higher earner and therefore it is a bigger effect.

Witness G: Yes, it is a massive effect on me to go down to statutory maternity pay, more so than it is for my wife. If my wife was taking home statutory maternity pay on her job, she only works 15 hours a week. It literally equates to what she has now. If it is me, I lose over half my pay. I cannot lose half my pay every month to go off. Does that make sense?

Q76 **Mr Shuker:** If the money bit was not the issue, and it did not have a big financial affect between whether it was mum off or dad off, how many people would take that leave at that point?

Witness G: I would.

Witness A: Definitely.



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Q77 Mr Shuker: Fantastic. Does anyone disagree with that? For you, the far biggest things in the implementation of this policy is about the level of money you would get between you as a couple. That would be an ideal world, and we live in a world where probably all of us take a hit by having kids, on different levels, at what level do you think it would become viable? Would it have to be 90% of what you already earn through the whole duration? Does it have to be a little more generous, or a lot more generous? Ministers will ask us what the tipping point is at which the policy becomes viable.

Witness E: Statutory maternity pay should not end at nine months. What is the point of having maternity leave that runs up to a year but at nine months it ends? A lot of mums are going back to work at nine months or even six months because of that. When you are talking about shared parental leave and you have up to 12 months to take, from a financial point of view you are having to take a hit because there is no money when the nine months is up.

Q78 Mr Shuker: Can I ask one other question on policy? The Prime Minister last week said that she thought all jobs should be advertised as flexible from day one. You have the right to request flexible working after a period of time, but she suggested that by advertising them as flexible from day one it is probably easier to iron these things out before you come to that point. Do any of you have any strong views about that?

Witness C: This was released about five years ago from Working Families: "Happy to Talk Flexible Working". It is a no-brainer. I raised it with the company five years ago. I raised it with the company again because we are in pay talks. It should be done and it needs to drive a change in flexible working approaches from managers.

There is a perception. I have explained to people before a couple of times: if you have two 25 year-olds who apply for a job within [Company], coming in external and all things are equal—education, experience, skills, knowledge, ability and all the rest of it—one is male and one is female, you guarantee that manager is going to have that thought their head that you might go off on maternity leave. If you have shared parental leave enhanced to full pay, that immediately removes that—no ifs, no buts. It also drives that manager to truly think about how they get that role delivered, from a conventional working pattern to one that can be done flexibly and delivered on outputs. The principle of shared parental leave is a great piece of legislation. Until legislation or policy is brought in that takes the financial element away, the problem inherently is money. You push that to full pay, you have got yourself a cultural change.

Q79 Mr Shuker: That is really good. Witness A, Witness F and Witness G, it feels like the jobs you have described today less easily lend themselves automatically towards flexible working. Working from home is not going to be an option of an afternoon, is it?



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Witness G: Not in retail, no.

Q80 **Mr Shuker:** Exactly. Do you think that having an element of flexibility and being able to request that on day one would make any kind of difference to your industry? Be honest.

Witness F: It would make a difference to me and to everyone in our industry. There are a lot of people that want flexible working hours, because they are juggling childcare, but they cannot get it. You apply for it, you go through all the channels and then you get refused. We have part-time rotas: you can do a morning, a middle or a late. You will only be doing four hours a day, which suits in terms of childcare. They will go through the application process, everything above board, fill in the right paperwork, and the company decide on it. After about six weeks they come back and just refuse it.

Q81 **Mr Shuker:** The right to request is not working for you at the moment in your business.

Witness F: No.

Q82 **Chair:** You can see how it could work practically.

Witness F: Yes, it reads really well on paper but you never get it.

Witness A: I have encountered it. A lot of the time the immediate response is, "Needs of the business". That unfortunately tends to trump whatever it is we are asking for.

Q83 **Mr Shuker:** Could you personally see a way in which flexible working could work with your job?

Witness A: Not in my situation.

Witness G: It cannot work in retail generally. There is not the flexibility. Like he has just said, you will go and ask for something and they say, "No. Needs of the business". They do what they want when they want. If you bend over backwards for them, that is fine, but when you ask for some help from them, it is not easy to do. As a general assistant or someone that works in retail, it would be harder for them to get anything. You cannot have Christmas off because it is the busiest time of the year and it is about the needs of the business. You cannot take the time off to go and see your child's nativity play because it is about the needs of the business: "It is too busy. I am sorry. You cannot go". There is no flexibility there at all.

Q84 **Mr Shuker:** Are you saying you understand your employer's point of view on that, or are you saying that, if they did apply themselves, they could find a way to make flexible working work?

Witness G: Yes.

Mr Shuker: You are saying the latter.



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Witness G: Yes. If they could apply things it would make it more flexible, but in retail they do not.

Q85 **Chair:** Can I pick up on a couple of very specific things around antenatal appointments? This is something that you are nowadays allowed to go to. We talked about it a little bit at the beginning. I wondered if anybody had any reflections on that, because you are allowed to go to antenatal appointments. I know some of you have younger children than others.

Witness G: I have had employees come to me and say they have been told they cannot take it, they have to go and take a day's holiday or make the time up, to which I clearly have stated they do not.

Q86 **Jess Phillips:** Men and women?

Witness G: Yes. Mainly men. The women are generally gone with the baby. With men, I have had it in the last six months as well. Someone has come up to me and said, "My manager has told me I cannot go to an appointment", and I have said, "No. Forget that. Go and tell them you are going". That is the end of the conversation.

Witness A: That is pretty much my experience with my members.

Chair: There is a lack of understanding of statutory rights.

Witness C: In the [Company], for mums it would be paid entitlement; for dads, it is unpaid.

Q87 **Chair:** Does anybody else have any other reflections on that? The other bit was that fathers who have been with the company for more than a year can take 18 weeks for each child under the age of 18. Did you know about that legal entitlement? That is unpaid.

Witness C: I knew about that.

Chair: Witness C, you know about everything.

Witness C: I read policy.

Q88 **Chair:** They are very lucky to have you. Nobody has taken that up.

Witness C: It is about money. It is unpaid.

Q89 **Chair:** Is there an awareness of it? The answer seems to be no, but because it is unpaid, even if you were aware of it—

Witness A: I am aware of it but it is unpaid.

Q90 **Mr Shuker:** Can I ask Witness H something, because a lot of what we have focused on is people in paid employment? You made a decision to go self-employed. Do you think there is anything the Government could or should be doing to help people who are in your situation around this issue?

Witness H: I do not know. For me it has been pretty straightforward. It has been fairly easy to do it, because my situation has been easy to



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adapt. I have not needed any help. I have been able to set things up myself. As a personal experience, I am not sure I can give you an answer to that.

- Q91 **Mr Shuker:** Do you feel at a disadvantage in comparison to some of the other people on the panel in terms of the rights that they have to request, or do you feel quite liberated from it?

Witness H: I feel quite liberated at the moment and quite free. I feel freer than I have in a long time. I have a lot less pressure. I get to spend more time with my kids. Generally, I am happier. It has worked out for me.

- Q92 **Mr Shuker:** Would it have been a choice that you would have made if you had not had kids?

Witness H: No. I would have gone career, career, career.

- Q93 **Mr Shuker:** Why is that? I am not trying to be all deep and meaningful, but practically what was your thought process about it?

Witness H: I was quite career-orientated. If I had not had kids, that would have been the main focus in my life. Now that I have kids, that has shifted. Although I want to enjoy a good and successful career, I also want to spend time with my kids and get enjoyment from that. I get more enjoyment from my kids than from my career.

- Q94 **Jess Phillips:** None of you seem to have terrible workplace banter that goes on that suggests that men should not look after their kids, which is maybe what we thought we would hear, but Witness F did touch on it. As fathers, do you feel you get that culturally from services? I speak as somebody who is not a full-time carer of my children and still gets all the emergency phone calls, even though I do not live in the same city as them and cannot get there. They still do not call my husband; they call me. Do you find that the discrimination is that way, for instance with schools?

Witness E: If my child is sick at school or at nursery, the first call they make is to my wife. If they cannot get through to her, they go to me. I do not know if that is a cultural thing or not.

- Q95 **Jess Phillips:** Do you feel that people treat you differently at school or nursery because you are a dad as opposed to a mum?

Witness F: I do, yes. I feel that very much. If my daughter is ill, the school can contact the office but there is no guarantee they will contact me, which is bang out of order. I have had a run-in with them before about it, so I have changed garages since. I could be in the middle of [...], but still, give me the call; I will come back to [...] change and go home and get my daughter. They are more interested in why mum cannot do it.

Jess Phillips: You mean they are more like that at work.

Witness F: Yes.

Witness E: When I was on parental leave, I was going to the occasional baby group, and I would be the only dad there. Mums were looking at me with suspicion, "What is a man doing here?" From that point of view, it is quite isolating because you have to put yourself out there to speak to other parents and that sort of thing. When you are on parental leave you do not have that daily contact at work. You are only seeing your other half when they come back from work in the evenings. In order for more men to do it, it needs a massive cultural shift. It is going to take generations before we get there, the way it is going.

Witness C: I deal with a lot of contractors as well as operational staff, through my [Union] role. When I was setting up the Fathers Programme and talking to my [Union] colleagues and reps out in the field, where it is a much higher male density in terms of ratios, there was still a culture of "man up and get on with it"—still, now. Again, it is shifting but it is shifting at a snail's pace. People that are of perhaps a slightly older generation—not looking at anybody in the room—once you get past 40 or 50, and people are dads of older-generation kids that have grown up, without broad-brushing, they do not always get that and they do revert to the "man up" type of thing. That was what they went through and perhaps what they were exposed to. That needs to be broken.

If you have legislation in place that self-employed people or people in employment can access from day one that makes a fundamental difference as well. If you either brought the state up, in the same you do for maternity, for six weeks to 90% of pay in employment, that would make a difference. The alternative may well be something like universal basic income, where the state pays for all, and then you are looking at a much larger shift in how employment and work takes shape, because you would not necessarily be having employers pay for everything. If one or two were paying a little more tax, you would maybe have a bit more in our pockets to pay for universal basic income.

There are various ideas. It is not all about shoving into shared parental leave and crowbarring companies to pay it all. There are other ways and mechanism.

Q96 **Mr Shuker:** If any of you have had an experience where you were the sole carer for your child, perhaps mum and dad had split up or were apart for a period of time, or whether that is your circumstance right now, do you think there are any specific things that we have talked about today that are more acute where you are the sole carer or separated? It is fine if not. Okay.

Thinking about any of your members, because some of you are representatives of members, have you had any particular real horror stories around this? We have heard a mix of experiences here. Have there been any really bad experiences that you have come across around this issue?



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Witness A: I touched earlier on the fact that I had a member who was single and there was a total collapse of childcare on the specific day. The support was not there for them. As I said, the result was that they were taken down the disciplinary route for something that could have been solved in about five minutes if management had been willing to do so. As it was, I had to sit in a room for an hour, thrash it out and explain what this particular member was entitled to.

Witness D: I mentioned another member of the [Charity]. He has had quite a rough time being the sole carer of his child, just in terms of what information was shared with him about his entitlements and everything. He had to navigate from scratch and dig deep to find whatever he was entitled to. I cannot remember any specific story but I know he had a really difficult time in that respect.

Q97 **Chair:** Does anybody else want to add anything in the last minute or so?

Witness D: Going back to what you said about the Prime Minister mentioning something about advertising flexible working as a generic thing, it is all good and well to advertise for it, but it is whether managers are going to be trained enough. For example, my role is flexible working but my manager had no idea what it entailed. Like you said, Witness E, it is a cultural thing and it is embedded. I do not know whether it is this country or whatever, but it is something that is going to be really difficult to change. Even if it is going to be implemented in all workplaces, for you guys working in retail, if it is implemented is there going to be provision to have that? It has to be really, really clear and set in stone. Managers need to be trained up to standard on flexible working.

Q98 **Chair:** Witness D, you make a very good point. When you talk to employers about flexibility, it creates more work for them. That is why people are often resistant. When you do offer flexible working, do you know what you get? Brilliantly loyal staff. That is the benefit. At a time when recruitment costs so much money, that is something worth having. You are right, though; it is a management issue.

Witness D: I remember my previous manager to-ing and fro-ing emails about little things. I was late quite a few times and I remember her line manager was getting so annoyed. You know my circumstance and you are constantly going at me, emailing to and fro, cc-ing her line manager into it as well. It got to a stage where we were all in a meeting and he pulled her up and said, "Cut him some slack". I thought I was the one in trouble. Line managers need to be aware of flexible working.

Chair: Thank you all so much for this discussion. It has been incredibly useful for us. You all have very different experiences and things that you have done, which we have been able to draw on. Incredible thanks must go from all of us to Witness C, particularly, for everything you have done within your organisation, which is great because it shows us that it can be done but it is through a lot of hard work. Thank you all for your time. I really, really appreciate it. You are all time-poor people and to share



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these hours with us this morning has been really valuable. If there is anything that comes to your mind afterwards and you think, "Oh flip. I meant to say that", do drop us an email and let us know because we have really enjoyed the conversation. Thank you very much.