

Submission from the Centre for
Social Justice and Steve Double MP to
the Women & Equalities Committee
inquiry into fathers in the workplace.

February 2017

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25%

The involvement of a father figure increased the chances of a child escaping poverty by 25 per cent

Changing the terms of the debate to focus on low income fathers:

Encouraging fathers to play a more active role in family life should be a social policy priority for the Government. Children with highly involved dads do better at school, have higher self-esteem and are less likely to get into trouble in adolescence.

Supporting fathers can help improve the childhood life chances in our poorest households. Researchers from Edinburgh University have found in poorer households, the involvement of a father figure increased the chances of a child escaping poverty by 25 per cent¹.

There is an important gap in our political discussion on work and fathers in low paid roles. The debate on family friendly working can too often focus on fathers working in higher paid, professional occupations in office environments. The debate is missing a 'social justice' angle which the Committee could help to address in its report.

Recommendation: The CSJ would strongly encourage the Committee to consider how low paid fathers are able to balance work and family life. In particular, the Government could help to change the terms of the debate by launching a Review into the impact of low paid work on the ability of fathers to play an active role in the family.

1 Clapton, Gary; University of Edinburgh, 2014: <http://www.fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk/archive/DadMatters.pdf>



Centre for Social Justice polling on fathers

The Centre for Social Justice conducted its own qualitative research in response to this inquiry. We worked with the polling company VoxPopMe.com to interview 50 fathers about the challenges they face in balancing work and family life. The fathers we spoke to came from all parts of the country and a wide range of different working environments.

Dads trying hard to be Dads: We identified a strong emotional response from all the fathers we interviewed. We found that amongst all fifty interviewees, dads were trying hard to be dads and in many cases making significant amendments to their working lives to accommodate time with their children. There was no sense of ambivalence from the fathers we spoke to about spending time with their families. The old stereotype of fathers being emotionally detached from their children or leaving parenting to mothers is outdated. Both policy and working practices need to reflect this reality with an attitudinal shift in thinking where fathers will expect to be 'hands on' parents. The extent to which our interviewees had almost all made dramatic amendments, and in many cases, salary sacrifices, was striking.

Most of our fathers referred to partners who worked and the challenges of balancing working patterns to ensure quality time both as a couple and with children. This was particularly acute amongst shift workers.

Of the fifty fathers we spoke to almost all mentioned 'time' as the biggest barrier to balancing work and family life. Those fathers who didn't reference time almost always had jobs which allowed for a significant amount of home working or flexibility. Time poverty was felt as acutely as lack of money. Almost all fathers we spoke to expressed concern that they would leave before their children woke up in the morning and arrive after bedtime. Fathers who worked in shifts were particularly concerned by the effects of becoming 'de facto' absent fathers through very long shifts coupled with extensive commutes.

There is a notable gender divide in working patterns. In 82 per cent of couple families fathers work full-time. In 29 per cent of couple families mothers work full time², in 31 per cent mothers work part-time and in 22 per cent fathers are the sole breadwinner³. That leaves 18 per cent of families where there's some other arrangement - this includes those where mothers are working full-time and the father isn't and those where both mother and father work less than full-time⁴.

In couple families in which at least one parent is employed, only one mother in five (22 per cent) brings home half the family income. A third (31 per cent) of UK fathers in couple households were working 48+ hours per week in 2011. The average full-time UK working mother does 39 hours per week, with the average full-time working dad doing 45 hours.

82%

In 82 per cent of couple families fathers work full-time.

2 Fatherhood institute: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2016/why-we-need-the-uk-press-to-stop-dad-shaming/>

3 Ibid

4 Ibid



In couple families in which at least one parent is employed, only one mother in five (22 per cent) brings home even half the family income⁵. A third (31 per cent) of UK fathers in couple households were working 48+ hours per week. In 2011 the average full-time UK working mother worked 39 hours per week with the average full-time working father working 45 hours⁶.

Our random sampling of UK fathers underlines the extent to which low income fathers can become 'hard to reach' within discussions around family and work. The majority of our respondents articulated challenges faced by employees in typically professional, office based working environments. Our survey demonstrates the need to better understand the nature of low paid work and its impact on fathers and family life.

Policy makers and employers should consider the extent to which they 'father proof' their workplace, to encourage positive perceptions of fatherhood reflecting the extent to which the dads we spoke to all wanted to play an active role in family life.

Our survey reflects the findings of a recent research exercise conducted by Plymouth University, which uncovered a 'fatherhood forfeit' in attitudinal bias amongst employers against fathers looking to work part-time or reduce their working hours.

5 Ibid

6 Ibid



47%

Half of all fathers (47 per cent) saying they felt their role wasn't valued by society.

46%

Almost half (46 per cent) of the lowest income fathers reported a lack of good fatherhood role models.

Centre for Social Justice Survey of Fathers 2016⁷: In 2016 the Centre for Social Justice conducted an opinion poll to explore attitudes among UK fathers. Our results found that the UK still has a long way to go in becoming 'father friendly' with almost half of all fathers (47 per cent) saying they felt their role wasn't valued by society. Almost half (46 per cent) of the lowest income fathers reported a lack of good fatherhood role models.

Our polling found a missed opportunity to engage with fathers and encourage them to take an active role in parenting. Only 25 per cent of fathers felt there was enough support to help them play a positive role in family life. 55 per cent of low income fathers were provided with no information on becoming a dad for the first time, compared to 29 per cent of higher income fathers. Half of all new fathers felt there wasn't enough help and support for fathers, a figure that remains consistent across the income spectrum.

New fathers are crying out for better social and emotional support rather than being told to 'man up', with 3 out of 5 Dads (57 per cent) saying they felt emotionally unsupported when they first became a father.

The Centre for Social Justice believes more needs to be done to promote the important role of fathers and change public attitudes, particularly among employers. In our submission to the Government's Life Chances Strategy in 2016, the Centre for Social Justice suggested the Government should consider launching a national campaign focused on the important role of fathers and fathers-to-be⁸. In 2016, the Scottish Government sponsored the Scottish Year of the Dad to encourage Scottish employers to understand how they could make their work places 'father friendly'. This Government-funded campaign promoted positive perceptions of fatherhood alongside practical guidance and support delivered at a local level.

Recommendation: The Department for Work & Pensions should undertake an analysis of the Scottish Year of the Dad and develop a plan for rolling out a national campaign funded by the UK Government. The Committee might wish to take evidence directly from the Scottish Year of the Dad organisers as part of their inquiries.

7 <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Annual-Fatherhood-Survey.pdf>

8 <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Life-Chances-Strategy-Submission-FINAL.pdf>

The Role of Government - Ministerial Responsibility

There is no single person in Government who specifically addresses issues related to fatherhood, despite the evidence of the important role fathers can play in supporting Government social policy objectives.

In December 2016, a cross party group of MPs wrote directly to the Prime Minister asking her to consider creating either a specific Ministerial Responsibility for fatherhood or appointing a 'fatherhood champion' within Government⁹.

A new Ministerial Responsibility for fatherhood would ensure all Government policy is assessed for its impact on fathers and promote the important role of fathers in family life. In addition to extending the responsibility of a Government Minister to address fatherhood, a new Ministerial Responsibility would extend the remit of the relevant Department to:

- Ensure all Government policy is assessed for its impact on fathers, using the Government's Family Test, especially dads from poorer backgrounds.
- Encourage UK employers to become 'father friendly' and recognise the needs of fathers in the workplace.
- Work with NHS bosses to make sure expectant fathers are helped to play a full role in the maternity and birthing process.
- Promote the important role of fathers in family life by supporting role models and mentoring programmes, shining a spotlight on good practice where this is making a real difference.
- Help the Government to roll out successful parenting programmes aimed at fathers and expectant dads.



The Role of Government - Amending the Equality Act (2010) to recognise the importance of fatherhood and change attitudes:

It is now almost seven years since the Welfare Reform Act (2009) provided for the joint registration of parents on birth certificates. In a recent written answer to David Lammy MP dated December 8th 2015 the Minister of State for Work and Pensions confirmed that the Government was still 'considering' the responses to the public consultation on joint registration, which closed in February 2010. This further underlines the Government's inertia in relation to fatherhood.

The Government could lead a change in attitudes towards fatherhood by extending the Protected Characteristics legislation contained in the Equality Act 2010 to paternity discrimination at work and outside the workplace in such places as higher education.

This idea was first proposed by Shane Ryan, Chairman of The Fathers' Development Foundation¹⁰.

An amendment to extend the Protected Characteristics contained within the 2010 Act to paternity would send a strong signal that the Government wants to promote the importance of the father. It would also provide legislative leadership to protect fathers in the work place (especially low income fathers) and encourage employers to amend their workplace practices, to ensure that fathers feel comfortable raising the issue of fatherhood in the workplace.

Recommendation: The Committee should consider how an extension of the protected characteristics contained within the 2010 Act might support fathers in the workplace to request flexible working patterns and change attitudes amongst employers.

¹⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/shane-ryan/lets-start-a-new-debate-a_1_b_13283238.html



Conclusion:

Fathers play an important role in childhood outcomes. It is important that their role is not overlooked in the policy process. Within our submission to the Committee's inquiry we recommend Government action in the following areas to help low paid fathers in the workplace:

- Move the debate away from high paid fathers. An evidence review is needed into the impact of low paid work and active fatherhood. There is a gap in the evidence base in relation to low paid fathers which leads to a political debate focused on higher paid fathers in professional roles.
- The Government should fund a national campaign to change perceptions around fatherhood and attitudinal change within the workplace. This campaign should be modelled on the Scottish Year of the Dad.
- A Minister should be given specific responsibility for Fatherhood with a remit to encourage father friendly work practices, deliver a UK wide campaign to promote fatherhood and support policy development.
- The protected characteristics contained within the 2010 Equalities Act should be extended to include paternity. This amendment to the 2010 Act ensure companies to adopt practices which support fathers in the workplace and protect low income fathers.

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Prime Minister
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6th December 2016

Dear Prime Minister

Re: Appointing a Minister with specific responsibility for Fatherhood following announcement of Lord Freud's retirement

We are writing as Members of Parliament from all parties who sit on the All Party Parliamentary Group on Fatherhood and take an active interest in fatherhood policy and family issues. The life chances of young people is at the core of the Group's work.

Following the recent announcement that Lord Freud is retiring from his role as Minister of State for Welfare Reform we are writing to you to ask that his successor is given a remit for promoting fatherhood amongst their ministerial responsibilities in order to both highlight the important role that fathers play in family life and also to develop and bring forward policies that support active fatherhood.

We believe there is a strong case for a Minister to hold this responsibility:

- Research from the Centre for Social Justice has found that over **1 million** children have no meaningful contact with their father at all.
- **76 per cent** of all male prisoners come from households without a father figure in the home.
- Every year **1 in 20 children start school** with no registered father, despite the fact that the involvement of a father in a child's life is **linked to improved school achievement**, especially amongst boys.
- Children from low income households who have an active father figure at home are **25 per cent** more likely to escape the poverty they grow up in.
- **55 per cent** of low income dads say they received no information or support prior to becoming a father.

A new ministerial responsibility for fatherhood would help to ensure that all Government policy is assessed for its impact on fathers and promote the important role that fathers play in family life.

We believe the appointment of a successor to Lord Freud is an important opportunity to raise the profile of fatherhood in stronger, more stable families and improve the life chances of all children across our country.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon David Lammy MP (Chair)
Steve Double MP (Vice Chair)
Rt Hon Frank Field MP (Vice Chair)
Fiona Bruce MP (Vice Chair)
Chris Leslie MP (Secretary)

Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP
Byron Davies MP
Gary Streeter MP
Catherine West MP