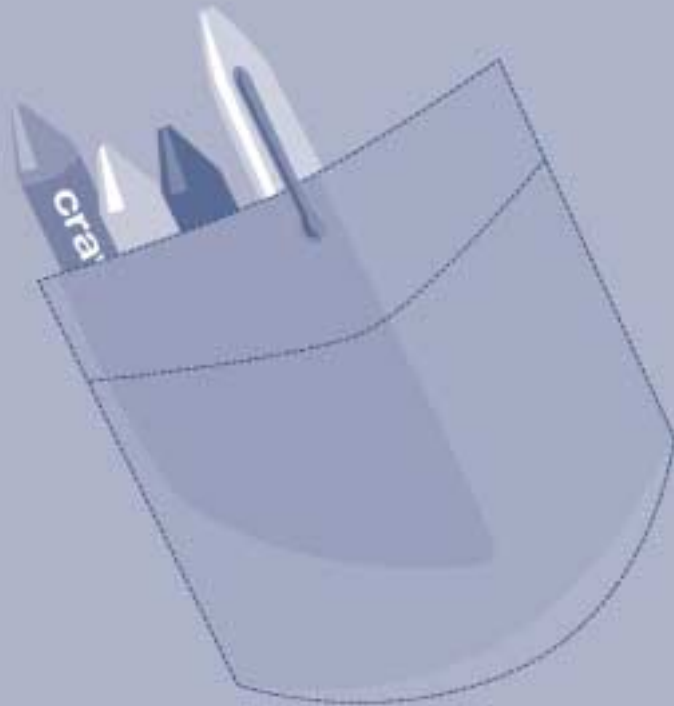


# Work & Parents

competitiveness and choice

a summary



dti

Department of Trade and Industry

**Every day parents have to juggle holding down a job with being a good parent. The Government wants to make it easier for parents in work to balance these responsibilities. We are now consulting on proposals for change. This summary outlines the options being considered. It's time for you to have your say.**

## **NEW OPTIONS TO SUPPORT PARENTS AND EMPLOYERS AT THE TIME OF BIRTH**

Most working women get 18 weeks' paid maternity leave. If a woman has worked in the same place for more than one year, she can take an extra 22 weeks' unpaid leave.

Many women and men feel that maternity leave and pay need to improve to ensure that the health and welfare of all new mothers are safeguarded and to make it easier to return to work. Which of these changes would make the biggest difference?

- **Should the period of unpaid maternity leave be extended so that a woman can stay at home for a year in total?**
- **Should any extension to unpaid maternity leave be shared equally between the mother and the father?**
- **Should the flat rate of maternity pay be increased? Or the period over which a woman receives maternity pay lengthened to 26 weeks?**
- **Should one parent have a right to leave paid at the equivalent flat rate and for the same length of time as maternity pay when adopting a child?**

An increasing number of men want to play a more active role in supporting their partner following the arrival of a new child.

- **Should working fathers be given paternity leave, for example for two weeks, paid at the same flat rate as maternity pay?**
- **What mechanism should be used if paid paternity leave is introduced and why?**

Paying for parental leave would be very costly for employers and the State. However, the Government is seeking views on whether, despite this, it is a priority. Other options on parental leave are:

- **Should the amount of parental leave available to parents of disabled children be increased?**
- **Should there be funding to help employers develop flexible parental leave schemes?**

People are now able to take unpaid time off to deal with a family emergency, for example, when children are sick.



- **Should this entitlement to time off work include routine hospital appointments for children and other dependants?**

The main problem faced by employers, especially small ones, is finding cover when someone is absent.

- **How could the Employment Service and private recruitment agencies work with employers from an earlier stage with managing absences?**

Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is paid by employers and then refunded by Government. This creates an administrative cost for employers. What can we do to reduce the costs for employers?

- **Should more small and medium-sized employers qualify for complete repayment of the money they pay out on SMP and the additional compensation?**
- **Should small employers be encouraged to make use of the existing provision to seek SMP payments in advance from the Inland Revenue?**



- **Should the Inland Revenue make available a reminder of maternity leave and pay requirements through the pack they send to employers each year?**

**Instead of any of the above and not before 2010:**

- **Should the Government pay SMP to mothers direct, instead of through their employer?**

The legislation on maternity rights is confusing.

- **Should the Government bring together experts to look at simplifying the existing rules?**

Which of the following kinds of guidance and advice would you like to see:

- **basic one page flow charts for employers with more detailed guidance for advisers?**
- **integrated guidance from different government departments?**
- **packs to help employers and employees draw up a maternity leave “contract”?**
- **guidance setting out the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees for maternity and parental leave?**

## NEW OPTIONS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING

Flexible working arrangements can help parents combine work and bringing up their children. Many want to work part-time. Some want to work from home, perhaps on particular days of the week. Others want to be able to fit their working day around their family responsibilities.

Flexible working can also help employers meet the increasing demand from their customers for out-of-hours service. Many businesses already offer flexible working, but this often depends on individual managers rather than company policy.

The Government wants to enable more people to work flexibly. The Government is seeking views on whether there should be a limited right to work reduced hours:

- **Should mothers who return early from maternity leave have the right to work reduced hours for the rest of that time?**
- **Should fathers have the right to work reduced hours until the end of maternity leave?**
- **Should both parents have the right to opt to work reduced hours, for as long as they wish, when the maternity leave period ends?**



If any of these options are taken forward:

- **Should all employers be able to refuse a request to work reduced hours on a continuing basis if to grant it would cause harm to the business?**
- **Should guidance be produced on what the harm test might mean?**
- **Should employers with a pre-determined number of employees be exempt from granting any requests to work reduced hours, except for mothers for a short time? If so, what should that number be?**

Alternatively, could the Government encourage the spread of best practice through introducing incentives. Which of the following would you like to see:

- **an easily accessible Internet Flexible Working Gateway backed up by a call centre?**
- **a kitemark that organisations committed to an appropriate code might display?**
- **mechanisms for taking the kitemark away if sufficient flexible working opportunities are not provided?**
- **providing a challenge fund for small businesses to meet the costs of adopting flexible working?**
- **an advertising and publicity campaign?**

# CHILDCARE

Childcare is an important factor in helping parents to work.



- **What tools would best support Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in their work with the business community?**

Childcare businesses are often not sufficiently supported.

- **Should a group of business advisers and potential providers of childcare consider what support this group of businesses needs?**
- **Should more childcare businesses be eligible for support from the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme?**
- **Should funding for childcare businesses be streamlined?**

## HOW TO RESPOND

Not all of the options set out in this summary can be pursued. It will be necessary for the Government to choose the action which will bring the best outcomes for parents and employers at an affordable price.

You are, therefore, asked to indicate your top three priorities and why the other options are not a priority or why they should not be pursued at all.

### **Please list your top three priorities:**

1: \_\_\_\_\_

2: \_\_\_\_\_

3: \_\_\_\_\_

**Why are these your greatest priorities? What are the potential costs and benefits?**



**Of the options you have not chosen, which have the lowest priority and why? What would be the costs of these options to you?**

**Are you responding as a parent, an employer, an employee representative, an employer representative, a family representative or in some other capacity?**

---

Your response to this consultation, including your identity, may be made available in whole or in part at the Department's discretion unless you state in the response what you wish to keep confidential. Where confidentiality is not requested, responses may be made available to any enquirer, including enquirers outside the UK, or published by any means including on the Internet.

**Would you like this response to remain confidential?**

**YES/NO**

It would be helpful if you would provide your contact details.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Responses should be sent by 7 March 2001 to:**

Review Team  
Department of Trade and Industry  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

Fax: 020 7215 5450  
Email: [reviewteam@dti.gov.uk](mailto:reviewteam@dti.gov.uk)

The full text of the Green Paper and the form for responses can be found at: [www.dti.gov.uk/er/review.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/review.htm)

Copies of the Green Paper can be purchased from The Stationery Office. Further copies of this summary are available free of charge from the DTI Publications Orderline on 0870 1502 500. The summary is also available in Welsh, large print, Braille and on audio cassette from the Orderline.





Printed in the UK on recycled paper with a minimum HMSO score of 80.  
December 2000. Department of Trade and Industry.  
© Crown Copyright. <http://www.dti.gov.uk/>  
DTI/Pub 5143/30k/12/00/NP.  
URN 00/1339