

Parental leave call for evidence Acas response

13 November 2025

This is the Acas Executive response to the [Department for Business and Trade \(DBT\) and Department for Work and Pensions \(DWP\) call for evidence on parental leave and pay](#).

Our response

Question 1: Do you think that the current parental leave and pay entitlements support the objectives, as set out in the review terms of reference?

Objective 1: Providing sufficient time off work with adequate pay to support maternal health.

Acas response: No response.

Objective 2: Supporting economic growth through labour market participation by enabling more parents to stay in work and advance in their careers, including reducing the gender pay gap.

Acas response: No response.

Objective 3: Ensuring adequate resources and leave for parents to facilitate the best start in life by supporting the healthy development of young children.

Acas response: No response.

Objective 4: Providing parents the flexibility to make balanced childcare choices, including co-parenting.

Acas response: No response.

For each objective, briefly explain the reasons for your selection above. Please provide any evidence (including links) to support your view.

Objective 1: Maternal health

Support the physical and mental health, recovery and wellbeing of women during pregnancy and post-partum by giving them sufficient time away from work with an appropriate level of pay.

Acas response: Acas provides advice, guidance and training on various employment-related topics, including parental leave and family-friendly rights. Between July 2024 and June 2025, Acas handled more than 616,000 calls from individuals and employers to our national helpline. Over 14,000 (2.4%) of these related to maternity leave and over 3,000 related to other types of parental leave (0.6%).

Callers to the Acas helpline represent a small portion of those using parental leave. We're conscious that most callers contact us because they are facing a problem, so our insight is skewed as a result.

Our helpline advisers find that employees calling about taking parental leave are commonly concerned about pay, particularly if there is no enhanced company pay for parental leave. Single parents in particular call with concerns about whether they can sustain their lifestyle on statutory parental leave pay alone. Some callers find that the level of pay they receive will dictate how much parental leave they can afford to take off and when they can return.

In addition, we sometimes hear of a domino effect, in that some callers who wish to return to work are unable to get the flexible hours they request. This means they have to seek extra childcare, which they struggle to afford having been on statutory parental leave pay (or no pay in the final 3 months of maternity leave), leading to a situation where the only financially viable solution is to leave their employment.

Objective 2: Economic growth through labour market participation

Support economic growth by enabling more parents to stay in work and advance in their careers after starting a family, particularly to improve both women's labour market outcomes and the gender pay gap, reduce the 'motherhood penalty' and harness benefits for employers.

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Acas helpline advisers find that calls on parental leave are commonly on eligibility and practicalities. For example, how leave can be taken, notification requirements, and holiday accrual. Calls on shared parental leave in particular are most commonly in relation to how leave can be taken, how to put in notifications, and eligibility.

Acas helpline advisers report that a significant proportion of maternity leave calls relate to redundancy protections, and concerns about being made redundant during or following maternity leave. In a similar vein, some callers are concerned that the job they return to is not the one they were in prior to leave, or that their maternity cover has been kept on in their role and they are offered a different role to return to.

Calls on the topic of returning to work following parental leave (from both employers and employees) are primarily related to flexible working, particularly in relation to trying to balance work with childcare. Issues include what to do if flexible working requests are turned down, and the difficulty of arranging appropriate childcare (commonly with long waitlists) without yet knowing exactly what hours they will be required to do on returning to work. Helpline advisers noted a marked gendered difference in relation to these calls. They reported receiving very few calls from or about fathers compared to mothers seeking flexible working related to childcare, or concerned about balancing work with childcare responsibilities.

When we receive calls where the caller is leaving employment prior to returning or on return from parental leave, while some are leaving work because they want to spend more time with their child, more commonly the reason given is an inability to get flexible working hours to accommodate childcare.

Some callers found that minimal contact or 'keeping in touch' (KIT) days with their employers led to them being or feeling overlooked, and felt it led to barriers to progression when they returned to work. Some callers also reported confusion as to how much pay to expect when taking part in a KIT day, which varies by company.

Objective 3: Best start in life

Ensure sufficient resources and time away from work to support new and expectant parents' wellbeing and facilitate the best start in life for babies and young children, supporting health and development outcomes.

Acas response: No response.

Objective 4: Childcare

Support parents to make balanced childcare choices that work for their family situation, including enabling co-parenting, and provide flexibility to reflect the realities of modern work and childcare needs.

Acas response: No response.

Question 2: Are there further objectives that you would like to see included as part of the parental leave and pay review?

Acas response: Yes. We propose that the review considers the effectiveness of current keeping in touch (KIT) entitlements and arrangements. This could be included as a factor in either or both of the first 2 objectives, as it impacts on adequate pay and parents feeling able to stay in work and advance their careers. In terms of adequate pay, lack of clarity on pay for KIT days can influence parents choosing to take them, and some parents use KIT days to top up statutory payments. In terms of parents feeling able to stay in work and advance their careers, appropriate KIT arrangements directly contribute to parents feeling involved and considered in the workplace, supporting them to return, and appropriate KIT arrangements should also include sharing suitable job vacancies while an employee is on parental leave.

While we understand that the review is solely looking at parental leave entitlements, Acas helpline advisers report that our calls related to returning to work are often on the topic of flexible working. Being able to balance flexible working arrangements with childcare appears to be a key factor in parents' ability to return to work, and their ability to progress within their careers. This is especially the case for women.

Please prioritise the objectives, including any additional objectives, in order of importance (with 1 being most important).

- Providing sufficient time off work with adequate pay to support maternal health
- Supporting economic growth through labour market participation by enabling more parents to stay in work and advance in their careers, including reducing the gender pay gap
- Ensuring adequate resources and leave for parents to facilitate the best start in life by supporting the healthy development of young children
- Providing parents the flexibility to make balanced childcare choices, including co-parenting

Acas response: No response.