

Fathers and the Flexible Workplace: Benefits & Barriers

**Dr Katrina Allen, Policy Officer
Children in Scotland**

**Project: 'Making the Gender Equality
Duty real for children, young people
and fathers'**

18th November 2008

Changing Times

Families, labour markets & society changing in complex ways...

- **Technological advances** – possibilities for remote working
- **24 hour society** – increasing expectation of services on demand
- **Climate change, rising transport costs, congestion** – affect the viability of traditional modes of working
- **Family structures changing** – father figures commonly incl. biological, non-biological, resident, non-resident, foster fathers, step fathers, grandfathers
- **Gender Equality Duty** – public bodies to monitor impact of policies and practices and act to reduce inequalities

Changing Attitudes & Expectations

- Emphasis on **work-life balance and flexibility**
– questioning historic ways of working
- Evolution of **gender-defined caring and ‘breadwinner’ roles** – research shows men no longer increase their hours of work when become fathers & want more time with children
- Recognition that **children benefit from the active, positive involvement of both parents** in their lives:
 - caring role ↑ valued
 - expectation of ↑ time & commitment fathers

**Wider
social
&
cultural
context**

Individual & couple factors

Values, attitudes,
beliefs, skills &
abilities, priorities

Socio-economic factors

Education,
finances,
networks,
health, care
needs

Workplace factors

Demands,
policies &
support,
w/place culture

Types of Flexible Working

- **Flexible working includes:**
 - changes to no. of hours worked
 - changes to working times
 - working away from office
- **Options include:**
 - part-time, job sharing & term-time working
 - flexitime
 - annualised hours
 - working from home

Fathers' Access to Flexible Working

- **Right to request flexible working for parents of young (under 6) or disabled (under 18) children and carers of adults – after 26 weeks continuous service**
- **UK Gov due to extend right to request flexible working to parents with children up to 16 from April 09 – now under review**
- **Employers statutory duty to treat requests seriously – must follow correct procedure and justify refusal in writing**
- **Reasonable time off to deal with family emergencies – regardless of service length**

Demand for Family-friendly Working

- **97% of employed fathers in Scotland working full-time** compared to 45% of employed mothers (ONS Labour Force Survey 2005)
- **↑ from 11% to 31% new fathers working flexitime** across UK 2002-6 (Research by DTI)
- Recent survey of 3,500+ parents found: **83% of fathers wanted to work flexibly** – more than 2/3 had not achieved satisfactory working arrangements (Research by websites Mumsnet and Dad Info)
- Another survey found **70% of fathers want to be more involved with their children** (Research by Equal Opportunities Commission)

Benefits – Fathers & Children

- **Increased balance, feel more valued, less work/home conflict, lower stress levels**
 - work/home conflict causes substantial stress for men
 - stress increasing with growing social expectations
- **Better quality father-child relationship**
- **Fathers less marginalised from family life**
- **Children benefit emotionally, physically & mentally from involvement of both parents**
- **Positive involvement of fathers & father figures in caring linked to children's wellbeing, confidence, educational achievement, behaviour and health**

Benefits – Employers

- **Happier, motivated, less stressed workforce with lower rates absenteeism** – reduced work/home conflict, health & wellbeing benefits
- **Higher productivity** – flexibility ‘goes both ways’, partnership approach to working
- **Higher retention** – skilled & experienced staff strong incentive to stay when start families
- **Attracting diverse talent from wider pool** – tackling gender imbalance at senior levels and in male/female dominated occupations
- **Positive image for organisation** – as service provider as well as employer
- Remote working potential to **reduce carbon footprint & lower costs**

Wider Benefits

↑ **sharing of parenting contributes to:**

- ↑ **equality** in society generally
- ↑ **work opportunities for women**
- ↓ **pay gap** men & women
- ↓ **gender inequality and gender-stereotype views among new generation of children & young people**
- ↑ **engagement of men** in communities & with education, health, social services

Examples - Good practice

Andy, accountant

Mon-Thurs Andy travels from home to offices in Manchester and Leeds. His work on the train is included as part of 30 hour week. He says:

“Now we have 2 young children, having an extra day off a week means I have more energy to devote to them... I appreciate what KPMG has given me so I'm focussed and I believe I deliver more than I would if I worked 5 days a week”

KPMG's Head of Diversity said: “There's such a strong business case for flexible working in terms of retention and recruitment. Its at the heart of what it means to be a good employer”

(BBC online news 23/1/2007 extract)

Examples - Not so good

James, patrolman

James would love to work flexible hours. He says overtime working is compulsory and holidays banned until April, after the peak period. He is exhausted by the job and sees very little of his wife and 2 young children. James says asking for flexible working would be unacceptable – the company's attitude is "lump it or leave it".

"I'm up before the kids are awake and they're in bed by the time I get back. I work 3 weekends a month, so I'm lucky to see them 2 days a month... Its too much. I wasn't even able to take a day off for my daughter's birthday".

His employer said it had a formal policy of allowing employees to make a flexible work request and that it 'always complied with conditions of employment contracts and working time regulations.'

(BBC online news 23/1/2007 extract)

Barriers to Family-friendly Working

- **Employer policy and practice**
 - 20% of fathers said not allowed to work flexibly
(Research by websites Mumsnet and Dad Info)
- **Perceptions**
 - 22% of fathers worried about impacts on their career
(Research by websites Mumsnet and Dad Info)
 - men who take advantage of flexible working looked upon less favourably than women within the workplace
- **Workplace culture**
 - Attitude that people who succeed work long hours
 - Unfair on childless employees? Not if universal right
- **Workplace capacity**
 - SMEs in particular argue they lack capacity to implement BUT employment disputes and staff turnover costly in time & resources

The Gender Equality Duty

- **Equality Act 2006 introduced the GED**
 - general duty on public bodies to promote equality & stop unlawful discrimination
 - specific duties for listed Scottish public bodies include:
 - Publish gender equality scheme
 - Assess impact of policies and practices on both women and men
 - Set gender equality objectives, plan & take action to achieve
 - Report annually & review progress every 3yrs

In practice this means...

- Policies about parental leave and working terms/conditions that result in gender inequality – should be re-examined and revised in light of the GED
- Public sector bodies opportunity to lead by example – pushing forward changes in the way we work

“Far from damaging the way we work, **flexible working has made us better able to cover shift patterns.** And this isn’t all about being worthy – **lots of our benefits... are fun** – personalised babygros, keepsake boxes and portrait sessions for our ‘Botanic Inn babies’; an annual family fun day; and fathers’ Day events for Dads who work for us... **Our staff is very loyal and committed to us”**

(Head of HR Botanic Inns, in CBI 2008)

“Work patterns are extraordinarily diverse and there’s **no overdependence on rules and regulations** – that’s lazy management... We’ve learned that **flexibility must be a two-way street.** It isn’t just about us allowing our staff to work the hours they need... staff repay our flexibility with a **commitment** to help the company when it needs it.”

(Managing Director Listawood, in CBI 2008)

Positive Steps for Employers

- **Develop flexible working policy with employees**
 - consistency, shared expectations and understanding
- **Offer flexible working to all staff, not just parents/carers**
- **Be open to flexible working in all jobs, including management level**
- **Actively encourage fathers to use existing family-friendly provisions** – including managers (set example)
- **Monitor & feedback the impacts:**
 - Objective criteria (take-up, diversity, staff turnover, productivity)
 - Employee feedback
- **Publicise flexible working policy** – attractive to potential employees, increase workforce diversity, good PR

The Big Picture: 'Smarter Working'

Flexible working for fathers is part of broader changes in working culture that:

- Prioritise work-life balance & wellbeing
- Make better use of technology for out-of-office working
- Promote greater workforce diversity & equality

And finally...

- **CiS project ‘Making the GED real for children, young people and fathers’ will:**

- explore impacts of the GED in Scotland
- identify & share good practice examples

Kat Allen, Policy Officer, Children in Scotland

Email: kallen@childreninscotland

Tel: 0131 222 2440

www.childreninscotland.org.uk

**Please tell us about your experiences
& examples!**