



[www.menandboyscoalition.org.uk](http://www.menandboyscoalition.org.uk)  
[info@menandboyscoalition.org.uk](mailto:info@menandboyscoalition.org.uk)  
[07834 452357](tel:07834452357)

c/o The ManKind Initiative (charity), Belvedere Road, Flook House, Taunton, TA1 1BT

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Women and Equalities Committee: Fathers and the workplace inquiry

Submission from Men and Boys Coalition

## **Introduction**

- 1 The following submission is from the Men and Boys Coalition, a network of over 60 organisations, academics, journalists, professionals and leaders committed to highlighting and taking action on the gender-specific issues that affect men and boys. The Coalition was launched in November 2016.
2. Members of the Coalition share the aims of:
  - Highlighting and tackling issues where the needs of men and boys are unmet
  - Highlighting and tackling the circumstances where the victims of unfair discrimination are men and boys
  - Helping create positive and constructive public discussion about men, manhood and masculinity
3. There are two issues that the Coalition is concerned with that specifically focus on fatherhood:
  - The challenges faced by men as parents, particularly new fathers and separated fathers
  - The negative portrayal of men, boys and fathers

## **Summary Response**

4. The Coalition is pleased that the Select Committee is holding this inquiry and recognises that the workplace and fatherhood is an equality issue for men.
5. A number of members of the Coalition have submitted evidence to the inquiry (Working with Men, Families Need Fathers and John Adams – [www.Dadbloguk.com](http://www.Dadbloguk.com)) and alongside the Fatherhood Institute, we would urge the Committee to call them as witnesses. We also support the concerns raised by the research from Working Families and the Fairness in Families Index 2016 (Fatherhood Institute).
6. There are a number of workplace and employment barriers areas that we feel prevent fathers from playing a full fatherhood role in the upbringing of their children.
7. **Employer attitudes:** Employers (including male and female employers) still expect women to do the majority of childcare. This has the disadvantage of both 'holding' mothers back but also means father's requests for flexible working are viewed negatively. This attitude is drawn from wider society where the perception remains that children are the primary responsibility of women.
8. The research from the Working Families Report showed fathers wanting flexible working are twice as likely to be viewed by their employer as being less committed than mothers and that working flexibly will have a negative impact on their career.
9. As set out by the Families Need Fathers (Cymru) report, separated fathers can also suffer additional barriers in a workplace setting, with the lack of work flexibility and understanding preventing them and their children from have a meaningful relationship.
10. The media portrayal and narrative of back-to-work initiatives and childcare schemes can also reinforce societal and employers belief that only fathers are expected to work throughout a child's early years. This can be seen through headlines and articles such as:

*“Hundreds of thousands of stay-at-home mothers will be encouraged to go to work under Government plans to reform childcare in the UK.”*  
(Telegraph - 22 October 2014)

*“How does a qualified mom get back to work?”* (Daily Mail - 20 March 2014)

*“Why we urgently need to solve the return-to-work dilemma for mothers”*  
(Daily Telegraph - 14 November 2016)

10. **Recommendation 1: The Government and other statutory bodies create a narrative that encourages and expects employers to be father-friendly, in the same way, they are rightly expected to be mother-friendly. This approach will also help to change broader societal attitudes.**
11. **The lack of well-paid paternity leave** is a barrier with additional time spent often being taken as annual leave. There is no reason why, on the basis of parental equality and on shared parenthood, that there should be a difference between Statutory Maternity and Paternity Pay rates in the first six weeks of a child’s birth.
12. The fact that there is both a difference in the time periods and rates of entitlement already acts as a structural barrier regarding fatherhood and the workplace. In effect, it acts as a clear push factor or disincentive for working men to be involved as fathers in the every first weeks of their child’s birth.
13. This is compounded by evidence from the Fatherhood Institute, ([www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2014/fi-research-summary-paternity-leave](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2014/fi-research-summary-paternity-leave)) which clearly shows the benefit to the child, mother and father in a father having a hands-on role at the very earliest stage in a child’s life.
14. **Recommendation 2: There should be a transition to extend statutory paternity pay to the same level as statutory maternity pay for the first six weeks.**
15. **There are equality barriers** for men who are taking on the primary care responsibility including ‘stay-at-home’ dads who are subsequently denied access to job and skills (re)training because these services are for women only. This both exacerbates and reinforces societal attitudes on the role of mothers and fathers in parenthood but is also a clear area of discrimination.

16. The Coalition is concerned about the evidence submitted by John Adams ([www.Dadbloguk.com](http://www.Dadbloguk.com)) regarding:

*“I have been in contact with two [back-to-work] such schemes to ask how and why men are denied access to these courses. On both occasions the organisers informed me they were entitled to deny men places on their courses because they had identified an ‘in need’ group and this was permitted under the Equalities Act.*

*“...male carers are having the Equalities Act used against them. I would argue such schemes should be exempted from the Equalities Act so men can benefit from them and remain active in the workforce.”*

17. An example of a Government backed scheme which is only for mothers/women is in Scotland where the Scottish Government announced on 13 June 2016:

*“A [Returners] project to help bring experienced women back into the workplace after a career break is to be trialed in Scotland, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said”*

18. In addition to these barriers, there are also some employers who make clear that their focus on back-to-work schemes are aimed at women (mothers) and not men (fathers).

*“While being open to men and women, the [Return to Work] programme has a key aim of helping women who have taken a break for more than two years transition back into the workplace” (Deloitte)*

19. **Recommendation 3: Employers, companies and organisers running back-to-work job, training and (re)training schemes for returning parents and/or those with primary parental responsibility, should ensure they are available for both mothers and fathers.**