

Thank you for your email (14th March) inviting the Jersey Child Care Trust to make a submission regarding the proposals to extend current family friendly employment rights.

With regard to the first two points – ‘Extending parental leave from 26 weeks to 52 weeks (for both parents)’ and ‘The emphasis on gender balance in childcare roles’ the Trust has tried to take a balanced view - factoring in both the parents situation and that of the employer;

As we understand the proposal for Jersey is to offer up to 52 weeks leave for BOTH parents, of which the first 6 weeks will be paid in full by the employer. If we compare this to the UK’s Shared Parental Leave (where the leave is shared and more weeks are paid), whilst Jersey is offering a longer period of leave to both parents the paid element is still limited to just 6 weeks. Considering the reported uptake of the UK leave provision is just 2% we would be concerned that we would see an even lower uptake here in Jersey beyond the paid 6 week period. The reasons given for the low uptake in the UK are the cultural and financial barriers, which we think would be present here too – so will it really improve gender balance in childcare roles? Only for those families where the father can sacrifice their salary and faces no cultural barriers in taking extended periods of leave to care for their children. I don’t know how much a reality that is but moving from a place of minimum paternity leave provision to offering a full 52 weeks of leave for fathers is a massive cultural shift and will take time to bed in.

New parents will worry about the longer term impact on their careers if they take extended parental leave (relates to the cultural issue above).

Many employers on the island provide enhanced maternity pay. Changing maternity leave into parental leave and making it available to both parents creates problems for these employers, especially as the cost is passed on to the employer (unlike the UK). Many will be unwilling to make enhanced maternity pay available to both men and women in the form of parental leave pay and may have to revise their policies which could lead to a lowering of enhanced maternity/parental leave pay.

On the whole it’s a generous policy on paper but the reality for most families is that the financial barrier will be too great for them to benefit from the extended unpaid leave element. It would be fairer to see a statutory maternity/parental pay provision in place that could help extend the period of paid leave for parents beyond 6 weeks.

Communications on this will be key – it’s important that parents know what their rights are to parental leave and given the significant changes the government will need a good communication strategy to successfully implement this change.

It would be interesting to know:

- What has been the take up in the increased maternity leave provision that was introduced last year? Are more women taking longer maternity leave? If not have they explored what the barriers are?
- What does the government predict the take up % to be? What will be a measure of success?

On your third point about ‘Breastfeeding rights in terms of breaks and workplace facilities’, the Trust has contributed to (and is fully supportive) of the Breastfeeding Policy Group – (now an Operational Working Group) a multi-agency group run by the Baby Friendly Initiative Lead Health Visitor with Family Nursing and Home Care.

Please do get in touch if you need any more information.

With very kind regards

Kate

Kate Elston

Watch 'This is Harry' to see our work in action <https://vimeo.com/133257916>

Jersey Child Care Trust