



TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

SUPPORTING PARENTS IN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

Parental Leave in UK Small & Medium Enterprises

Key findings · Employee survey n = 2,103 · Employer survey n = 1,999 · ESRC-funded study

Scan to see our toolkit for practitioners

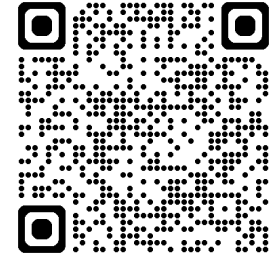


FIGURE 1

Six gaps in awareness of parental and childcare entitlements

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Average perceived vs. correct values · employee survey · n = 2,103



Source: ESRC-funded study on transitions to parenthood in UK SMEs · Employee survey · n = 2,103 · Perceived figures are averages across SME and large-firm employees

Our study measures awareness of rights asking employees how many weeks of leave parents were entitled to (total and paid at 90%), as well as entitlements to free childcare and awareness of childcare costs.

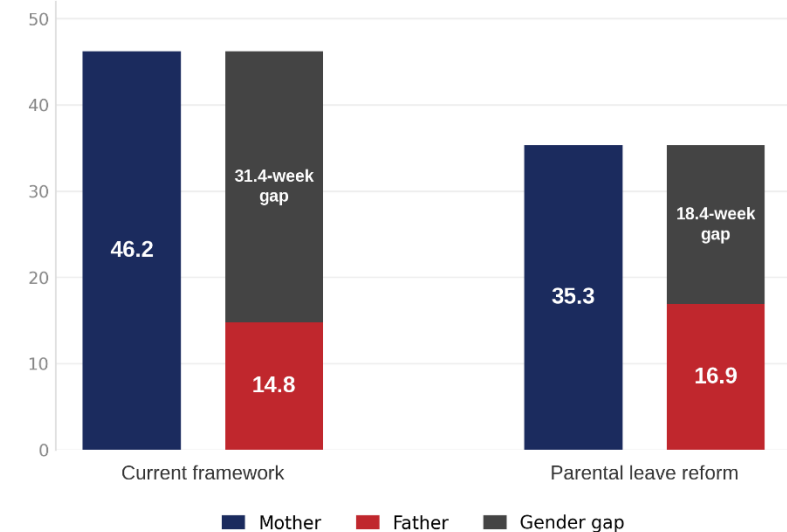
Maternity leave length is the best-understood entitlement, though still slightly underestimated. Paternity leave duration is vastly underestimated — most likely because Shared Parental Leave is not factored in by respondents. Well-paid leave is overestimated by both mothers and fathers, reflecting widespread unawareness that statutory pay drops to around £180/week after just 6 weeks.

FIGURE 2

Extended paternity leave as a step towards gender equity

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Weeks of paid leave taken · average across 4 reform scenarios, each bringing paternity leave to a minimum of 6 weeks paid at 90% of salary



Source: ESRC-funded study on transitions to parenthood in UK SMEs · Weeks at 90% of salary

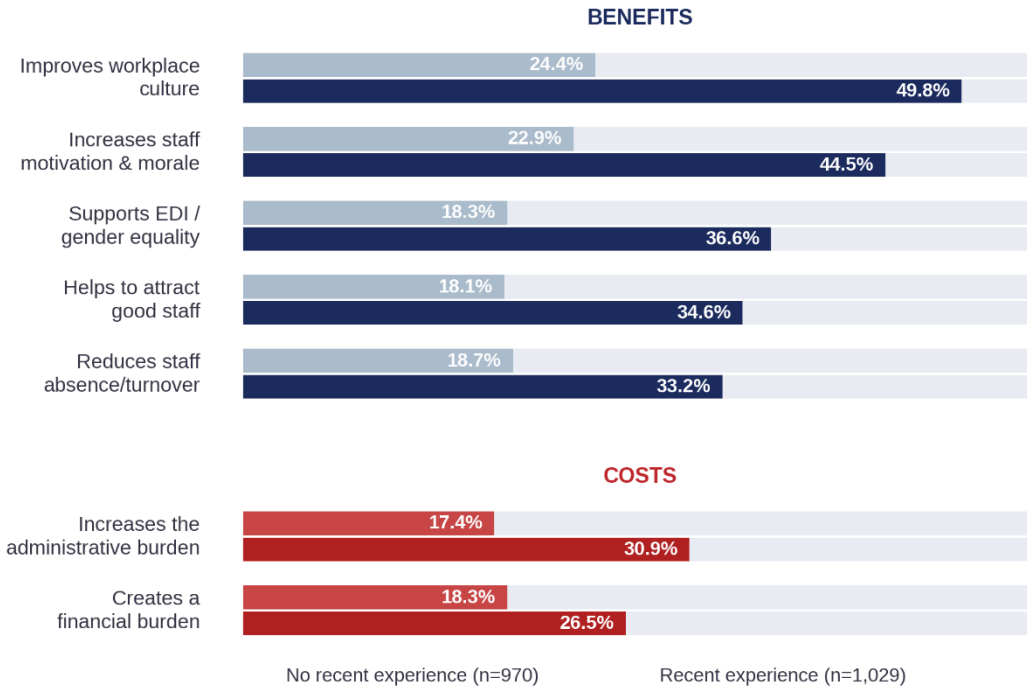
Our study evaluates the impact on employees' intentions of four reform scenarios for parental leave — each guaranteeing fathers a minimum of 6 weeks' leave paid at 90% of salary. We find that the gender gap in leave-taking could narrow by around 40%, from 31 weeks to 18 weeks, a meaningful step towards greater gender equity both at home and in the workplace.

FIGURE 3

Employer views: experience of supporting parents changes perceptions

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% agreeing · employer survey · n = 1,999



Source: ESRC employer survey · n = 1,999

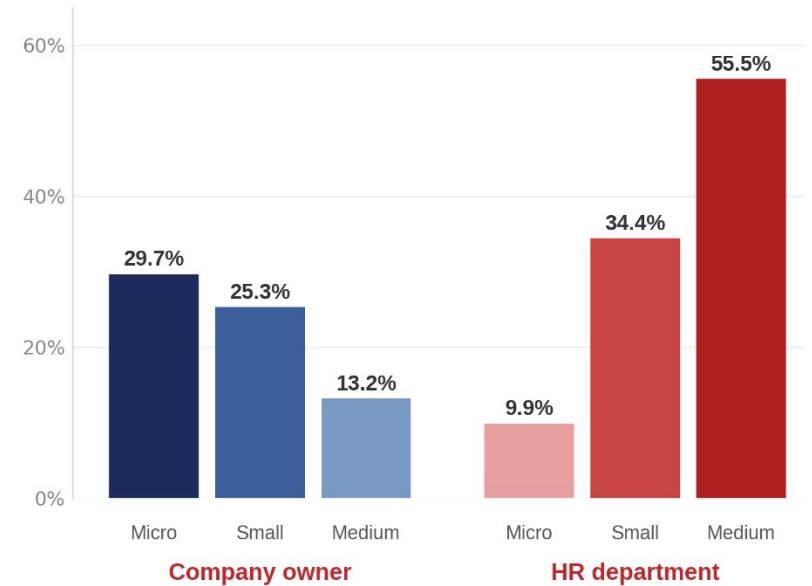
Employers with recent experience of supporting staff through parenthood are significantly more likely to recognise the benefits — including improved workplace culture, staff morale, and gender equality outcomes. They also perceive higher costs, suggesting that hands-on experience sharpens awareness of both the opportunities and the challenges involved.

FIGURE 4

Whose role is it to support staff with childcare duties?

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% of SME managers identifying each role · by firm size



Source: ESRC employer survey · SME sub-sample · n = 1,105

As firm size decreases, so does the formality of HR procedures. In micro firms, responsibility for supporting staff with childcare duties falls primarily to the company owner; in medium-sized firms it shifts to dedicated HR departments. Smaller employers may therefore need greater external guidance to navigate their obligations effectively.