Nick Clegg Announces reform allowing Dads & Mums equal parental leave rights

Wednesday 14 November, 2012

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has announced a radical reform which will allow fathers to play an increased role in raising their child at home in an aim to boost the economy and provide a more flexible return to work path.

The reform is focused at aiding mothers in getting back to work by allowing both parents equal rights to share the child minding role at home. The new system will allow parents to pick and choose how they share the crucial first year after the child is born.

Mothers still have to take the first two weeks of leave after the birth and working parents are still entitled to 52 weeks of maternity leave.

"Our current system of maternity leave is antiquated and out-of-step with the wishes of modern parents who want much greater flexibility in how they look after their children."

"Reform is long overdue and the changes we are making will shatter the perception that women have to be the primary care-givers. In the future, both mothers and fathers will be able to take control of how they balance those precious first months with their child and their careers."

"This is good news not only for parents and parents-to-be , but employers too who will benefit from a much more flexible and motivated workforce."

Parents will have much greater flexibility about how they 'mix and match' their leave. They may take the leave in turns or take it together, provided that they take no more than 52 weeks combined in total."

For example, the mother could take the first eight months, with the father taking the remaining four months; or the mother could return to work for a period in the middle of the year with the father taking care of the child at that time; or the parents could choose to both stay at home together with the child, for up to 6 months."

The new entitlement will allow both parents to keep a strong link with their workplace, helping employers to attract and retain women in their organisations and preventing women dropping out of the workforce following childbirth. The aim is that women will face less of a˜'career penalty' for taking an extensive period of time off.

Employers will benefit from being able to make the most of the entire talent pool that the increased flexibility allows.

Minister for Employment Relations, Jo Swinson, said:

"If we are to deliver sustainable, strong growth we need to get the best out of both men and women in the workforce. "

"Current arrangements are old-fashioned, inflexible and gender-biased. People should have the right to choose how they balance their work and family commitments."

"These proposals bring good news for business, not least a more motivated and productive workforce. Employers will be able to recruit and retain staff from a wider pool of talent in turn helping to diversify our economy and drive growth."

"Extending the right to request flexible working will enable all employees to discuss flexible working with their employer, and move the discussion away from why the employee needs to work flexibly, and onto how flexible working will work for the business."

All mothers will continue to have a guaranteed 52 weeks of maternity leave if they want it. They will have to take at least two weeks (or four weeks if they are manual workers) before they can return to work to make sure they have appropriate time to recover from the birth. Should they choose to take advantage of flexible leave, mothers and fathers can opt into the flexible parental leave system at any point from the initial two week recovery period after birth.

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Parents will be required to provide a self-certified notice of their leave entitlement to their employers, with the Government intending to consult fully next year on the detail of how the new system will be administered. Parents will be expected to give their employers eight weeks notice of intention to take flexible parental leave.

The Government is creating a new statutory payment for parents on flexible parental leave, with the same qualifying requirements that currently apply to statutory maternity and paternity pay. The new system will not be restricting the flexibility of flexible parental leave but will leave it to each parent and their employer to agree between themselves the pattern of leave.

Fathers are also to gain a new right to take unpaid leave to attend two antenatal appointments. Statutory paternity leave will remain at two weeks, but the Government is to keep this under review and look at extending this period once the economy is in a stronger position.

New proposals are also announced today to extend the right to request flexible working to all employees, to give greater choice and freedom to workers and businesses. This will remove the cultural expectation that flexible working only has benefits for parents and carers, allowing individuals to manage their work alongside other commitments and improving the UK labour market by providing more diverse working patterns. For example, grandparents could apply for flexible working to help care for their grandchildren.

The Government will also remove the current statutory procedure for considering requests. Instead employers will have a duty to consider all requests in a reasonable manner. Businesses will have the flexibility to refuse requests on business grounds but the new laws are expected to bring benefits to employers as well.

Evidence from the Employers Worklife Balance survey in 2007 shows flexible working creates a productive and motivated workforce, saves employers money from reduced absenteeism and lower turnover costs, and allows them to retain highly skilled staff.

The Government plan to legislate on this next year and will introduce the changes to flexible working in 2014 and to flexible parental leave in 2015.

Notes to editors:

1. The proposals are in response to the Modern Workplace consultation and meet the following two key commitments of the Coalition Government:

- "We will extend the right to request flexible working to all employees, consulting with business on how best to do so"• and
- "We will encourage shared parenting from the earliest stages of pregnancy â€“ including the promotion of a system of flexible parental leave"

2. Further information, including the consultation document can be found at http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces?cat=closedwithresponse. The consultation ran from 16 May to 8 August 2011.

3. The Government's responses to the consultation can be found here: http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces?cat=open

4. Employers Worklife Balance survey 2007 http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file42220.pdf

5. The Government's economic policy objective is to achieve 'strong, sustainable and balanced growth that is more evenly shared across the country and between industries. It set four ambitions in the 'Plan for Growth' (PDF 1.7MB), published at Budget 2011:

· To create the most competitive tax system in the G20
· To make the UK the best place in Europe to start, finance and grow a business
· To encourage investment and exports as a route to a more balanced economy
· To create a more educated workforce that is the most flexible in Europe.

Work is underway across Government to achieve these ambitions, including progress on more than 250 measures as part of the Growth Review. Developing an Industrial Strategy gives new impetus to this work by providing businesses, investors and the public with more clarity about the long-term direction in which the Government wants the economy to travel.

6. BIS's online newsroom contains the latest press notices, speeches, as well as video and images for download. It also features an up to date list of BIS press office contacts. See http://www.bis.gov.uk/newsroom for more information.

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