

FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKING – WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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The Government has recently announced changes to flexible working rights and confirmed new rights to additional paternity leave, both of which will take effect from April 2011 in the hope and expectation that it will be easier for people to balance work and family life.

The right to request flexible working presently only extends to parents of children under 17, parents of disabled children under 18 and carers of certain adults. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has announced that from April next year, the right to request flexible working will be extended to parents of all children under 18. It is estimated that this will benefit almost 300,000 more employees. There will still remain the requirement that individuals must be continuously employed by the same employer for more than 26 weeks before a request can be made. Furthermore, a consultation paper will be launched later this year on extending the right to request flexible working to all employees.

Employment Relations Minister, Edward Davey, said:

“We want to help parents and create a fairer, family friendly society...this change will give parents of all children regardless of age the same right to request flexible working. It will also make it simpler for employers and employees to identify whether they are eligible to make a request.”

Equalities Minister, Lynne Featherstone, added:

“A family friendly workplace is a business friendly workplace. Companies are missing out on the skills and talents of too many people who are forced to choose between raising a family and having a job, so we will be working with businesses to change this in a way that will make life better for employers, employees and the economy.”



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The consultation document to be launched later this year will also look at how to design a new system of flexible parental leave. As an interim measure to encourage shared parenting, the Government has confirmed that the Additional Paternity Leave Regulations 2010 will have effect for parents of children due on or after 3 April 2011.

These Regulations will allow employed fathers a right to take up to six months' extra leave, which can be taken once the child's mother has returned to work. This paternity leave will be available at any point after the child is at least 20 weeks' old and will give parents greater choice in child care responsibilities. To the extent that the leave is taken during the mother's maternity pay period, the father will receive statutory paternity pay. This is paid at the same rate as statutory maternity pay, which is presently 90% of earnings up to a maximum of £124.88 per week.