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Work Life Balance Transnational inventory: United Kingdom

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Drafted by *NLH Partnership*.

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Introduction

Work-life balance is an important policy issue for both government and business. Both the New Labour Government and the Conservative opposition, for instance, have stated their commitment to promoting work-life balance, the Conservatives framing this concern as part of their vision of 'ethical work' above the pursuit of profit. New Labour, during its 10 years in government, has implemented a number of work-life balance focused, family-friendly policies. However, few of these have been aimed directly at men and fathers.

The concept and practice of work-life balance traditionally focused on family-friendly workplaces and working practices, and enabling parents (and primarily mothers) to balance work and childcare responsibilities. However, the traditional mother-focus of family-related work-life balance policies has recently started to shift, as there has been a growing realisation of the importance of also addressing the needs of fathers and male carers. Most importantly, however, there is a growing recognition from organisations, trade unions, the government and workers themselves that work-life balance is about more than families, and is more about helping all employees to have access to working arrangements that are compatible with life outside work. As Taylor states in his publication 'The Future of Work-Life balance', calling for a broadening of the work-life balance debate:

*"The debate over work-life "balance" needs to extend beyond questions of gender, on how working mothers and fathers can cope with dependant children. This important concern must only be seen as a part of a more comprehensive public policy strategy that aims to address the work pressures and dissatisfactions experienced by both men and women in paid employment, irrespective of their household circumstances."*¹

It is well documented that, for many workers, work intensification has made life increasingly complex and rushed, and that British workers are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their work-life balance, facing heavy workloads on top of long working hours. For a growing number of workers, they are finding that life at work is taking over life outside of work. They are feeling a "time squeeze" and becoming pressured in managing their day-to-day work and life. Factors such as the rising UK elderly population - one in eight adults in Britain look after or provide some regular care to a sick or elderly person – add to the pressure on workers produced by juggling the demands of home and work and trying to fit more and more into the day.

Increasingly, people want to spend more time with their families or friends or on other activities outside work, and there is an increasing desire for greater 'time-sovereignty' through flexible working, that is, more control by workers over when and where they work, and a break with the traditional none-to-five culture. At the same time, organisations are becoming increasingly aware of the business benefits of work-life balance, with more and more published accounts of reduced absenteeism, lower staff turnover and a more productive, committed workforce resulting from positive approaches to work-life balance.

¹ Taylor, R. (2001) *The Future of Work-Life Balance*, Swindon: ESRC

While the Labour Government has introduced a wave of policies supporting flexible working and helping parents at work, there is an ingrained culture of nine-to-five presenteeism within the UK. Indeed Britain works the longest hours in Europe, and the UK is the only EU country that allows staff to opt out of the 48-hour limit set by the Working Time Directive. Yet the country still lags behind in the productivity tables. This is also possibly because work-life balance is still not seen as relevant to everyone, but rather, as an issue mainly affecting parents, and particularly mothers. It could be argued that work-life balance will only be taken seriously when it is seen as an issue benefiting everyone at work

There are however, signs of change, and a major push for increased work-life balance then, has come from workers themselves, expressing a desire to exert more control over their working lives and working hours. The UK, like many other western economies, has seen an influx of women into paid employment over the last few decades. The UK workforce is now predominantly female, and although they are concentrated in part-time work, this has meant that more families are dual income and have had to negotiate new ways of managing childcare responsibilities. This has led to men, through choice or necessity, playing an increasingly active role in the home, and in childcare and domestic responsibilities. UK research, for instance, has shown that British dads do approximately one-third of childcare. However, research has also shown that fathers often do not get the flexibility at work to help them do more childcare. In particular, fathers who work long hours during the week often find it difficult to engage in significant amounts of childcare during this time, and compensate for this by spending more time with their children at weekends.² Research consistently shows high aspirations for more involved fatherhood, especially amongst younger men, and clearly such aspirations have implications for the nature of fathers' working lives. Recent research suggests that younger men in particular, are beginning to rethink what they want in terms of work-life balance, and, as work intensifies, seek flexible working patterns or options such as self-employment, to enable them to balance work and personal or family life.

As the future workforce becomes characterised by higher numbers of female workers, dual-parent families will need to constantly re-assess the division of paid work and domestic and caring responsibilities within their households, inevitably causing employers to face ever-increasing demands from their workforces, and increasingly from fathers and male carers, for better work-life balance. Some commentators have suggested that as a new generation of fathers struggle to reconcile work and family/personal life, outdated working philosophies and cultures must change, and employers must provide 'father-friendly' workplaces if they wish to attract and retain the best male staff.

Changes in the nature of work and the workplace then, have been a key factor contributing to changing views about fathers and fathering, and the role of men in families. Although the traditional expectation and role of 'father as breadwinner' is still alive and well, there have been shifts in expectations about men's roles in society and fathers' roles in families, and there is a growing expectation that men will take more of an active role in the care and nurture of their children. These changes have led to increased pressure on fathers to play a more active role in their families and

² O'Brien, M. & Shemilt, I. (2003) *Working Fathers: Earning and Caring*, Manchester: EOC

their children's lives. Both men and women tend to see changes in the paternal role, and especially increases in fathers' involvement in childcare and domestic life, as desirable and positive. Academic research too, suggests that father involvement in children's lives, whether fathers are resident or non-resident, can have positive outcomes for children later on, in terms of factors such as educational attainment, levels of offending, and mental well-being.³ Government clearly recognise this shift in aspirations and expectations around fathers' roles in the family, and through public policy, have sought to recognise and respond to it^{4,5}.

Research however, consistently shows that achieving a better work-life balance remains a key problem area for working people in general, and that fathers often find it difficult to manage the competing demands of greater family involvement and work⁶. Policy changes have created a more supportive context for involved fathering but the relatively low rates of financial support available to men who take paternity leave, the centrality of the 'breadwinner' role to many men's sense of identity, 'maternal gate keeping' of the childcare role by mothers, workplace cultures, and family traditions can all militate against greater paternal involvement.

Although there are some examples of good practice around work-life balance, this is not yet an issue being taken up across the board by organisations in the UK or at a pace demanded by employees, particularly in relation to the needs of fathers. Organisations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) have been particularly critical of the lack of help and support for fathers in balancing work and family life, stating that not enough has been done to enable fathers' to balance work and family life, despite the fact that they have a crucial role to play in caring for their children. Indeed, work by the EOC found that 11 per cent of fathers have either left a job or been unable to take a job because of difficulties combining it with their care responsibilities⁷ (EOC, 2004c)

In summary, the UK does seem to be in a state of change with regard to work-life balance policy and practice. Although parental aspirations and expectations have changed, and the need to address the needs of fathers as well as mothers and non-parents as well as parents is increasingly appreciated by government and business, the pace of change with regard to meeting the work-life balance needs of fathers has been slow, and there have been relatively few targeted initiatives in this area. Many of the policies that aim to improve the labour-market position of women and close the gender pay gap, have the knock-on effect of helping fathers' work-life balance by enabling families to have greater choice about how they manage domestic, caring and work responsibilities and discouraging reliance on the traditional, male breadwinner role. Clearly however, more needs to be done by both employers and government to directly assist fathers in balancing work and family and personal life.

³ Buchanan, A. & Flouri, E. (2002) *Conceptualising Father Involvement: Findings from the British 1958 birth cohort*, University of Oxford, Centre for Research into Parenting and Children: ESRC Regard Website

⁴ Lewis, C. (1986) *Becoming a Father*, Milton Keynes : Open University Press

⁵ Hatter, W., Vinter, L. and Williams, R. (2002) *Dads on dads: Needs and expectations at home and at work*, London: MORI Social Research Institute.

⁶ Equal Opportunities Commission (2003) *Fathers: Balancing work and family*, London: EOC

⁷ Equal Opportunities Commission (2004)*, London: EOC

I - National policies

A review of policies introduced under the New Labour Government reveals a mixture of approaches on working time and pay, from the transposition of the European Working Time Directive, to far-reaching regulations introducing the right to paternity leave and policies on child poverty. Some can be seen to be directed at workers generally or to help parents at work, with few directed specifically at fathers.

1.1. Policies targeting fathers

Parental Rights

All policies targeting fathers sit in the context of legislation that defines their rights and responsibilities with regard to their children. Under current law, in the UK a mother always has parental responsibility for her child. A father, however, has this responsibility only if he is married to the mother or has acquired legal responsibility for his child. Living with the mother, even for a long time, does not automatically give a father parental responsibility. Parental responsibility does not always pass to the natural father if the mother dies and the parents were not married. Unmarried fathers can either achieve parental responsibility by marrying the mother of the child(ren) or applying for it through a court. The issue of parental rights for fathers was particularly highlighted in the UK in recent years through high profile actions by members of the organisation 'Fathers4Justice', that included scaling the Houses of Parliament and climbing the outside of Buckingham Palace.

The favouring of mothers over fathers in terms of parental rights, clearly reflects a traditional and stereotyped view of gender roles and of the expectation that mothers will be the primary carers for children. This is relevant in terms of work/life balance, as it is a good example of the ingrained notion that even as more dual parent families become dual income, mothers will be the main carers and fathers the main breadwinners. Such tacit assumptions and values influence the expectations that men, women, and employers have about work/caring responsibilities, and who the primary beneficiaries of work-life balance policies should be.

Paternity leave and flexible working

From April 2003 British fathers acquired a legal right to take leave from work when their child is born. Fathers are eligible for two weeks paid paternity leave (Statutory Paternity Pay), which can be taken as a single block of one or two weeks within the 56 days following the child's birth. However, Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) is paid at the rate of £108.85 per week or 90 per cent of average earnings if the man earns less than £108.85 per week. In addition, fathers also have an entitlement to access to 13 weeks of statutory unpaid parental leave for each child aged under five, or 18 weeks in the case of a child with disabilities. This provision, available since 1999, is open to mothers as well as fathers, and most parents are required to take leave in blocks of one week.

The rules governing parental and paternity leave have prompted some criticism. Some organisations have argued that the level of SPP is too low to encourage uptake by significant numbers of fathers and that this two weeks paid paternity leave,

should be paid at 90% of salary as a minimum, the same rate as early maternity leave, otherwise men may not be able to afford to take it. In addition the EOC has argued that there should be a greater degree of flexibility allowed in terms of *how* parents may take leave, so every parent can afford to take parental leave in a way that suits their particular family circumstances.

The Work and Families Act 2006 extended maternity and adoption pay from six to nine months from April 2007, towards the goal of a year's paid leave by the end of the Parliament. The Act also gave employed fathers a new right to up to 26 weeks Additional Paternity Leave some of which could be paid, if the mother returns to work. In addition, under the 2006 Act, mothers are now entitled to 52 weeks maternity leave, regardless of how long they have worked for their employer, and 39 weeks of maternity pay.

A possible new development came with the launch of a government consultation in May 2007 on new paternity leave proposals. The scheme would allow mothers to pass some of their statutory maternity leave (and pay) to fathers if they returned to work. This is likely to prove particularly popular with families where the mother earns substantially more than the father.

The government proposes allowing fathers to 'self-certify' that their child's mother is returning to work early, and that she is passing maternity entitlements over to them. The father will be required to give his employer eight weeks' notice. While the trade unions have welcomed the governments' recognition that fathers play a vital role in the first year of a child's life, they argue that fathers should be entitled to this leave in their own right, rather than mothers having to give up paid maternity leave in order for fathers to get paid paternity leave.

The Employment Act 2002 contains provisions giving parents of children under six, or of disabled children under 18, the right to apply to work flexibly and their employers have a duty to consider their requests seriously. Employees have the right to request:

- a change to the hours they work;
- a change to the times when they are required to work; or
- to work from home.

The employee has to make an application in writing, giving details of how the change in working pattern will help them care for their child, and how the changes might affect the employer and how these could be accommodated. The emphasis is on employers and employees finding a solution that suits them both, and has therefore not given an automatic right to work flexibly.

While welcomed by many NGOs, employers and trade unions as a step in the right direction, the right to request flexible working has been widely criticised for its voluntary nature. Researchers from Liverpool John Moores University concluded that its voluntary nature means that it lacks any real power to help working parents and offers little help to workers who are not sufficiently empowered or confident to

ask their employer for flexible working⁸. However, the right to request flexible working may be viewed as a fallback mechanism for employees who felt their employers were treating them unfairly. In addition, the 2003 EOC research *Flexible working: Survey of awareness*, suggests that fathers are less likely than mothers to know that they have the right to ask for flexible working.

Lobby groups such as the CIPD, EOC and the TUC have argued for the right to request flexible working to be extended to all workers, not just those with young children. A survey for the EOC found that 60% of people would support the extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees⁹. Mike Emmott, Employee Relations Adviser at the CIPD argued: "We would urge organisations to go beyond compliance with the law, and to respond positively wherever possible to employees' requests for flexible working"¹⁰.

The flexible working legislation has its roots in the Green Paper *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1999: 26) that emphasised the dual nature of parental economic and social responsibilities for children. Despite arguments that the provisions of the Act are too limited in terms of both the extent of financial support available to fathers and the conditions under which flexible working conditions may be achieved, it reflects a shift towards the increased centrality of fathers in family policy.

Fathers and the childcare and child poverty agendas

Although access to paternal leave and flexible working arrangements are clearly important policy developments with regard to fathers and their work-life balance, it should also be noted that other areas of work-life balance related family policy have targeted fathers and male carers. One such area is the childcare agenda.

A major governmental objective under New Labour has been the reduction of child poverty, achieved in a large part through an increase in parental employment. This strand of policy is closely allied to another government strategy aimed at improving the supply of affordable childcare, so enabling parents to balance work and family commitments. The government's policy began with its National Childcare Strategy (NCS) launched in 1998, which aimed to extend the range and accessibility of good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0-14, and up to age 16 for children with special needs. The Strategy was founded on a commitment to promoting the well-being of children, offering equal opportunities for parents, especially women, and to supporting parents in balancing work and family life.

The New Labour 'Sure Start' initiative has been central to achieving the Government's childcare targets. Beginning in 1999, the New Labour Government funded more than 500 Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) that operated in some of the most deprived communities throughout England. SSLPs were central to the Government's efforts to improve the life chances of children living in the country's most socially disadvantaged areas, and delivered a range of services for children and families, including childcare. Learning from SSLPs' informed the Government's

⁸ *Combining Work and Family Life: Removing the Barriers to Women's Progression*. Liverpool John Moores University

⁹ Equal Opportunities Commission (2007) *Working outside the box*

¹⁰ www.flexibility.co.uk/flexwork/general/flexible-right.htm

decision to implement a national programme of Children's Centres, with the ultimate aim of having a Children's Centre for every community in England, rather than targeting only the most needy communities as SSLPs had. Children's Centres are central to the Government's childcare targets, with the provision of childcare being a key part of their role. As with SSLPs, Children's Centre guidance explicitly states that fathers and male carers should be included in consultations about the nature of service delivery, and, although research has shown that Early Years initiatives such as Sure Start are largely mother-focused¹¹, this does again indicate that family and childcare policy is beginning to consider the needs of fathers.

The NCS has delivered a major expansion in childcare provision with substantial numbers of new places in the public, private and voluntary sectors and with a wide variety of types of childcare provider - notably, day nurseries, playgroups, out of school clubs and childminding. Following the introduction of the Childcare Bill 2005, a statutory duty now rests on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare provision for their community; and to offer access to childcare for children aged 3-14, from 8am to 6pm on each weekday throughout the year by 2010.

1.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

There are no policies which specifically target men as a whole but an array of social legislation may have a bearing on them including the Gender Equality Duty (GED), which came into force in April 2007 and is part of a broader Equalities Act (2006).

Gender Equality Duty

The GED requires public authorities to pay due regard to promoting gender equality and eliminating sex discrimination. This means service providers and public sector employers will have to design employment and services with the different needs of women and men in mind. It will require public bodies to set their own gender equality goals in consultation with their service users and employers and to take action to achieve them. Public service providers will need to look at who uses their services, and ask:

- What are the priority issues for women and men in the services we provide?
- Do they have different needs within some services?
- Will women or men be put off using a service because of lack of childcare or an unsafe or unwelcoming environment?
- Are there some services which are more effectively delivered as women-only or men-only?

Public sector employers would also need to look at their employment practices and consider the needs of all their staff, including those that identify as transgender or

¹¹ Lloyd, N., Lewis, C. & O'Brien, M. (2004) *Fathers in Sure Start Local Programmes*, NESS, September 2003

transsexual. We should see increased childcare provision and more flexible working as public bodies respond to the needs of parents and carers.

Working Time Regulations

The Working Time Regulations 1998 introduced limits on working time for many workers in a number of key areas and gave a right to paid annual leave for the first time. The regulations provide a basis for all workers. The provisions include:

- a 48 hour ceiling on the maximum average working week;
- entitlement to four weeks' annual leave and holiday pay;
- a ceiling on night workers' normal hours of an average of eight hours in every 24, and an absolute eight-hour ceiling for hazardous night work;
- minimum daily rest periods and weekly rest periods; and
- a right to rest breaks and a separate obligation on employers to provide rest breaks where work is monotonous or work rate pre-determined.

In the UK, workers may agree to opt out of the maximum working week - an arrangement which has been opposed by both trade unions and the European Parliament.

Part-time working

The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 gives protection to part-time workers, ensuring that they cannot be treated less favourably than comparable full timers in their terms and conditions. This means that part-timers are entitled to be paid pro-rata to full timers for the hours they work, have the same entitlement to annual leave, maternity and parental leave and sick leave on a pro rata basis.

Government Promotion of Work-life Balance

In March 2000, the government launched the Work-life Balance Campaign to encourage employers to introduce flexible working practices to help employees to achieve a better work-life balance. There were three main elements to the campaign:

- Establishment of Employers for Work-Life Balance, an independent alliance of leading employers committed to promoting good practice in the business community
- The Challenge Fund which ran for three years from 2000, to help employers explore how work-life balance policies can help them deliver goods and services more efficiently and flexibly. The fund provided free consultancy advice to forward looking organisations that wanted to introduce innovative working arrangements that benefit their business, employees and customers. 448 companies took up this service during the period.
- Publication of a discussion document, including a checklist of the principles of work-life balance¹² and a document setting out the business case, providing

¹² DfEE (2000) *Changing Patterns in a Changing World: A Discussion Document*, London: Department for Education and Employment

50 case studies of Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and larger businesses offering flexible work-life balance strategies¹³.

II - Local/regional policies

II.1. Policies targeting fathers

The policies referred to above with regard to paternity leave and flexible working have force in both Scotland and Wales.

II.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

A similar situation with regard to policies targeting men as a whole pertains in the UK regions as to the UK as a whole.

Wales

The Welsh Assembly is responsible for managing the Work-life Balance Initiative, launched in March 2000. Together with Chwarae Teg, the Assembly Government has promoted the business case for work-life balance and invited comments on how to best put it into practice. Chwarae Teg is an independent organisation backed by a partnership of public, private and voluntary organisations. It helps to promote work-life balance by supporting and developing childcare projects and partnerships; providing a technology-based, Wales Childcare Information Service; and promoting family friendly working practices with employers.

In addition, the Challenge Fund provides support for small businesses to undertake projects concerning work-life balance. This is complemented by the pamphlet *Work-Life Balance: A better way of working and living – a guide for employers in Wales*. In March 2004, 11 new projects in the SME and Voluntary Sector in Wales received nearly £100k in the latest round of the Work life Balance Challenge Fund.

Scotland

The Scottish Executive has supported the measures introduced at UK level to address work-life balance. It also launched the document "Take the Time" in 2003 which is a guide to work-life balance aimed specifically at Scottish employers and Human Resources teams. It provides guidance to developing and implementing a work-life strategy and includes a number of case studies, showing how organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors in Scotland have made work-life balance work for them.

In May 1998, the government published "Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland". A key part of the strategy was the establishment of Childcare Partnerships to be set up in every local authority area bringing together all those with an interest in childcare to promote its expansion in line with parental

¹³ DTI (2003) *Flexible Working: the Business Case: 50 successful stories*, Department of Trade Industry

demand. Plans for the 2003-2007 parliamentary session¹⁴ set out the following commitments:

- Provision of more flexible and more available childcare
- Nursery school provision for three and four year olds and the creation of flexible childcare provision accessible to all, expanding facilities, in the public, private and voluntary sectors and through co-operative arrangements
- Maintenance of free nursery places for every three and four year old in Scotland
- Support for breakfast clubs

III - Private sector initiatives

III.1. Policies targeting fathers

Research suggests that amongst employers, there is a high level of support for policies and practice that allow fathers to achieve a better work-life balance. However, evidence also suggests that where policies exist which would enable fathers to negotiate their working arrangements, they are often not aware of them and employers may not be taking sufficient steps to ensure they are promoted and publicised. As a result, many employees are unaware of such policies in their workplace. It is also possible that some companies actively choose not to promote their family friendly policies. As Richard Reeves points out, in many private-sector companies, little effort is made to inform fathers of their rights in relation to work-life balance related policies, such as those related to flexible working, or to attempt to gauge the level of need amongst fathers for the implementation of such policies.¹⁵

There is however, evidence that some large organisations have taken steps to increase their responsiveness to pressures from employees for greater work flexibility. CIPD identify a number of different initiatives that private sector employers are implementing, including, offering more flexible work patterns (the most common option of flexible working offered by organisations), offering extended leave and other time off arrangements (for example sabbaticals, career breaks and study leave), and financial and practical support and assistance such as crèches or subsidised childcare. In addition, an interesting database of practice listed by The Work Foundation highlights the business case developed by several private and public sector organisations, the processes and outcomes of revised working practices and policies¹⁶.

III.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

No systematic review of whether private sector organisations have taken steps to develop policies which target men has been undertaken in the UK.

¹⁴ Scottish Executive (2003) *A Partnership for a Better Scotland*.
www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/government/pfbs-00.asp

¹⁵ Reeves, R. (2004) *Dad's army: The case for father-friendly workplaces*, The Work Foundation

¹⁶ For example, <http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/pdf/BritishTelecom.pdf>

IV - NGO initiatives and proposals

IV.1. Policies targeting fathers

There are a number of lobbying and advocacy groups active in the field of paternal rights in general and issues about the balance between work and home life in particular. Some of these groups play an important role in supporting fathers, stimulating media interest in fathers and fathering as well as contributing to debate about public policy. In some cases they also develop public awareness raising campaigns and seek to project positive images of fathers and fathering.

Fathers Direct is one major campaigning organisation promoting the cause of fathers and male carers in families, and the importance of work-life balance. Fathers Direct, which is part-funded by the Government, is the national information centre on fatherhood, and lobbies for greater focus on fathers in the development of family-friendly policy. Its stated aims are:

- To give all children a strong and positive relationship with their fathers
- To support co-operative parenting
- To support both men and women as both carers and earners

The Parents and Carers Coalition was set up by the EOC in 2004. The coalition has over 50 member organisations representing parents, carers and paid care workers as well as older and disabled people and includes Age Concern, Child Poverty Action Group, the TUC, Fathers Direct and Relate. The Coalition wants to see more access to flexible working and support for carers and parents, and campaign around the following goals:

- Mothers, fathers and carers being able to choose whether or not to combine caring with paid work and get the support they need whatever choice they make
- More access to flexible working for all parents and carers in all types of job
- Reducing long hours at work, to ease the pressure on workers and increase real productivity
- Better access to good quality, affordable childcare
- Better support services for carers and for older and disabled people
- Better pay, training and prospects for childcare and other care workers
- A better framework of employment rights for parents and carers
- A pensions framework that does not penalise people for the time they spend caring

The TUC has a website entitled Changing Times, which is devoted to work-life balance and includes a case study guide on work-life balance and various resources. The TUC has recently been campaigning against Britain's long hours culture and since 2004 has organised a 'Work Your Proper Hours Day' on one day in February, urging staff to work their contractual hours only and take a full lunch break. The TUC estimates that nearly five million employees worked on average an extra day a week in unpaid overtime in 2005.

Working Families makes the case to government and employers for social policy and workplace change that will benefit families, employers and communities. Its vision is a society where everyone has real choices about how they balance their working and caring responsibilities¹⁷. It calls for:

- Family friendly working hours and leave for parents and carers
- A right to request flexible working for all employees
- Affordable, quality childcare and elder care
- An end to the UK's long hours work culture

The Work-Life Balance Centre undertakes research into work and its effect on people's lives and provides guidance to employers and employees.

In addition, the fathers' rights group Fathers4Justice rose to prominence following a number of high-profile stunts by its members to highlight the difficulties they and other men faced in terms of their rights as parents. Their campaign thrust the issue of paternal rights into the limelight, but the organisation was disbanded in 2006 following growing disquiet about the tactics used by the group to gain publicity.

IV.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

There are no systematic reviews or robust data available on the extent to which NGOs have developed policies that target men as whole.

V - Best and worst practices

Statutory Paternity pay

There have been relatively few government policies aimed predominantly at fathers, and of those that have, there is a lack of robust evaluation of their impacts on fathers' work-life balance. In particular, it is difficult to find evidence at this point in time, that specific policies have been successful in helping fathers to achieve a better work-life balance.

That said, there is debate about the relative impacts of different work-life balance related policies. For example, since April 2003 British fathers have had the legal right to take leave from work when their child is born. They are eligible for two weeks paid paternity leave (Statutory Paternity Pay), which can be taken as a single block of one or two weeks within the 56 days following the child's birth. Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) is paid at the rate of £108.85 per week or 90 per cent of average earnings if the man earns less than £108.85 per week. Although the introduction of SPP was undoubtedly welcomed by most key stakeholders, there has been criticism about the level at which SPP is set, casting doubt on the extent of uptake of SPP and thereby the effectiveness of the policy in assisting families. A father earning the average wage could lose more than £700 over the two-week period that he was claiming SPP.

A recent poll of 1000 fathers suggested that nearly two-thirds of fathers of newborn children do not take their full entitlement of paternity leave. The poll found that 58%

¹⁷ www.workingfamilies.org.uk

of dads questioned took less than one week of the two-week statutory paternity leave entitlement. For those fathers who did not take their whole entitlement, financial concerns were cited as a particularly important factor influencing their decision. Forty-eight percent stated that financial concerns were the main reason that they returned to work rather than stayed at home. Other reasons for not taking full paternity leave included lack of sympathy from employers, with 10% of fathers fearing their career would suffer if they took too much time off. In addition, 13% said that their employer was not parent-friendly and 20% said they were needed back at work urgently.¹⁸ EOC research also casts some doubt on the extent to which fathers are taking up their full allocation of SPP. Although they suggest that 70% of fathers take at least two weeks' leave around the birth of their child, they argue that many of these dads use part of their annual leave to secure the time off, rather than relying on the low rates of paternity pay.

The EOC and TUC have been particularly vocal regarding the rate of SPP, arguing that it is set too low to encourage uptake by significant numbers of fathers. It has been suggested that it should be paid at 90% of salary as a minimum, the same rate as early maternity leave, so that fathers can afford to take it.

Case study

A number of organisations can be highlighted as exhibiting good practice in family-friendly and father-friendly practice. The 'Employers for Work Life Balance' alliance, in particular, does much to disseminate good practice, and its website (www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk) gives a number of case study examples. Examples of UK good practice include:

British Telecom

British Telecom (BT) is a member of Employers for Work Life Balance. It employs more than 100,000 people around the world and more than 90,000 in the UK. Its work-life balance policies are in one portfolio called 'Achieving the Balance', which covers flexible working, home-working, part-time working, job sharing, maternity and paternity leave, adoptive leave, parental leave, special leave and leave for carers.

BT encourages flexible working and has over 9,000 home workers, nearly 500 job sharers and over 5000 part-time workers. BT allows employees to do a mix of home and office-working and work long and short days. BT has used IT and technology to support flexible working, including providing broadband for employees at home, in the office and when they are travelling. In addition, managers have been encouraged to support flexible arrangements requested by employees. BT's approach provides increased opportunities for people with disabilities, carers and those returning to work after a career break, and the company sees the business benefits of encouraging employee's work-life balance as significant, citing increased staff retention, a reduction in costs through more staff home-working. In addition, 98% of women return to work after maternity leave.

¹⁸ The Guardian (2007) *Fathers fail to make full use of paternity leave, survey finds*, August 1, 2007

BT offers parental leave benefits greater than the legal minimum, with these benefits being available to those in same-sex relationships. BT provides paternity leave paid at two weeks at full pay and two weeks' unpaid leave.

Metropolitan Police

The Metropolitan Police won the award for 2007 'Family Friendly Employer of the Year' and were judged to be overall 'Employer of the Year'. Their family-friendly employment policies include:

- A heavily subsidised emergency back-up childcare scheme, which is available to anyone called out on a crisis
- Flexible working and emergency leave for all staff
- Subsidised holiday playschemes and childcare vouchers for parents and carers
- Extended paternity leave, compressed hours and career breaks for dads

Conclusion

The policy context in the UK around fathers and work-life balance appears to be altering. The potentially important and positive role that fathers can play in their children's development as well as their economic importance is receiving attention. Moreover, generic family and employment policies are more frequently identify fathers as parents than was previously the case. However, these changes have occurred slowly, and there is still a clear 'mother focus' apparent in family-friendly policy initiatives at all levels.

There has been progress which brings the UK nearer to other European countries in terms of providing fathers with rights to paternity leave and flexible working arrangements although this has been subject to criticism from some lobbying and advocacy groups, who regard the steps taken as too limited in scope and ambition.

In general, the UK government's approach has been to encourage employers, on a voluntary basis, to extend the scope of work-life balance schemes available and raise public awareness of legal entitlements, and the benefits of work-life balance policies. Central to the Government's work-life balance agenda is that flexible working options are good for business. It is claimed that employers offering more flexibility benefit from a "happier" and more motivated workforce, experience less absenteeism and have fewer retention problems.

The major tension faced by both families and policy-makers around the issue of fathers and work-life balance revolves around the economic imperatives imposed by work and the aspiration to spend more time with families. Some organisational practices and cultures and some men's own attitudes and beliefs can also continue to provide important points of resistance to change.