

What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?

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Citation for published version (Harvard):

Forbes, S, Birkett, H & Smith, P 2020, *What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?* Government Equalities Office.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952934/What_motivates_employers_to_improve_their_Shared_Parental_Leave_and_pay_offers.pdf>

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Government
Equalities Office

What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?

**Research report prepared by Sarah Forbes, Holly
Birkett and Penny Smith**

April 2020

This research was commissioned under the previous government and before the covid-19 pandemic. As a result the content may not reflect current government policy, and the reports do not relate to forthcoming policy announcements. The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the government.

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1. Executive Summary

This report uncovers and explains factors that make organisations more likely to promote or enhance Shared Parental Leave (SPL) as a way of improving gender equality in the workplace. The report seeks to explain how and why some organisations have enhanced (above statutory level) their SPL and Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) entitlements for employees. This includes what motivated them to pursue this policy, why they chose to enhance SPL if they have done so, how they have promoted and enhanced SPL, and what the outcomes have been. Interviews were conducted pre-COVID-19 with Human Resource (HR) managers and senior line managers across 11 companies and three third-sector organisations. The research aims to create a better understanding of the motivations and approaches of these companies in order to: develop a picture of best practice in this field, understand how to encourage other companies to promote and enhance SPL and identify tools and processes which would encourage fathers to take on more caring responsibilities and utilise the opportunities offered by SPL.

The findings of this research should be considered in conjunction with the authors' previous research on barriers preventing families from using SPL (i.e., Birkett & Forbes, 2019). Existing research in this area demonstrates that attitudes to the gender divide in early child-caring have changed dramatically in the UK in recent years with parents more likely to want to share care (Curtice, Clery, Perry, Phillips, & Rahim, 2019; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016). Existing research also shows that two significant barriers exist for parents wanting to use SPL including financial barriers and a lack of knowledge/poor communication around the policy (Birkett & Forbes, 2019; also see Twamley & Schober, 2019). Offering above statutory pay (e.g., percentage of wage replacement level; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018) therefore represents one way to encourage more parents and particularly fathers to take up the SPL offer. Some best practice companies across the UK have started to enhance statutory ShPP in order to support workplace equality, promote staff wellbeing and attract and retain the best talent.

Three main groups of organisations ($n=11$) were identified through the research, each with different approaches to enhancing SPL (or not).

- Group One ($n=5$): Organisations which were either enhancing or working towards enhancing their SPL policies or were developing a policy that moves beyond SPL. These were generally large multinationals, which were competing for talented Millennials in an international marketplace, and had significant resources for HR and diversity and inclusion interventions. These companies' SPL policies had been enhanced over time by making a business case to the board, usually with strong backing from a range of senior managers. Best practice organisations in this group were enhancing SPL to the same level as Maternity leave and actively promoting SPL and equal parenting across the workforce.
- Group Two ($n=2$): Organisations which were committed to greater equality in the workplace and actively supporting fathers and same sex parents, but had significant organisational or practical barriers to enhancing SPL. These companies were not actively promoting SPL for one or more of the following reasons: they significantly enhanced Maternity Leave policies meaning that increasing SPL to match high levels of maternity pay would be very expensive; they were

concerned about female employees' reaction to a policy which might be seen as favouring men; difficulties getting the support of board members from a different generation who did not see the value of such policies; having a large number of roles, usually occupied by males, which the organisations regarded as incompatible with career breaks. Some of these organisations were however looking into enhancing Paternity Leave as a way of supporting fathers.

- Group Three ($n=4$): The final group of organisations were not proactively looking at ways of enhancing SPL or supporting parents in the workplace. These were generally Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) with few resources, concerned about the uncertainty and business risk associated with people going on leave at relatively short notice. Larger, more bureaucratic organisations with highly gendered workforces also fitted into this group. In addition, these organisations often had workplace cultures where both the business and much of sometimes the workforce were opposed to fathers taking long periods of leave.

This research also highlights the need to consider ways to address the gender imbalance in the availability and use of statutory and organisational parental leave policies for all parents. Some organisations in group one are explicitly tackling this issue by removing barriers to fathers and parents in same sex couples taking leave and enhancing pay for SPL at the same level as Maternity Leave. The current gender imbalance in parental leave policies and pay can act as a barrier to fathers and parents in same sex couples taking leave, while putting unnecessary pressure on mothers to take longer time out of the workforce than they might otherwise choose to do. The research also suggests that a lack of open discussion around caring before birth or adoption, combined with well-established gender norms around childcare, creates a climate in which fathers and parents in same sex couples may feel uncomfortable raising their wish to care with their partner, since they often view Maternity Leave as their partner's entitlement.

1.1 Considerations for Change

The research highlights the following future considerations for organisations and Government:

Change initiatives

- Where possible, particularly for larger organisations, enhance SPL offering to the same level as Maternity Leave. Where this is not possible, organisations should consider options for enhancing Paternity Leave to offer fathers more time with their children in the first year.
- Where appropriate, organisations could invest in developing staff and succession planning by covering parental leave periods with short internal secondments advertised across the organisation to support inclusive succession planning and the talent pipeline.
- Develop a reverse mentoring programme with early career employees mentoring board and Senior Management Team (SMT) members, to help improve intergenerational understanding and integrate changing cultural attitudes around gender and caring.
- Examine the UK's emphasis on policies which encourage mothers' caring by continuing the momentum towards a more gender equal approach to parental leave at Government and

organisation level. This could include removing disparities in economic incentives between SPL and other policies.

- Consider measures to increase transparency such as publishing of family-friendly policies for organisations with 250 employees or more, including parental leave and pay arrangements. Consider implementing voluntary questions within the Gender Pay Gap (GPG) reporting platform for organisations with 250 or more employees on whether or not they enhance their ShPP offering and other parental leave policies.

Communications initiatives

- Best practice organisations in each sector could produce case studies of how and why they have promoted and enhanced SPL, highlighting the benefits they have realised.
- Improve communication of SPL policies to employees, and communicate the benefits of SPL for the family, and particularly for the children using existing research. This may also require improved training for HR staff and line managers around family-friendly policies. This could be as simple as a short outline of each policy for line managers and contact details for more information.
- Organisations could use previously tested myth-busting messages around SPL to overcome perceived barriers to utilising SPL. For example, messages that clarify that both parents can use SPL simultaneously thus breaking down the myth that parent one must return to work for parent two to use SPL.
- Encourage organisations, including SMEs, to make use of available tools from government websites and third-sector organisations to better support parents in the workplace, such as CIPD, Working Families, Business in the Community and the Equal Parenting Project. Drawing upon these available resources ensures that it is easier for organisations to promote and enhance policies, especially if they do not have an HR department, for example, easy to implement practices such as parenting groups, example champions etc.
- Devise a practical toolkit to engage more men nationally and at organisational level in conversations around caring (e.g., Icelandic government's Barbershop Toolbox; United Nations, 2015).
- Organisations could consider developing a parents' and carers' group, or joining a virtual one with other organisations in order to support parents in the workplace and make them aware of the options available to them.
- Where appropriate, engage with guidance from the Government Equalities Office (GEO) to develop a voluntary action plan for inclusion in your company's GPG report and consider inserting an enhanced SPL/ShPP policy in this to show how you are supporting parents to share caring between them.
- Clearly communicate existing financial incentives for SMEs to encourage organisations to promote policies.
- SMEs could benefit from specific guidance, underpinned by research, explaining the business benefits of promoting SPL to help encourage more SMEs to support SPL and allay fears about the take-up of SPL

What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?

2. Introduction

This report uncovers and explains factors that make organisations more likely to promote or enhance Shared Parental Leave (SPL) as one potential way to improve gender equality in the workplace. The report is structured as follows. It begins with an overview of existing academic and grey literature on the role of organisations in this important policy area, and on how these organisations balance their statutory duties with their business strategies. A multiple case study approach is utilised based on 11 UK organisations and three third-sector organisations. This sample includes examples of best practice organisations that have significantly enhanced SPL, organisations that have promoted but not enhanced SPL, and organisations that have not yet enhanced it and do not intend to do so. These case studies are based on extensive documentary analysis and interviews with senior managers and HR professionals across each case study organisation. Key findings from the analysed interviews are then presented, offering a clear picture of how these organisations were experiencing and enacting SPL policies. Finally, the section on future considerations for change outlines how organisations and policy-makers could work to increase the uptake of SPL and support more equality of child caring amongst employees.

The aim of this research is to understand why and how some organisations have enhanced their Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) entitlements for employees. This includes what motivated them to push this agenda, why they chose to enhance SPL if they have done so, how they have promoted and enhanced SPL, and what the outcomes have been. The project's key research questions are therefore as follows:

1. What examples of best practice exist of improvements to SPL/ShPP offers, and what lessons can be learned from these by employers, government and other stakeholders?
2. What motivates employers to enhance their SPL and pay offers?
 - What forms do such improvements take?
 - What does an employer's journey toward an improved offer look like?
 - How is this affected by company characteristics such as size, sector and composition (e.g. women in senior positions)?
 - What are the impacts of improving SPL/ShPP offers, for example in terms of take-up?

2.1 Understanding Shared Parental Leave

SPL was introduced in 2015 across the UK by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. The policy was introduced to support parents in sharing their caring responsibilities within the first year of birth or adoption and give them choice. It was seen by the government as a key lever for achieving gender equality in the workplace (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). Such policies are also important in encouraging fathers to take on more domestic responsibilities in the home (for example, see Bünning, 2015).

2.2 Key features of the statutory Shared Parental Leave policy

The SPL policy applies to all eligible parents in the UK who have had or have adopted children since April 5th 2015. It allows mothers (or primary adopters) to cut their Maternity Leave short (after the mandatory two-week period) and share the remainder (a minimum of one week and a maximum of 50 weeks) with the other parent (if eligible). During this time, the other parent may be entitled to statutory ShPP. Statutory ShPP can be received for 37 of these 50 weeks, and is currently £151.20 per week or 90 percent of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower (accurate at date of publication). One crucial aspect of SPL is that it offers parents considerable flexibility, unlike other parental leave policies, so they can take leave and claim ShPP at the same or different times. The leave can also be taken in one go, or in up to three separate periods of at least one week. Some key eligibility criteria must be met. For example, parent one must have worked for the same employer for at least 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week before the baby is due (or before being matched with an adopted child), and fathers/ parent two must have worked for at least 26 weeks in the 66 weeks leading up to the due date and earned at least £30 per week (maternity allowance threshold) in 13 of those 66 weeks.

Extant research and HMRC data have demonstrated that, as with most new policies, a small proportion of parents are currently using the SPL policy. This is despite research demonstrating that attitudes to the gender divide in early child-caring have changed dramatically in the UK in recent years with parents more likely to want to share care (Curtice et al., 2019; Equality Human Rights Commission, 2016). Therefore, while parents increasingly want to share more of the childcaring in the first year they are currently not very likely to largely because of structural and cultural barriers parents face in using the SPL policy (Twamley & Schober, 2019) such as the financial impact and lack of information/communication about the policy (Birkett & Forbes, 2019). In the 2018/2019 financial year, 10,700 individual claims of ShPP were made (Forbes & Birkett, 2019) and this increased to 13,000 individual claims in the 2019/2020 financial year, which reflects a consistent increase year on year. It is important to remember that this only accounts for those who took the statutory paid part of SPL (and not unpaid SPL). This relatively low take-up means it is crucial to understand how organisations, their HR managers and senior management can better support and promote the policy, particularly in terms of better communication and enhancing ShPP, in order to increase the uptake of SPL and encourage the sharing of caring responsibilities.

2.3 Why was Shared Parental Leave introduced?

The introduction of SPL was motivated by a desire to remove gender inequalities faced by working parents and encourage shared parenting (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). It aimed to encourage both mothers and fathers to play a part in the care of children in the first year after birth, whilst maintaining a connection with the workplace. The policy has provided the opportunity for fathers to take time for more caring duties which is of importance given that existing research recognises that women's earning potential reduces after having children, referred to as the 'motherhood penalty' (England, Bearak, Budig, & Hodges, 2016). Research has shown that when fathers take parental leave, this helps to reduce the motherhood career penalty faced by their female partners (Andersen, 2018).

Atkinson (2017) argues that greater gender equality in childcare cannot be achieved as long as mothers continue to be regarded as the primary carers. In other words, traditional gender norms prevent policies designed to promote gender equality from being effective. Driving take-up of SPL has been regarded by the last two UK governments as a means of 'sharing the joy' between two parents and encouraging fathers' greater involvement in childcare. Former Business Minister Jo Swinson stated in 2013, when the policy was being designed, 'We want to shatter the perception that it is mainly a woman's role to stay at home and look after the child and a man's role to be at work' (Clegg & Swinson, 2013). Extant research highlights numerous benefits of breaking down traditional gendered norms around child-caring, for example, fathers' involvement in childcare can encourage stable parental relationships (Schober, 2012), alleviate the negative effects of childbirth and mitigate against the impact of 'role traditionalization', on couples' relationships and mothers' wellbeing (McClain & Brown, 2017). Sharing of leave also discourages parents from adopting a gender-traditional division of domestic labour after childbirth (Schober & Zoch, 2018), which is relevant since women's levels of unpaid work in the home relate to weakened labour-market attachment (Kühhirt, 2011; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). Improving gender equality in childcare is likely to reduce the pressure on women to always be the primary carers, which in turn will strengthen their labour market attachment.

SPL is also viewed as one lever for helping to close the GPG. GPG reporting was introduced in 2017 to address the gap between average women's and average men's pay in the UK. This requires UK firms with 250 employees or more to publish their GPG statistics. The UK continues to have a significant GPG at 17.3% (Office of National Statistics, 2019) and differences in full-time work history between men and women are a significant factor (Olsen, Gash, Sook, & Zhang, 2018).

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3. Existing research on parental leave policies

Existing research on parental leave policies and equality in child-caring tends to examine the drivers and barriers to uptake. The research suggests that traditional gender norms, government and organisation policies that reflect these norms, and inadequate remuneration often constrain how couples make decisions about childcare.

Germany, Iceland and the Scandinavian countries are often identified as leading the way in this policy area. However, even in these countries, women predominantly use the full entitlement of leave offered, with men more likely to take leave when it is non-transferable (must be used by the father and cannot be used by the mother; Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016), particularly when the non-transferable leave is well remunerated. The UK has only offered fathers' leave after birth or adoption since 2003 (Paternity Leave) and SPL since 2015, whereas other countries have pursued an approach promoting more equal child caring arrangements for much longer (e.g., since 1974 in Sweden, 1981 in Iceland and 1993 in Norway). The Nordic model of parental leave is viewed particularly positively for its extended leave and non-transferable leave provision, but Iceland is the only country in the world to offer both parents equal amounts of paid leave in the name of gender equality. At present, Iceland offers five months of leave to parent one, five months to fathers/ parent two, and two months to be used however the couple wish. This approach draws upon research in 29 countries which reveals that fathers are more likely to take parental leave in countries with fatherhood quotas (non-transferable amounts of leave) and high levels of payment (Karu & Tremblay, 2018).

3.1 Benefits of fathers' involvement

Past research has also examined the benefits to children of fathers' early involvement. In relation to child development, research has found that the quality of the father's involvement early in a child's life is associated with positive behavioural outcomes (Opondo, Redshaw, Savage-McGlynn, & Quigley, 2016). In addition, cross-national analysis using longitudinal data from four OECD countries (Australia, Denmark, the UK and the US) shows a positive and significant association between fathers' leave taking and their involvement with their children in all countries. Results for the UK also show that children with highly involved fathers achieve higher cognitive test scores (Huerta et al., 2013). Higher levels of support for paid parental leave, alongside improved support for childcare, are also shown to have positive 'outcomes for children in the areas of child poverty, child mortality, and educational attainment' (Engster & Stensöta, 2011, p.113).

3.2 Research on Shared Parental Leave in the UK

The UK has had SPL since 5th April 2015. This was preceded by Additional Paternity Leave which was available from 2011 to 4th April 2015. Both policies rely on parent one transferring time from their leave to their partner (i.e., maternal transfer), although there were some differences regarding when in the first year the leave could be transferred. Additional Paternity Leave

permitted the transfer of leave to take place only after 20 weeks (meaning the mother/parent one had to take the first 20 weeks leave), while SPL permits the transfer as early as two weeks post-birth. Research on Additional Paternity Leave has identified that the take-up appears to have been curbed by parents' gender-specific expectations (Kaufman, 2018), which persist in UK society.

There has so far been very little research on SPL in the UK (see Birkett & Forbes, 2019 for a broader discussion), particularly from an organisational perspective or in relation to its beneficiaries. Research on organisations' influence on the uptake of SPL identifies that poor communications around the policy (Birkett & Forbes, 2019; Ndzi, 2017) and financial concerns relating to taking the leave (Birkett & Forbes, 2019; Twamley & Schober, 2019) are key barriers to take-up.

Existing research also suggests that Millennials, defined as people born between the early 1980s and mid 1990s (Shrimpton & Clemence, 2017) are particularly keen on policies like SPL and Paternity Leave and are likely to look at an organisations' approach to these and other family-friendly policies before making a decision to work with an organisation (Business in the Community, 2018).

3.3 Organisational culture

Other European research has looked at the influence of organisational culture on take-up of parental leave post birth or adoption. Overall, the literature highlights that organisational culture influences the uptake of parental leave, and that the changing nature of work is influencing fathers' self-perceptions as breadwinners and promoting their fear of adverse treatment if they take a long period of leave.

Crompton, Brockmann and Lyonette (2005) find that increasing competitiveness and intensification in workplaces runs counter to government policies seeking to improve work–life balance and promote the 'dual-earner family' model. This is because men are usually in 'career jobs' and are therefore unable to increase their participation in household tasks, even if they hold liberal attitudes toward gender roles. Women, whose attitudes tend to be more liberal by comparison, are thus even more challenged to balance duties at work and at home. This perpetuates the 'modified male breadwinner' model of the 'one and a half earner' family (p.229). In Sweden, Haas and Hwang (2016) demonstrate that even when work–family balance and gender equality are a high policy priority, reducing fathers' working hours after parental leave is difficult because companies face insufficient political, social and functional pressure to comply with the reduced working hours policy for fathers (introduced in 1978). This highlights the continued influence of gendered norms such as the 'male breadwinner model' and the notion of part-time work as feminine.

Improved visibility of male co-workers using extended periods of leave, advocacy of shared parenting by employees and removal of stigma attached to taking a significant period of leave have been identified as key to improving uptake of parental leave policies. For example, Bygren and Duvander (2006) demonstrate in Sweden that factors relating to both partners' workplaces have a considerable impact on fathers' use of leave during their children's first year. More specifically, they argue that male-dominated workplaces and those where other men have not previously taken parental leave negatively influence men's decisions to take leave. Haas, Allard and Hwang (2002) emphasise men's own advocacy of shared parenting within the organisational culture as playing an important role in encouraging the uptake of this leave. Burnett et al. (2013) also find that, despite available work–family policies, fatherhood is not generally part of organisational culture in the UK, which marginalises and disadvantages fathers. Rudman and Mescher (2013) show that fathers who want to make use of available work–family policies, such as parental leave, must deal with both a poor worker and a femininity stigma, as a result of which they are often judged to be weak and lacking in agency, and are (economically) penalised for not living up to the image of the 'ideal worker'. The findings of both Burnett et al. (2013) and Rudman and Mescher (2013) are supported by Birkett and Forbes (2019) in relation to the use of SPL in the UK. These attitudes act as a barrier to fathers obtaining work–life balance and reinforce gendered expectations that they should not take on childcare duties. According to Koslowski and Kadar-Satat (2018), fathers in the UK still feel that taking longer leave may be perceived as a lack of career commitment. Therefore, workplace culture can have a negative impact on men's willingness to request leave.

Processes within the organisation may also perpetuate an organisational culture that prevents the uptake of extended parental leave. In the UK, managers and HR departments still lack knowledge of their SPL policies (Birkett & Forbes, 2019). Kaufman and Almqvist (2017) also highlight that in the UK it is assumed that female employees will take Maternity Leave (see also Birkett & Forbes, 2019). This reveals the emphasis on Maternity Leave in many UK organisations, and a lack of knowledge around SPL. Communication of the policy, development of an inclusive workplace environment for fathers, and improved knowledge of SPL are all important levers to increase its uptake but, as has been highlighted, the organisation's role in enhancing pay is key to creating change.

3.4 The role of remuneration

On average, men still earn more than women in the UK, which makes ShPP a key factor in decisions to take SPL, since taking it may not be financially feasible (Birkett & Forbes, 2019; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018; Moran & Koslowski, 2019). Families must consider the cost of reducing the breadwinner's income (Birkett & Forbes, 2019; Twamley & Schober, 2019), especially if pay is only offered to the father/ parent two at a statutory level, as is the case for most parents in the UK, rather than being enhanced by his/ their employing organisation. Offering above statutory benefits (i.e., average wage replacement level) could potentially encourage more fathers to take up the SPL offer (Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018). This could also be achieved by offering fathers individually allocated leave or by organisations enhancing ShPP.

Existing research on pay offered during parental leave often focuses on statutory pay, for which remuneration rates vary significantly across Europe, with some countries paying a flat rate and others offering a percentage of salary. Research has shown that men are more likely to take leave if it is non-transferable and is compensated at or near 100 percent of salary (Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016). O'Brien's (2009) comparative review of OECD countries also shows that fathers take most leave when the offer is longer than the statutory 14 days, is specifically targeted at fathers and is highly remunerated.

In the UK, statutory ShPP is paid either at a flat statutory rate (currently £151.20) or as a percentage of average weekly earnings (90%), whichever is lower. Crucially, this differs from Maternity Leave which, for the first six weeks, is paid as a percentage of average weekly earnings (90%) and for many families this will be significantly higher than the statutory £151.20 ShPP rate. Fathers wishing to use SPL are therefore likely to be entitled to a maximum of £151.20 statutory pay per week (accurate for 2019/2020 financial year; UK Government, 2019) while on SPL, which for many families will be significantly less than their normal take home pay, unless their employing organisation enhances their ShPP. Again, this highlights the important role that organisations can play in enhancing the ShPP offering for their employees to help drive take-up. It therefore becomes important to understand what might motivate organisations to enhance their ShPP offerings.

4. Methods and analysis

This is a qualitative study that adopts a multiple case study approach with a sample of 11 organisations and three third-sector organisations, predominantly comprising those that have enhanced their ShPP offerings or have actively promoted SPL or parenting leave policies. Some organisations that have not enhanced or actively promoted SPL are also included in order to develop a picture of how and why organisations may choose to enhance SPL, or not. Representatives from three third sector organisations working with companies on SPL and family-friendly policies are also included, providing an alternative perspective on companies' motivations for promoting or enhancing SPL. It is important to understand the organisations' journeys toward enhancing ShPP. This approach allows us to develop an understanding of the strategic and practical actions that companies may take to drive the policy's use.

A case study approach enables researchers 'to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 1981, p.59). A case study perspective permits the collection of data from multiple sources to understand a phenomenon (Scapens, 2004) and the use of multiple research paradigms to extend knowledge (Yin, 1981). Data were collected using two key methods. First, the research team collected available documentation from the participating organisations relating to their policies and procedures on SPL, along with previous policies where available, and other documentation such as press releases and communications with employees (including any offline promotions) and other stakeholders. This included statistics over time on the take-up of SPL, maternity and Paternity Leave policies, company-wide communications about SPL and the company's SPL policy. Primary data were then collected through semi-structured interviews with senior line managers, in order to understand the overall approach of the organisation and HR managers, and how the approach and policies were actually implemented. A clear picture was built of the strategy, processes and decision making around each case study organisation's SPL policy and communications.

Purposive sampling was used, and the sample case studies were identified based on the researchers' knowledge of organisations that were displaying good practice in the field and organisations facing structural and resource issues representative of similar organisations such as SMEs. Of the 11 organisations in the sample (excluding the three third-sector organisations), five can be described as 'best practice' having enhanced their SPL or parenting policies. These organisations were actively promoting SPL as part of their commitment to gender equality in the workplace and diversity and inclusion objectives. Whilst not currently enhancing SPL, out of the remaining six organisations three were focused on diversity and inclusion issues including SPL and/or other parental policies. This left a further three organisations in the sample where SPL was not currently a focus. The case studies were sourced from diverse industries, and the organisations varied in size. The sample was biased toward large professional services firms based in London, since this group was most likely to have introduced enhancements (the focus of the research) and presented the strongest examples of best practice. This industry also comprised organisations actively considering enhancing in the future.

Data collection in each case study organisation consisted of an average of three interviews: two interviews with senior HR professionals and one with senior line managers from a different part of the organisation. In smaller organisations that had less HR support, the interviews were more likely to be with senior line managers who had knowledge of the company's strategy development processes. In order to uncover an alternative perspective on issues around enhancement, three interviews were also undertaken with professionals working in the third-sector that supported organisations in enhancing their ShPP and family-friendly offers.

Table 1: Key features of organisations enhancing Shared Parental Leave or employing gender-neutral leave

Industry/pseudonym	Size (UK) employees	Multinational	Gender make-up (F=female; M=male)
InsuranceCo	10-20k	Yes	Management/Specialist: 49% M, 51% F Managers: 63% M, 37% F Senior Management: 70% M, 30% F
MediaCo	10-20k	Yes	Managers: 56% M, 44% F Senior Management: 61% M, 39% F
ConsultancyCo	10-20k	Yes	Partner: 81% M, 19% F Director: 69% M, 31% F Senior Management: 67% M, 43% F
TechnologyCo1	1-9k	Yes	Senior Management/Director: 71% M, 29% F
EducationCo	1-9k	Yes	Senior Academics: 72.5% M, 27.5% F Senior Management: 46% F, 54% M

Table 2: Key features of organisations not enhancing Shared Parental Leave

Industry/pseudonym	Size (UK) employees	Multinational	Gender make-up (F=female; M=male)
PublicSectorCo	10-20k	No	Managers: 47% M, 53% F Chief Officers: 44% M, 56% F Directors/highest grade: 57% M, 43% F
BankingCo	10-20k	No	Managers: 59% M, 41% F Senior Management: 76% M, 24% F
RetailCo	50-100k	Yes	Managers: Senior Management: 62% M, 38% F
TechnologyCo2	1-9k	Yes	Managers: 90% M, 10% F Senior Management: 79% M, 21% F
SME1	1-100	No	Managers: 42% M, 58% F Senior Management: 75% M, 25% F
SME2	1-100	No	Managers: 50% M, 50% F Senior Management: 72% M, 28% F

4.1 Interviews

Thirty-one interviews were undertaken with senior managers and HR professionals across the 11 case study organisations (see table 3). A further three were undertaken with senior managers in third-sector organisations that supported UK organisations with their diversity and inclusion policies and interventions, comprising two charities supporting families and young people, and a coaching and consulting organisation working with organisations to support families in the workplace. These in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in person where possible, or by telephone where face-to-face interviews were impractical. The interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes.

Table 3: Completed interviews

Organisation	SPL status (E=Enhance, DE=Does not enhance, NA=Not applicable)	Interviews completed
InsuranceCo	E	5
MediaCo	E	3
ConsultancyCo	E	4
TechnologyCo1	E	4
EducationCo	E	3
PublicSectorCo	DE	2
BankingCo	DE	2
TechnologyCo2	DE	3
RetailCo	DE	3
SME1	DE	1
SME2	DE	1
ThirdSector1	NA	1
ThirdSector2	NA	1
ThirdSector3	NA	1
Total		34

4.2 Analysis and reporting conventions

It should be noted that this qualitative research is based on in-depth interviews with senior managers from a small sample of employers. These findings should be treated as indicative and should be read in conjunction with the other extant research discussed in this report. It cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the wider population.

Direct quotations are provided as illustrative examples of common themes emerging from the analysis. In some cases, these have been abbreviated for the sake of brevity and comprehension, without altering the original sense of the quote.

Having collected the documentary and interview data, they were transcribed and analysed by the research team using thematic analysis with NVivo software. A code book was derived from the extant literature and extended as new themes arose inductively from the data and analysed (Weick, 2001) based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. A two-step abductive coding process was undertaken. The initial data were read through in detail by the team to identify consistent themes, and codes were agreed by a three-person team. The interviews were then re-read and systematically coded, with a focus on identifying patterns in the data.

4.3 Document analysis

Once all relevant documentation had been collected from each organisation, the data were analysed using thematic analysis, taking a similar approach to that used for the interview data already collected (Bowen, 2009).

5. Findings: Organisations enhancing Shared Parental Leave

This section outlines the key findings of the research. The analysis is divided into two key sections. The first section presents common themes for organisations that had enhanced SPL (or offer gender-neutral leave, with explanations of why they chose to take this path and discussion of the process of moving toward an enhanced offering, including initial findings regarding the effects of enhancing SPL for these companies (Group one; $n=5$). The second section describes themes identified for organisations that had not enhanced their policies, including their motivations and processes (Groups two, $n=2$; Group three, $n=4$).

5.1 How they are enacting Shared Parental Leave or an enhanced alternative

Table 4: Gender-neutral parental leave policy (Company 1)¹

Policy characteristic	Gender-neutral policy offering
Length of time before eligible to use the leave	No eligibility criteria connected with length of service or average earnings. Must be taken within the first eight weeks of the child being born or adopted and can only be used in one block.
Total duration of leave	52 weeks ²
Total amount available at 100% salary replacement	26 weeks
Total amount above statutory but less than 100% salary replacement	N/A
Total amount offered at statutory level	N/A
Antenatal appointments	Reasonable time allowed for antenatal/adoption appointments

¹ Organisations have been further anonymised in this section (Companies one to five).

² The organisation offers an enhanced company alternative to SPL that provides up to 52 weeks leave.

Table 5: Gender-neutral parental leave policy (Company 2)

Policy characteristic	Shared Parental Leave policy offering
Length of time before eligible to use the leave	Conditional on having been employed by the company for 52 weeks by the end of the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth (EWC). This form of leave includes any statutory entitlements such as Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay and ShPP. Therefore, if used as SPL, it will include the entitlements of SPL.
Total duration of leave	52 weeks
Total amount available at 100% salary replacement	26 weeks
Total amount above statutory but less than 100% salary replacement	N/A
Total amount offered at statutory level	11 weeks
Antenatal appointments	Time off to keep antenatal appointments (both parents)

Table 6: Enhanced Shared Parental Leave policy (Company 3)

Policy characteristic	Shared Parental Leave policy offering
Length of time before eligible to use the leave	Conditional on having been employed by the company for 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week before the EWC.
Total duration of leave	50 weeks
Total amount available at 100% salary replacement	16 weeks
Total amount above statutory but less than 100% salary replacement	N/A
Total amount offered at statutory level	21 weeks
Antenatal appointments	Reasonable time off for antenatal appointments

Table 7: Enhanced Shared Parental Leave policy (Company 4)

What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?

Policy characteristic	Shared Parental Leave policy offering
Length of time before eligible to use the leave	Conditional on having been employed by the company for 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week before the EWC.
Total duration of leave	50 weeks
Total amount available at 100% salary replacement	18 weeks
Total amount above statutory but less than 100% salary replacement	N/A
Total amount offered at statutory level	19 weeks
Antenatal appointments	No reference

Table 8: Enhanced Shared Parental Leave policy (Company 5)

Policy characteristic	Shared Parental Leave policy offering
Length of time before eligible to use the leave	Conditional on having been employed by the company for 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week before the EWC.
Total duration of leave	50 weeks
Total amount available at 100% salary replacement	16 weeks
Total amount above statutory but less than 100% salary replacement	N/A
Total amount offered at statutory level	21 weeks
Antenatal appointments	No reference made, but Maternity Leave policy refers to paid leave for mothers and unpaid leave for parent two for this purpose

5.1.1 Gender-neutral Parental Leave

As detailed in table three, five organisations in our sample were enhancing their SPL. Two were significantly enhancing it and removing some barriers to taking it. These decisions had been taken to respond to GPG issues, to remain competitive employers particularly in an international jobs' market, to help promote their brand, and to influence the culture of their organisations, challenging gender roles and expectations.

By reconfiguring their SPL, these organisations were able to present their parenting policies as gender-neutral, allowing all employees becoming parents to receive the markedly favourable terms and conditions detailed above. For example, company one implemented a gender-neutral leave policy offering six months' paid leave for both partners (regardless of gender) and removed the element of sharing leave between two parents. If an employee within the company offering gender-neutral leave (see table 4) chose to use SPL in particular (with the usage of blocks of leave etc.) they must meet the statutory requirements but also must recognise that the gender-neutral form of leave is only available in one block. Thus, the gender-neutral form of leave simplifies the policy arrangements. This was explained by an HR manager:

"I think one of the key things I would say around the difference, and this is not to slight the statutory SPL at all, but our [gender-neutral] leave within [the company] has absolute simplicity at the heart of it ... that is what we did. So actually, you don't have to share, you don't have to sacrifice, you don't have to think about, you know, giving requisite periods of notice within so many weeks, so it's really simple".

Cross-industry policy transfer was also identified as a driver of gender equality in the workplace. Specifically, company two adopted a form of gender-neutral leave and had been informed of it and encouraged by another organisation that was best practice in this area, and had then designed and implemented a similar, significantly enhanced SPL policy fit for purpose in its industry (see table 5). This was in response to concerns following its GPG reporting. The new policy was regarded as a key tool to effect change, as an HR manager explained:

"Whilst the enhancing of SPL doesn't give us any short-term gains in terms of the gender pay gap, we believe that it will help the root causes in terms of encouraging fathers – you know, encouraging men as well as women to go on periods of leave, to look after their children".

5.1.2 Enhancing Shared Parental Leave

Five companies had enhanced their SPL or parental leave since the introduction of SPL policy in 2015, believing that this would broaden the policy choices available to their employees and ensure that their policies compared favourably with competitors. A company enhancing SPL described how the policy tied in with other family-oriented policies across the organisation. When it had introduced the company policy, it had been careful to simplify the lengthy government

document, shaping it to suit the company's and employees' needs. As a senior manager explained:

“On the one hand, there is the... Well it's, you know, legislation: we have to comply with it. But then the other piece is how do we then turn this into something that is employee-friendly and that is in line with our general kind of culture, our general practice, in terms of benefits and in family policies, etc.?”

Maintaining and enhancing business relationships was also identified as a key motivator. One HR manager in an organisation enhancing SPL described how discussions with stakeholders had led to a decision to enhance SPL after its introduction in 2015, bringing SPL in line with the enhanced Maternity Leave it already offered:

“I think we decided ... and I was involved ... and I think... weren't sure kind of what others were going to do and whether an enhancement was going to be necessary. So I think we were talking to other employers in our sector and clients that we work with, just to try to informally get information and... the right thing to do for our people and to create the equity between this particular leave and our Maternity Leave”.

Employers that had actively sought feedback from their employees had found that their employees wanted enhancement, as well as the opportunities that SPL offers (flexibility). An HR manager in an organisation that had begun to enhance its SPL in 2019 described enhancement as a response to employee feedback:

“So initially what happened was a lot of documents were downloaded from ACAS and used, and then over time it has evolved because what we recognised, it wasn't really meeting people's needs as it was, and one of the main changes has been offering... mirroring what we offer for Maternity Leave in terms of pay, although with a few caveats around that. So yes, we do have something that's been tailored more to what the [organisation] needs”.

5.2 Motivations for enhancing Shared Parental Leave

The five organisations enhancing SPL shared common motivations for taking this course of action. These centred around three broad themes of a desire to be competitive to attract and retain international and often young talent, a leadership team passionate about equality and inclusion, and efforts to change cultures and challenge stereotypes. Aligned to this latter theme was the impact of Millennials on workplace cultures.

5.2.1 Competition: Attracting and retaining talent

Amongst organisations enhancing SPL, ensuring that employee benefits are competitive and/or match other businesses in the same sector was a key motivator. It was clear that companies were significantly guided by this, attempting to attract and retain top talent in a competitive international pool. The following quotes underline this:

“I think you know overall, sort of high level, we want to retain people, we want to keep the best talent” (HR manager, TechnologyCo1).

“I think we realise that for us to attract and retain the best talent, we actually need to look at the way we work as a business and where we can try and encourage flexible working or different working practices” (HR manager, InsuranceCo).

“I think, at the moment, given there’s so few companies that are offering enhanced SPL, it also, I think, gives us an advantage in terms of attracting that younger talent as well. I think it’s a huge sort of both attraction and retention” (HR manager, MediaCo).

Working with a number of businesses in various industries, a third-sector interviewee underlined this drive to compare favourably with competitors:

“Some of [the businesses enhancing SPL] haven’t consulted. They have just gone ahead and said, ‘well, why wouldn’t we enhance this, the same as we do already for maternity and adoption?’ So you know, there’s been a lot of thinking about it amongst these good employers that we work with, and I think a lot of interest in comparing with others in the same sector”.

ConsultancyCo described its SPL policy as specific to its business, but also market-leading for SPL as well as Maternity Leave. It was seen as important for enhancing organisations to be in line with, or preferably better than, what is available within their industry, both for the reputational benefits and to recruit and retain top talent in an increasingly competitive international labour market. As explained by an HR manager at ConsultancyCo, this was a specific consideration when developing its SPL policy:

“We have a directly comparable group [in the consultancy business field] ... and we believed at the time – and again, you know, we don’t always know these things beforehand, or for sure – but we believe that [a significant number of direct competitors] were doing what we were doing”.

In a similar vein, a senior leader at EducationCo explained that a key part of the business case for enhancing SPL was talent attraction and retention of key international talent. The company also acknowledged expectations of enhanced SPL amongst Russell Group members (universities):

“We are a competitive employer, we want to measure up well against the rest of the Russell Group, so it’s part of that package that we offer. And yes, they do want us to be seen as being good employers, but I think it’s in that ... the business case is, being a good employer gives us a competitive edge. We attract and retain better people if we are offering things that are competitive with rival universities”.

Creating opportunities to develop employees’ skills, careers and profiles was also regarded as a motivator for some organisations. For example, an HR manager at MediaCo believed that enhancing SPL had the potential to showcase the talents of diverse employees when they temporarily stepped into positions left vacant by those on leave:

“It would give opportunities to others or diverse individuals to step into those opportunities, gain experience...”.

Making SPL policies, and indeed all parental leave policies, available for public consumption had been used tactically by some enhancing organisations. For example, ConsultancyCo had ensured that its policies were publicly available to improve accessibility to its employees, but also with a view to attracting talent into the business. As they explained:

“We were really keen for prospective employees, as well as our own people, to be able to have access to all of our maternity and SPL policies, so that’s published on a website... so we absolutely have it published now, so prospective employees can see it”.

TechnologyCo1 was similarly mindful of its need to match competitors in a global marketplace, as a senior manager highlighted:

“I think all of that comes into play when we look at why do we have enhanced pay. I think... generally speaking, you know, we are a global employer. We have a lot of competitors out there”.

MediaCo similarly believed that enhancing SPL would contribute to establishing how it was seen as an employer. InsuranceCo was also mindful of its identity, seeing customer relationships as a significant motivator. It hoped that its enhanced parental leave would be of value in customer interactions, because it opened up another dimension through which to connect ‘with a customer in a way which might be of value to them’ (InsuranceCo). Attracting a broader customer base was a tangible outcome following advertising campaigns:

“When we’ve done sort of activity on social media, or ... with newspapers, people have said, ‘I’m switching my policy to [InsuranceCo]’, or ‘I’m an [InsuranceCo] customer, I’m so proud’”.

5.2.2 The leadership team approach

A motivated and passionate leadership team was also identified as a key driver of the enhancement of SPL. This went beyond using the ‘right language’: leaders needed to demonstrate commitment through their actions, acting as positive role models and encouraging others to engage with the policy. In ConsultancyCo, the SPL policy was very much tied in with the leadership stance of equality and diversity, as a senior leader explained:

“There was quite a detailed position, and the very strong feeling from leadership was that we should be valuing our parents equally, be it the father, the mother, somebody who has adopted, somebody who is doing... being a parent in a slightly different way. But we shouldn’t be making a distinction and we should be offering the same amount of paid leave to all of our parents, and that was the big message and the reason that we came up with the policy that we did”.

Leadership support was particularly notable at MediaCo and InsuranceCo, including making use of the leave themselves:

“There’s actually genuine buy-in, and honestly I’m not just saying that because I work here. Umm, I can see that the culture is very, umm, very on board with it and they... it was... especially the fact that, you know, we introduced six months” (HR manager, MediaCo).

“... from my perspective, it seems to have been really warmly embraced in [InsuranceCo]...and some of that I would say is role modelled from the top, so there were some very senior men in the organisation who were very public about taking the time” (HR manager, InsuranceCo).

5.2.3 Challenging gender stereotypes

Pursuing diversity and inclusion strategies was a motivator for enhancing SPL to advance gender equality in the workplace. An HR manager at EducationCo related the policy to this agenda:

“I think it’s a broader commitment, certainly from my point of view: a broader commitment to issues of equality and diversity, which means we should do something about the gender pay gap, we should do something about this and do something about a lot of other things”.

Challenging negative gender stereotypes was highlighted by a number of organisations as a motivator for enhancing SPL, although it was recognised that these benefits had to be bolstered by a strong business case for investing in enhancing the policy financially. EducationCo was required to make a strong business case to its executive board as part of its journey from statutory to enhanced SPL. HR professionals noted that equality and diversity justifications had been insufficient to gain approval for this change; instead, they had had to focus on the need to gain a competitive edge amongst other leading education institutions:

“We want to have staff who are happy, etc., etc.; but on this issue we are really behind, and we want to be out in front. So I guess, yes, it is about well-being, but it’s sort of phrasing it in a way that has that kind of slightly macho, ‘we are the best’ kind of language...”

This organisation had responded to specific feedback from female academic staff, which had been a key motivator for enhancing SPL in line with Maternity Leave, as an HR manager described:

“We were getting a lot of feedback, people saying, ‘well SPL is meant to be flexible, it’s meant to help me look after my child and progress my career; but essentially, to do that I’m taking a big financial hit’. So that’s actually where that change came from. This has evolved to an SPL policy that has been tailored more to what [EducationCo] needs”.

Employee well-being was also regarded as an important motivator for enhancing SPL in other organisations, thereby promoting employee engagement, and ultimately retention. As InsuranceCo explained:

“That employee well-being and that sense of they are going to be engaged, because they’ve had an opportunity, they feel valued ... and they can contribute to the success of the organisation”.

This was echoed by an HR manager at TechnologyCo1, where SPL had been enhanced in line with the Maternity Leave offer to ensure that employees were not returning to work owing to financial pressures:

“I think the last thing we would want is for people to only have very... either having a very short leave or leave that was not paid, I think, at a sustainable level, and therefore people come back sooner than they actually really want to, purely for financial reasons”.

InsuranceCo referred to its specific mission to influence the culture of the business, and indeed to influence societal attitudes more broadly, challenging the female caregiver stereotype. These sentiments were echoed by an HR manager at MediaCo, who highlighted the importance of headlining and celebrating the company's enhanced SPL offer with a view to changing the organisational culture:

"Unless you do that and make people feel like something that organisation wishes to change, it just sits there as a policy change; like the Equality Act, which sits there, but unless you make true change in the different bits, it's not going to be seen or valued as, you know, real change".

5.2.4 Millennials

All organisations engaged in this research were particularly interested in the attitudes and aspirations of Millennials. How this generation is defined is contentious. For example, an Ipsos Mori report (Shrimpton & Clemence, 2017) identify Millennials as those born from 1980 to 1995, describing two 'Millennial mega trends' – the uncertain and stagnated economic context, and the rapidly changing technological environment in which they have grown up – meaning that Millennials are making choices later in life, such as getting married, having children and leaving education. Hope (2016) adds to this describing Millennials as follows:

"...while there is no universally accepted definition, the term 'Millennial' is typically applied to those born between 1980 and 1999, the largest age group to emerge since the baby boom generation, and a group that accountancy firm Deloitte predicts will make up 75% of the global workforce by 2025. As a generation that came of age after the 2008 financial crisis and have never known a world without the internet, they have very different expectations about jobs and money".

Organisations were aware of the potential impact of this group's evolving attitudes and expectations around gender and pay, caring responsibilities and unpaid work in the home. Narratives around Millennial attitudes toward work in organisations centred on expectations of agility in the workplace, with flexible hours and personalised working conditions, including periods of leave. All organisations that were enhancing SPL, and a number of those that were not, discussed the importance of meeting the expectations of talented Millennials in an international jobs market, in order to attract and retain top talent in the future. Millennials' questioning of gender identities, roles and expectations was noted by an interviewee from the third-sector:

"I certainly see the expectation there among Millennials, and particularly people of any gender. You know, it used to be seen as rather a women's issue, to combine any kind of caring, especially parenting, with work; and it's now much more seen as sort of gender-inclusive or gender-neutral, that people will want to take time around parenting".

Notably, organisations were responding to these expectations and shaping their policies accordingly, motivated particularly by the need to attract talent into the workforce. As suggested by an HR manager at MediaCo, which had significantly enhanced its SPL, this move had been strategic for talent attraction and retention:

“It’s absolutely clear that Millennials have an expectation of all of this. Definitely an expectation about flexibility, but I think, at the moment, given there’s so few companies that are offering enhanced SPL, it also, I think, gives us an advantage in terms of attracting that younger talent as well. I think it’s a huge sort of both attraction and retention”.

An HR manager at ConsultancyCo referred to the tendency for Millennials to expect portfolio careers, with career breaks for travelling and contract work, as well as active parenting: ‘That level of agility and flexibility is just so much more a way of being.’ This sentiment was echoed in other organisations, which acknowledged the need to respond to the ‘higher expectations for companies to adapt’ (MediaCo). It was also noted at MediaCo that younger fathers – likely to be of the Millennial demographic – were more likely to request SPL, but were sometimes faced by differing attitudes from those in more senior positions:

“I think I have seen more and more new fathers, so younger men, who would like to take the leave and who see this as very much their role, I think. The issue is the senior people who manage them and who are responsible for their careers and their promotion prospects, etc., who lived in a generation when women didn’t work and stayed at home, and therefore don’t understand why the younger men want to take the time off ... that has been what the challenge is. Sometimes that might just be the new father’s perception of what the response might be”.

A similar difference in attitudes was signalled by a senior manager at TechnologyCo1. In this organisation there had been a significant number of requests for information about SPL and flexible working from a section of the organisation dominated by males in their mid-thirties. This was contrasted with employees from older generations:

“I think there is more a feeling of that ability to share that responsibility for a child specifically, whereas I think the older generation don’t necessarily think of it so automatically as an option; they are much more in the traditional kind of set-up in the way of things... We’ve had quite a few part-time requests [from this department]; again, a couple of them have had babies and used the SPL, and actually now they want to work part-time and have some time at home. So they do think slightly differently, and I think that generation is a slightly different mindset”.

The domination of older generations in senior positions had been a challenge in EducationCo, where a potential barrier had been lobbying an executive board consisting mainly of those not

currently facing the challenges of dealing with children. Generational differences in experiences and expectations was echoed at MediaCo, where they were acknowledged by a senior manager:

“So perhaps somebody that has been here for 20 years, who just comes in to work every single day and that’s just what they do, a Millennial may not have that experience and that might be quite unusual for them, so it’s about something that fits for everyone”.

While some best-practice organisations were responding to these changing attitudes, business practices and policies more broadly might not be responding in a timely manner to these changing attitudes, as an HR manager at InsuranceCo noted:

“Old gender binaries are really in a sense reinforced by public policy maybe not moving as fast as we are socially”.

5.3 How enhancing organisations promote Shared Parental Leave

The sample organisations had all developed and promoted their SPL policies in slightly different ways, defined to some extent by the needs of their business and their workforce. Nevertheless, a number of key themes emerged. These included: the role of leadership support in driving the agenda; testimonials and role-modelling; networks and support groups; and access to information such as guides and scenarios.

5.3.1 Leadership support

Leadership support was key to the acceptance and normalisation of SPL, particularly in organisations enhancing the policy, which were more likely to ‘showcase’ it. An HR manager at InsuranceCo referred to a ‘top-down as well as a bottom-up message’. Aligning SPL with a broader diversity and inclusion agenda was part of the narrative for a number of enhancing organisations. ConsultancyCo provided one example:

“I would say at the most senior level there is huge support for it, because it aligns to our inclusion agenda and that has got board-level support. So I would say at that level it was a no-brainer, and you know we’ve had a lot of interest in it around making sure that we were doing the right thing and it was being promoted, and that people could access it”.

This sentiment was echoed by an HR manager at MediaCo, who pinpointed change as starting at the top:

“So I think you will get more people at junior level who will be keen, but when we start changing the culture from the top, then it will be very encouraging for the whole business”.

5.3.2 Testimonials/role models

Testimonials from those who had taken SPL at all levels was described as powerful by a member of InsuranceCo. This was echoed by an HR manager at MediaCo, who regarded it as crucial to pushing forward with SPL:

“When we have a few success stories that we can celebrate, I think that will be the biggest driver in encouraging others”.

Acting as a role model and advocate for others formed part of the pursuit of cultural change for some organisations enhancing SPL, as InsuranceCo explained:

“In terms of other companies, we’ve had a lot of interest from other companies who have said this is really positive. [MediaCo] came out very closely behind us... various other companies came out and said ‘it’s really good, we quite like this ... how is it working?’, etc”.

5.3.3 Networks and support groups

Networks and support groups were also key to engaging stakeholders with SPL. Parent networks were a source of feedback and consultation when developing SPL from a statutory into an enhanced offering. Similarly, stakeholder engagement was valuable over time as the policy developed and evolved. An HR manager at InsuranceCo referred to dovetailing its own and trade unions’ diversity and inclusion agendas. For example:

“Equality is a major focus to the union, so when we talk to them about this, you know, this really fits in with what we’re doing with them on diversity and inclusion, on balance, on well-being. So all the facets of the strategy are enshrined in that policy, so it doesn’t seem juxtaposed or stand-alone; it seems absolutely fundamentally ingrained in the culture of the organisation, and that’s the conversation we’ve been having with them”.

An HR manager at ConsultancyCo described how engagement with clients, as well as with other organisations, was an important strand to the development of SPL, with a view to sharing good practice and understanding potential barriers to the policy’s success:

“So I think, yes, there’s broader stakeholder engagement that’s been really positive for us, and that is absolutely kind of part of our strategy, I guess”.

5.3.4 Access to information

Access to quality information was a crucial issue. Some organisations in the sample were relying solely on self-service systems, with employees taking the initiative to seek out information. Other organisations had been more active in developing more accessible scenarios. EducationCo had developed a number of detailed scenarios to cover as many eventualities as possible for those considering SPL. According to an HR manager, the aim was to normalise SPL, highlighting the possibilities and potential for those who might not have considered this option before. As an HR manager explained:

“So I think actually explaining the different ways in which it can be used, and almost like modelling different scenarios, is really useful, because otherwise people just ... I’m off or he’s off, and they don’t get that ... Not that we have done this, but I would imagine just the normalisation of it that, if we can get the case-studies of saying, ‘look, this member of staff, he went off on SPL and he came back and it was a really positive experience’, so I think it’s almost giving people permission”.

TechnologyCo had taken a similar approach to easing understanding of the policy, as an HR manager explained:

“We ended up also having some illustrations within the policy so that people could see different ways of taking leave. Yes, so do they want to take something that’s continuous? Do they want to kind of break it up and have discontinuous? Could they tag on their holiday? And if it’s the partner, you can then maybe tag on some Paternity Leave at the start or the end. So having something people can actually see visually, instead of just reading an awful lot of words, I think that was also quite important for us to get in there”.

A few organisations were actively trying to encourage take-up through campaigns. InsuranceCo had significantly invested in ongoing promotion of its policy offering, including using testimonials, as an HR manager explained:

“I think for this to land, the communication was pivotal. So when we launched this, we did a huge campaign on the launch; but what we have done is, throughout the year, we have re-awakened peoples’ awareness using these testimonials. We then got to the year anniversary, and again we did a huge internal and external piece of work to promote this. So you know, internally, people should absolutely be aware. I don’t think anybody wouldn’t be aware, I’d be really shocked, that this policy didn’t exist, but we’ve also done a lot of work externally to kind of say ‘this is what we’re doing’”.

5.4 Effects of enhancing Shared Parental Leave

Overall, organisations enhancing SPL reported low but significantly above national average levels of take-up of SPL. Enhancement was still new for all organisations, and all had a clear drive to improve take-up rates and move toward more agile, flexible ways of working. Aligned with this, they acknowledged potential business and wider societal benefits. The potential for cultural change was most keenly acknowledged by those actively moving toward gender-neutral policies, centring on challenging gender stereotypes and promoting the benefits of taking responsibility for child rearing for both parents. Other enhancing organisations referred to this, albeit with less emphasis, and were vocal about opportunities arising from more widespread take-up of SPL. Broadly, these were noted as attracting ‘fresh’ talent into the business by promoting flexible working, and developing employee talent through succession planning and ‘backfilling’.

5.4.1 Effects on take-up

Since SPL is a relatively new policy, very few organisations are systematically tracking take-up. Where tracking is undertaken, levels of interest and take-up tend to be significantly above the national average when organisations enhance. However, since this is a new policy and enhancement is even more recent the rates are still much lower than for paternity or Maternity Leave.

5.4.2 Take-up in organisations adopting a gender-neutral approach

Company one had designed and implemented a gender-neutral policy toward the end of 2017. In relation to take-up of this policy, between 600 and 700 employees used the policy in the first 17 months, nearly 50 percent of whom were women. This was influenced by the level of remuneration of up to six months with full pay for either or both partners working in the organisation. With a similar policy, Company two began to enhance SPL in early 2019. Prior to this, uptake had been low, but since the implementation a surge in interest has been reported, as an HR manager explained:

“But we were pleased to see that there was an immediate response from fathers approaching us and saying, you know, ‘my baby’s due... so I’d like to take the leave”.

5.4.3 Take-up in organisations offering enhancement with 100 percent salary replacement

In TechnologyCo1, while figures had not yet been systematically collated, take-up had been significantly above average although still low, with only 17 employees taking SPL by 2018. This was also attributed to not having prevalent and effective communication around the enhancement being available. EducationCo described how it had recently started to enhance its SPL offering, although, by its own admission there was still work to be done on improving awareness amongst employees at all levels in order to drive take-up.

ConsultancyCo reported increased interest in SPL, particularly amongst men, with many taking the full 18 weeks. Whilst take-up was reportedly low compared with maternity and Paternity Leave, there was optimism in this company about the potential impact of enhancement, as an HR manager explained:

“It also, for me, is a way of driving towards a more inclusive culture; because I can see, where people have had the opportunity to take SPL, it changes the way they feel about being a working parent ... I mean, I passionately believe that men and women have a role to play in being active parents; that’s for the benefit of society as a whole, and the benefit of the individual in terms of well-being, and certainly for the benefit of the child. So it’s win, win, win for me, this one”.

5.4.4 Take-up in organisation offering statutory pay

Amongst organisations that did not offer any enhancement of ShPP take-up was generally very low. For example, one of the non-enhancing companies employing just under 20,000 had only 10 employees take SPL within the last financial year.

5.4.5 ‘Backfilling’ and succession-planning

As well as being valued as a key tool to attract talent into organisations, enhanced SPL also presented opportunities to develop talent internally. Through ‘backfilling’, employees could ‘step up’ into roles at higher grades and/or develop skills, encouraging professional development. To this end, InsuranceCo had developed a system of short-term internal secondments, with employees moving between different departments. The aim was to retain employees and cover vacant positions during periods of leave. This was often done through internal secondments open to anyone in the organisation, as explained by an HR manager:

“You still have your same manager, your salary’s budgeted where you were, so it’s a much easier move rather than a job move. And that’s been great: people who are interested to come and work in your area, trialling it out with you, internally at letting people get the skills to try different things or experience other areas. But it’s also supported some of this parental leave”.

Incorporating periods of leave such as SPL into working practices in positive ways like this was a narrative echoed in ConsultancyCo. As a client-based business where working away from home with clients was the norm, this company had recognised how 'blocks' of shared parent leave could be managed. From an employer's perspective, parental leave was then regarded as 'just another type of project' (HR manager, ConsultancyCo). This mind-shift appeared simple but was significant, as benefits such as SPL were normalised rather than regarded as an inconvenience or career-damaging, although it was conceded that developing this flexibility would be challenged more in differently-managed organisations:

"We are continually looking at how ... more and more people are spending time out of the office, whether it's at clients, or just working from home. So there's lots of positive things that I think will make it ... it must be easier for firms like [ConsultancyCo] than for other firms where it's more of a permanent line management-type role".

5.4.6 Cultural change: Challenging gender stereotypes

MediaCo was also keen to rethink gendered patterns of working practices when enhancing SPL in order to encourage more inclusive thinking in traditionally male-dominated teams. This was a clear effort to move toward normalising SPL as an entitlement for all, so that fathers, as well as mothers, would feel comfortable asking for leave without risk of stigmatisation. As an HR manager described:

"The two men who have put themselves forward, one is from our editorial team, you know, which traditionally is probably an area where people feel that they wouldn't take time off. So to see that, for me, is an encouragement that the culture actually is quite aligned to what we're trying to achieve".

This benefit was underlined by a third-sector interviewee:

"For those employers that have done it, well, there is still a huge engagement value, as we mentioned earlier. You know, many dads are delighted and surprised that this has been possible, and there's quite a buzz around it".

InsuranceCo, which had experienced significant take-up, noted that those who were taking its enhanced form of SPL tended to return with a different perspective, having had the opportunity to 'spend time at home with their child while they're small'. This was reiterated by an HR manager at TechnologyCo1, where positive recognition of men taking leave – especially SPL or Paternity Leave – was deemed key to engendering a supportive culture for employees, thus improving employer–employee relationships:

"I think it does really impact engagement and morale and the fact that you just feel that your employer is supporting you. Rather than sort of rolling your eyes and 'oh

God, you want to take two weeks out to be with your new child: what are you doing?', you know, 'this is actually great, you're having a new baby; this is really good, you should spend time with your child'".

Challenging negative perceptions around periods of leave and the impacts on careers, particularly for men, was part of the narrative around SPL. An HR manager at InsuranceCo referred to the simplicity of its parental leave policy, alleviating the 'risk of harm' that employees might feel when considering leave. Without financial anxieties and the perceived threat of career damage, employees, and particularly fathers, 'come back really focused and energised'. An HR manager at MediaCo echoed these sentiments, envisaging the policy as a catalyst for broader cultural change, for male employees in particular:

"I'm really trying to encourage that cultural change around it, so this is where it goes beyond just the policy, but making it comfortable for men to ask for, you know... Men are usually the higher earners: how does that work, making them understand what it means for them and that actually they should look at taking the full six months?"

With both males and females experiencing periods of leave for child rearing, there would be potential to redress the imbalance of concerns around flexible working and career advancement. Rather than being a female preoccupation, fathers would begin to share these concerns, levelling the playing field in the workplace, and more broadly within society. This point was commented on by a senior manager at InsuranceCo:

"We've had women who've come back and said, 'actually, it's great', because actually the stories they are talking about, I think they have had to think about... so they feel a bit reassured that we are getting there, in terms of myth-busting some of the sort of kind of stuff they worry about, basically".

5.4.7 Approach to flexible working/family-friendly policies

Every organisation enhancing SPL offered it as part of a broad suite of family-friendly or flexible working policies, including arrangements to ease return to work following a period of leave. Along with other organisations, HR managers at ConsultancyCo were mindful of the 'challenges of supporting a multi-generational workforce', and developing 'intelligent working policies' to support flexible working practices. Following this agenda, TechnologyCo1 had over recent years developed a programme specifically to support working parents. Narratives around encouraging employee engagement, as well as around well-being and mental health, were common themes, as an HR manager exemplified:

"We work in a very flexible way; therefore, often our employees are working late in the evening anyway, so why shouldn't they take a couple of hours out in the day? As

long as they manage their diaries and all that kind of jazz, then why wouldn't we kind of support that? So I think very much for [TechnologyCo1], it's that holistic well-being around your mental well-being. We do a lot around mental health, we have mental health first aiders and all that kind of stuff, so that all-encompassing kind of caring piece".

Managing differing arrangements for flexible working could be challenging, particularly in fast-paced MediaCo. This organisation had drawn on outside support to manage this, as well as devising case studies to demonstrate how flexible working could be accommodated:

"We actually work with a third party called [name of organisation], to come in and look at how we could change the job patterns in order to enable flexible working and job sharing. And now we've got a couple of examples of that, we've used them as case-studies to communicate the flexible working, and we'll do the same thing with the SPL".

Returning to work after a period of leave was recognised as a crucial time for employees. A number of structures were in place to support employees in this respect. ConsultancyCo referred to the availability of practical support, such as advice on childcare and coaching, similar to that following Maternity Leave. EducationCo also supported returning employees by temporarily changing their contract terms to lessen their workloads. A senior leader at InsuranceCo referred to the option for a gradual return to work for employees, with five hours per week allowed for 12 weeks, supporting a potentially difficult period for parents:

"So that's the principle that we worked on, is to say, 'actually, we understand it can be a stressful time reintegrating back into the organisation; therefore, we want to try and help you with this transitioning back in'".

An HR manager at InsuranceCo underlined the importance of creating a level playing field, encouraging a change in mindset whereby forms of leave and return to work were treated equally:

"When people go off on Maternity Leave, Paternity Leave, the teams all get much more accustomed to really being thoughtful about how people return to work, what to do with people who are out, and making sure that the quality is really there. And I think shared leave doesn't give you the same feeling. If you're going to say [gender-neutral] leave, then basically it means it's equal, and you have to really go through that thought process".

Relying on line managers to support flexible working was a concern raised by some. In theory, policies around flexibility and return-to-work processes were available, yet these were mediated at management level, as described by an HR manager at EducationCo:

“I think a lot of it is very local. Like a lot of things at the university, a lot of it, I think, comes down to individual line managers and how they manage that return to work. But certainly, the policy expectation is it is a managed process – you know, conversations have happened, people are aware of the opportunity to come back and work flexibly, for example”.

A number of organisations referred to having developed Paternity Leave as part of a review of family-friendly policies. For example, an HR manager at TechnologyCo1 referred to the company’s enhancement of its Paternity Leave offer from two weeks to four, with the additional two weeks to include any form of ‘caregiving’. Whilst the initial two weeks of Paternity Leave had to be taken within the first 56 days of the birth, the additional two weeks could be taken at any time during the first year. Reference was also made to the offer of three days of grandparents’ leave at this organisation, as part of a package of policies supporting families:

“We also offer now three days for grandparent leave; so if you become a grandparent, then within the first year of that child’s birth, you can take three days off to get to know your grandchild, essentially, which is quite nice... I think [TechnologyCo1], very much the culture is, you know, we work hard when you’re here, but when you have something in your life that’s a big change, or something happens, we’re really good at supporting people. So you know, having a child is obviously a big deal, and we want to make sure that people have the right amount of time to bond with their child”.

5.5 Relationship with gender pay gap reporting

Four of the five organisations enhancing SPL made reference to this policy as a tool to help tackle their GPG and encourage more female representation at senior management level and on the board. At the two organisations who had actively adopted gender-neutral approaches, direct links were made in interviews between the policy and engendering a culture to reduce their GPG, with plans to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the enhancement. Encouraging promotion and progression was emphasised by InsuranceCo on two fronts: first, allowing women to return to and progress in their careers while their partners took on childcare responsibilities; and second, affording opportunities for women to backfill particular positions vacated by those on leave.

A key theme that emerged in relation to GPG reporting and SPL was the degree to which the policy was recognised and promoted by the organisations. This clearly had an impact on take-up. MediaCo had been working on improving its GPG, publically promoting its significantly enhanced shared parental benefits to ensure this was ‘more than a policy in the handbook’, as explained by an HR manager:

“We didn't have a fair gender pay gap last year, but we've already done work to change that in the last 12 months and we communicated that this week, and also we have a five-year plan to actually reduce that by 2023. So I think this year it was definitely ... there was a lot less noise around it this year, compared to last year... I do think that it's showing us, as an employer, where our commitments are, what we believe in and just trying to shift that culture”.

Other organisations also saw the policy as an important tool for tackling their GPG, but were more inclined to situate this within a suite of measures and initiatives to this end. In the interviews and their GPG reports, these companies referred to specific changes they had made to promote policies and encourage take-up. At ConsultancyCo, for example, attention was drawn to the availability of its parental leave and pay policies online, attempting to remove discomfort from potential employees considering joining the company and, in the longer term 'creating more equity around parenting roles'. TechnologyCo1, which was enhancing its SPL, referred to a recent change of language, avoiding the terms 'Parental' and 'Maternity Leave' and substituting them for 'caregiver'. It also pointed to the removal of length of service as a condition for taking advantage of enhanced pay during periods of leave.

One HR Manager at TechnologyCo1 was doubtful that policy change was enough to tackle the GPG:

“I don't think any policy is going to, you know, fix... because there is only so much you can do as an employer. It is a societal issue and there is only so much you can do”.

A senior manager at EducationCo was also wary of over-estimating the extent to which SPL alone could impact on the GPG, underlining the complexities of these issues:

“I think [SPL is] going to be a small part of this. I don't think it's going to be... on its own it's not going to turn the dial massively, but it's part of symbolic support ... so yes, I think it will contribute to that. And I'm not trying to say the gender pay gap isn't important, because it certainly is, but I just think you have to look at these things, not just around gender, but other kinds of inequalities”.

Interviewees from InsuranceCo also understood the complexities of solving issues around the GPG. For example, according to a senior leader:

“This is not an easy one to crack because you're working at a number of different levers, so equal parenting could be one bit of it, making sure that we're fast tracking women up through the organisation is another bit of it, making sure we have really balanced recruitment at all levels and short lists at all levels, but particularly as we go up through the organisation, so that we stand a better chance of getting senior

women appointed. So there's any number of levers to use – as many as you can, basically, to try and level up that playing field”.

5.6 Issues faced by enhancing organisations

Key issues emerging for organisations enhancing SPL focused on two broad areas: the practicalities of understanding and communicating the policy (including within HR and the wider employee population), and the more complex and nuanced challenge of tackling gender bias and stereotyping.

5.6.1 Understanding and communicating Shared Parental Leave

Lack of understanding around the specifics of SPL was pinpointed as a key reason for low take-up. An HR manager described how confusion had led to employees missing out on entitlements:

“One of my colleagues, she did some research into this topic with [ConsultancyCo] and... who either who had used SPL or who had taken Paternity Leave and not taken SPL, and that really demonstrated a lack of understanding, with new fathers saying, ‘well, I would have taken more time off if it could have been paid’, and her saying to them, ‘but you... it would have been paid’. So people didn’t know that they could have had paid leave”.

TechnologyCo1 referred to the off-putting complexity of SPL in this respect, with employees struggling to plan ahead. It pointed to how the legislation had been presented as problematic. The following quotes from senior managers at TechnologyCo1 illustrate these issues and the perceived impact they had on take-up.

“I don’t know how easy it is for people to understand it, and I think that’s probably one of the reasons, you know, why the take-up has been fairly low... It’s really difficult... to work out how do I maximise the length of leave, as well as maximising my pay and my partner’s pay”.

“It’s just very complicated, and there are forms that need to be filled out and the planning done... even in the simplified explanation, it’s still rather complicated for employees to understand”.

At EducationCo, an HR manager underlined the challenges of ensuring that employees were fully aware of the technicalities of SPL, including the financial implications:

“I think people make assumptions about, well yes, the dad can take SPL, but that means the mum has got to go back to work and they don’t get the uptake; whereas

we have tried to explain it as thoroughly as we can, although with the slight downside of, you know, you're not going to get your [number of] weeks at full pay necessarily".

A number of organisations also referred to the difficulties of day-to-day management of SPL. In some cases this was most notable at middle-management level, as an HR manager at ConsultancyCo explained:

"Where we struggle – and this is again probably quite typical – is in the middle-management layer, so the people who are actually managing others on a day-to-day basis, and trying to balance resources; that's where some of the challenges have come".

Furthermore, understanding amongst HR professionals also presented challenges, as was underlined by one interviewee:

"I know that my HR advisor colleagues find it quite complicated. I do often have to answer a lot of queries coming from them".

Gender stereotypes situating females as the main caregivers were a key issue for organisations. Tackling these was deemed important to encourage take-up, and the policy itself was regarded as a tool to dismantle gender biases. Levelling the playing field between the sexes and improving understanding were seen as tangible benefits of parental leave by an HR manager at InsuranceCo:

"Just the fact that people are more aware of what women have experienced, they come with greater insight ...they are coming back into work thinking, umm, just being more aware. I think that's a tangible benefit, and hopefully that will come through in time to change the culture".

An HR manager at InsuranceCo also emphasised the persistence of accepted gender roles:

"Fundamentally there are ingrained gender biases and gender stereotypes that really do still pervade, even in 2019. And actually, I think it just goes a long way to show that, you know, in terms of that diversity, inclusion and balance, there's still a way to go".

This was underlined by ConsultancyCo, where an HR manager recognised that take-up of SPL disrupted traditional ideas about male and female roles and childcare responsibilities:

"If a man tries to take the leave, and so you've got the wider community response to it: 'well obviously he's a bit of a slacker, he's not...' You know, 'he chose to stay at home and let his poor wife go to work'. You know, that's that kind of real stereotypical response, isn't it?"

Related to gender stereotypes and accepted gender roles were concerns that taking leave would impact on careers. This was likely to be more of an issue for male employees – the traditional breadwinners – than for females. With this in mind, organisations were keen to shape their promotional activities accordingly:

“I think it’s targeting men as much as women in comms, and reassuring them that it’s not going to have this big impact on their career if they take time out... And genuinely then, as an organisation, that we will support people and we don’t penalise people for spending time out looking after their kids” (HR manager, EducationCo).

A senior manager at EducationCo also referred to the need to challenge the assumed impact of parenthood on career:

“I very much believe that actually one of the ways of removing the stigma of women going on leave, and that sort of slight sense of, once you’ve had a baby, you’re not so serious about your career, is if men go on leave as well. I think that would help break down those barriers, so I think... I don’t think we’re there yet, but I would imagine that would really help normalise and have benefits for women taking Maternity Leave as well”.

Reflecting similar sentiments around expectations of males and females and caring roles, a number of organisations referred to the notion of sacrifice impeding take-up of SPL. This related to the sharing of leave between two parents. There were concerns (also reflected in Birkett & Forbes, 2019) that parent two (typically fathers) would feel uncomfortable that they were taking time from parent one (typically mothers). This was exacerbated by financial discrepancies between SPL and Maternity Leave pay. A legal expert at ConsultancyCo described how this could be construed as discriminatory:

“There was quite a big debate at the time. Obviously the law allows you to offer different levels of paid leave for Maternity Leave than it does for SPL, so it would have been entirely possible for it not to offer the same Maternity Leave, although European case law is moving on that, and I expect at some point in the future it will be deemed to be indirectly discriminatory on the basis of sex to not offer the same”.

In May 2019, the Court of Appeal dismissed appeals in the sex discrimination cases of *Ali v Capita Customer Management* and *The Chief Constable of Leicestershire Police v Anthony Hextall*, ruling that a male taking SPL is not comparable to female employees taking Maternity Leave, as new mothers need recovery time following pregnancy and childbirth. It was therefore deemed not discriminatory for employers to enhance maternity pay but not ShPP. However, although these cases were dismissed in the Court of Appeal, the fact that they were brought to court at all demonstrates how issues relating to parental leave, gender and discrimination are part of the narrative and are likely to persist.

5.7 Key learning points

Key learning points from analysis of the interview data can be summarised under the broad headings of effective and on-going communication of SPL, active support for SPL by the leadership team, and enhancing SPL.

5.7.1 Effective and on-going communication of SPL

It is vital to communicate and clearly define the purposes, aims and benefits of SPL to senior leaders as well as employees across the organisation. When developing its business case for the executive board, EducationCo had modelled multiple scenarios for uses of SPL, focusing on the benefits to the organisation, including the need to match competitors' practices and enhance diversity and inclusion. Allaying concerns around costs was a challenge, but presenting a strong business case focusing on the more hard-nosed benefits was key to the board deciding to enhance SPL. As an HR manager explained:

"There is a sense that you're going to make a really strong argument, you are going to argue your case; and simply saying, you know, 'we should do this because it's the right thing to do' isn't... it's intellectually that's not acceptable to say that. It's like you have to make the business case for it".

EducationCo was aware that there was scope to further promote SPL, citing working examples, modelling different scenarios and case studies as potentially effective alternatives; although with take-up still developing, this was a challenge, as explained by an HR manager:

"I think what I would like to do, going forward, that we haven't done yet in terms of developing it further, is actually getting some good case-studies together. I think, you know, the unicorn would be if we had a senior academic man who took, you know, two months of SPL, and I guess that's the next stage in terms of trying to develop it".

ConsultancyCo was mindful of the need to ensure broad understanding of the policy and support employees through the SPL process, as this would impact on its likely success:

"So it's not just about having a really great brand spanking new policy, you know. You've really got to think about how you implement it, and that's why, you know, there's been a lot of work done to sort of help promote the policy, make sure that colleagues understand the policy to provide that supportive framework through the Empowering Parents Programme as well. Because it's actually the implementation of it that I think is really where you kind of can succeed or not succeed".

5.7.2 Active support for Shared Parental Leave by the leadership team

Leadership and role modelling are important in encouraging take-up, helping to engender cultural change across organisations and allow SPL to become acceptable. As an HR manager at ConsultancyCo explained:

“There has to be sort of leadership around this. So you know, you can have the policy, but if culturally people don’t feel that they can take up the policy, then you’ve got a real issue. So here comes, for me, leadership and culture, ultimately”.

MediaCo highlighted its commitment to parental policies at an event led by senior leadership. This was symbolically significant in terms of underlining the need to draw attention to these benefits for employees:

“So we’d already committed to sort of communicating anything we were doing around it, but also ... we made sure that we didn’t just sort of change the policy and the handbook and be done with it. You know, we had a big ‘town hall’ at the [London] theatre, and I stood up on stage and I announced it. And I have to say, when I announced it, I got a huge round of applause, which is unusual when an executive is just standing there giving a boring speech, but there was a spontaneous huge round of applause”.

The importance of leadership statements of support such as this was underlined by a senior manager at ConsultancyCo:

“Well, I think, as with all of these things, it can never... it never works bottom-up. It has to be seen to be something that the leadership of the firm are 100 percent behind”.

In this respect, EducationCo underlined the importance of cascading good practice particularly across the middle management teams generally charged with gatekeeping policy information. One HR manager at EducationCo observed:

“And I think it is that sense that when it comes to E&D issues, that [EducationCo] talks the talk – you know, it says the right stuff, we’ve got all the policies – but we don’t walk the walk. And it is that disconnect between policies and what managers actually do”.

5.7.3 Enhancing Shared Parental Leave

Particularly for those significantly enhancing SPL or moving to a fully gender-neutral policy, but also for those enhancing in any way, a key learning point was the need to tackle the perceived notion of sacrifice associated with SPL, as it required parent one (invariably the mother) to share the leave. Company one and Company two removed this barrier by offering six months' leave with full pay to both parents. Closely aligned with this was the removal of financial barriers, as Company two explained:

"I think that's been one of the big things, right, because it ... yes, it encourages people and, you know, financial stability is a big challenge, so that... yes, one of the big benefits".

Organisations were using agile and flexible working practices to attract employees, particularly from the Millennial demographic, whose attitudes are likely to shape workplaces going forward. As an HR manager at Company three asserted, changes in working practices could be a longer-term tool for tackling the GPG, but it was still challenging to change traditional attitudes toward gendered caring roles:

"As we move towards a more flexible work force, people's expectations of what they want from a work-life balance, if we want to start addressing the gender pay gap, then more men are going to have to start looking after their children ... It's just going to take some time, and also I think I'd make the comment that I don't see this reluctance to change in mindset to be something that I only see from men".

6. Findings: Organisations not enhancing Shared Parental Leave

The organisations in the sample who were not enhancing ($n=6$) fell into two groups. Firstly, a group ($n=2$) where organisations committed to greater equality in the workplace and were supporting fathers and same sex parents, but had significant organisational or practical barriers to enhancing SPL. These companies were not actively promoting SPL for one or more of the following reasons: they significantly enhanced Maternity Leave policies meaning that increasing SPL to match high levels of maternity pay would be very expensive; they were concerned about female employees' reaction to a policy, which might be seen as favouring men; difficulties getting the support of board members from a different generation who did not see the value of such policies; having a large number of roles, usually occupied by males that the organisations regarded as incompatible with career breaks. Some of these organisations were however looking into enhancing Paternity Leave as a way of supporting fathers. The other group ($n=4$) of non-enhancing were not actively enhancing SPL and did not intend to actively promote these policies in the near future. These were generally Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) with few resources, concerned about the uncertainty and business risk associated with people going on leave at relatively short notice. This group also included large bureaucracies with heavily gendered workforces.

6.1 How are non-enhancing organisations enacting statutory Shared Parental Leave?

Organisations that were not enhancing SPL were complying with statutory requirements for the policy and providing the statutory 37 weeks' pay. SPL was not a focus for HR departments in these organisations, nor a priority amongst their senior leaders. An HR Manager at RetailCo admitted that 'most senior managers won't have heard of it', while a PublicSectorCo HR employee and recipient of SPL asserted, '*I genuinely don't think there's an approach*'. Overall, take-up had been very low across these organisations. For example, RetailCo reported a small number of applications for SPL since its introduction in 2015, and there was just one case in PublicSectorCo.

There was also a notable contrast between enhancing and non-enhancing organisations in promoting their SPL offers. As discussed earlier, organisations offering extensive benefits publicised these widely. Other organisations offering smaller enhancements demonstrated a broad awareness of their SPL and its potential benefits, but did not actively promote it to staff. In non-enhancing organisations there was less awareness and positive promotion of SPL. An HR employee of PublicSectorCo, who had been a recipient of SPL, described the difficulty of locating information as a key factor:

"So you're kind of dazzled by options because, fair enough, they want to get into what you're entitled to, but it gets confusing then and it's not as though ... I mean, I may be proved wrong, but I don't think there's a page almost, or anything, where it's like parental leave..."

For this interviewee, prior knowledge of the policy had driven his SPL uptake, prompting him to seek advice from his employer. This reactive rather than proactive approach was a notable feature of non-enhancing organisations. At RetailCo, access to policies through the employee intranet was mediated by line managers. With much of the workforce operating in frontline retail environments, this exacerbated the lack of information flow, and consequently take-up, as an HR manager explained:

"I think it would be fair to say, so that the way that our internal internet is set up means that not all of our colleagues can access all of our policies, unfortunately. So in our support office in [UK city], all colleagues can access the policies. In our stores environment, our colleagues have to ask to use the manager's computer to be able to access policies. So I guess what I'm trying to say there is, not everybody will necessarily (a) be aware that we have an SPL policy or, (b) be able to access it".

Many organisations not enhancing SPL were generally self-critical about their approach, expressing their intention to focus on the policy in the future. For example, TechnologyCo2 referred to the possibility of enhancing it in future:

"As part of our overall diversity and inclusion strategy, it is something that we're looking at. I wouldn't say it is shared as much as it should be, but it is part of our

plan going forward, and even to look at the policy itself is part of our plan as well, in terms of should it be different to the statutory requirements?”

This was predicated on a need for broader attitudinal and behavioural changes to bring the policy to life:

“Because a policy is just a policy. It has behaviours behind it, and we have still got a way to go on that. For all of us this is a journey, and this is one of our areas that we’re not yet far enough ahead on probably”.

BankingCo recognised the virtues of SPL as a tool in itself for changing behaviours within the organisation, with periods of leave creating opportunities for employee progression:

“And I actually think that has allowed the people in my team who want to step up, to actually step up ... And I’m pushing them to go for, you know, the next level, and that has created a platform”.

A willingness to review current SPL arrangements was a common theme amongst non-enhancing organisations. However, one organisation, SME1, was explicit about having no intention of showcasing this policy:

“We’ve never thought about actively promoting it. Frankly it’s not in our interest... for the good of the company, we’d rather people didn’t take SPL. If they want it, they ask for it, we’ll work around with it, but we’re not going to actively ...promote it, no”.

6.2 Motivations for not enhancing

Non-enhancing organisations offered a number of reasons for maintaining a statutory SPL offer. Affordability was a key theme, expressed particularly stridently by one of the two SMEs. Another theme reported was a lack of interest from employees or a lack of societal awareness, along with the gender make-up of the organisation (male-dominated in some cases and female-dominated in others). Differences in generational attitudes were also a notable theme that intersected with the role of leaders in developing and promoting policies.

6.2.1 Affordability

The affordability of enhancing SPL was highlighted as a concern to varying degrees across all non-enhancing organisations. TechnologyCo2 had enhanced its maternity and Paternity

Leave in recent years, following various mergers, but the prospect of enhancing SPL appeared to be a step too far at present. Finances were an ongoing concern:

“Yes, we did [SPL] on an affordability basis, and we will look at that, and we always look at things like that. At the time I think we, umm, introduced the policy, we didn't have ... we were introducing ... we ... only recently moved away from statutory maternity and we started to enhance that, and then ... And we do enhance the actual two weeks off, but we haven't actually got to enhancing parental leave, but I think money is an issue full stop”.

The impact of budgetary constraints was also an ongoing issue for PublicSectorCo, where spending reviews and service redesigns formed a backdrop to the current employee benefits on offer, including SPL. In this environment, enhancing SPL would be unlikely in the near future.

6.2.2 Gender balance

A senior manager at TechnologyCo2 also alluded to the perceived risk of investing in SPL since two-thirds of the workforce were male:

“I think ...to be honest, a lot of it is down to affordability for the business. So we are gender split ... roughly 75% male... 25% female, so if we then start to ... It is the right thing to do, to have that balance, but can we afford to do it? What would the uptake be?”

The worrying prospect of sudden demand for SPL and the associated financial risks were common amongst organisations not currently enhancing the benefit. One of the two SMEs (SME2) contributing to the research described the promotion of SPL as currently a low priority. The size of the organisation meant there were few births annually, although according to the HR manager there was likely to be more focus on SPL in future:

“I think so far it's something we have but we've not necessarily really plugged away at. As an organisation, we maybe have one or two births a year, so we've never done a big sell on it. We possibly could do more, and that's something I will consider as we look at that pay element later this year”.

Interestingly, whilst the low number of births was a key factor in take-up in this SME, lack of interest in SPL was viewed by some as a justification for not promoting it, especially in male-dominated organisations. Promotion would arguably be most beneficial in these organisations, where the aim is to encourage male take-up in particular. Conversely, in female-dominated RetailCo, low take-up was assumed to be due to females not feeling

inclined to request SPL, given their traditional assumption that they will take Maternity Leave.

Gender dynamics were also evident in SME1's narrative around SPL. The director expressed particular reservations about the prospect of senior males taking SPL, especially those in the more specialised IT area of the business and those with client-facing roles. For this organisation, enhancing SPL was not seen as an option, although in the event of a request for SPL, longer blocks of absence would be preferred:

Director of SME1: *"It suddenly came to us we would, uhh, take it seriously obviously – you haven't got any choice but to – and then we would do our best on how we work through it. It wouldn't be in our interests if they were a member of the management team for them to have short..."*

Interviewer: *"Right, blocks, yes".*

Director of SME1: *"Yes, so you know, really, frankly, the longer the block the better for us, just for continuity".*

Interviewer: *"Practical reasons".*

Director of SME1: *"Relationships with clients, or with suppliers, umm, in the warehouse where it's less, umm, less of a need because... less skilled, yes, we could put up with a more frequent block".*

There was some recognition of the part played by gender stereotypes in exacerbating a lack of interest and/or take-up of SPL, for example by an HR manager at TechnologyCo2:

"When people think about having time away to support their children, they just go back to that assumption that it's the female that does that".

An HR Manager at RetailCo similarly pointed toward a lack of societal awareness inhibiting take-up of SPL:

"I just think it's about lack of awareness, so I think it's more from that perspective. As a society, I think generally we all know about Maternity Leave, adoption leave, Paternity Leave, but SPL isn't talked about as much within there, and I think that's where the challenge comes".

6.2.3 Generational norms, composition of the leadership team and employee advocates

Generational differences across organisations can also be a barrier to promoting and/or enhancing SPL. This was noted as an obstacle to stakeholder support in BankingCo, where trade union members tended to be older and longer-serving, and were therefore unlikely to be concerned with issues around parental leave:

“So for something like Paternity Leave or SPL and getting changes in there, actually it doesn’t come that high up the union agenda, because that’s not what they’re hearing from their members because, you know, their typical member isn’t at that stage”.

This was echoed at SME2, where lack of understanding amongst older, more senior employees was evidenced amongst stakeholders:

“I think the main challenges are on the pay element because our stakeholders are ... our senior team is a lot older, and when you mention maternity pay or paternity pay, all you get is ‘oh, in my day...’”.

Encouraging acceptance and understanding of SPL was a notable challenge across organisations, but particularly at middle-management level. TechnologyCo2 anticipated this issue:

“What we haven’t done is been pro-active about promoting it enough; so I think it will be supported and welcomed, and it would be a positive impact at exec level. I think the challenge – and I don’t know what the answer would be – but just based on generally middle managers can be, umm, a bit more of a sticking point”.

BankingCo emphasised the lack of role models at senior-leadership level to positively promote SPL:

“You know they will always say ... management always say they will support it, but you know you kind of want someone to role-model it”.

6.2.4 Organisational culture and approach, and family-friendly policies

The organisations with statutory SPL policies described varying approaches to family-friendly policies and flexible working arrangements. Larger organisations (250+ employees) were more likely to offer a suite of arrangements for employees to work flexibly or adopt agile working practices, while there were less formal arrangements in one of the two SMEs in the sample. Ultimately, despite these organisations not currently enhancing SPL, several referred to working toward this and/or supporting parents and families by allowing flexibility.

Networking groups such as those focusing on parents and families and female employees were key tools providing support and consultation on policy development in some organisations that had not enhanced SPL. BankingCo and TechnologyCo2 alluded to these

networking groups, with TechnologyCo2's forums contributing to discussions around diversity and inclusion strategies and family-friendly policies. In this context, SPL had not been a specific focus, as take-up had been low in this male-dominated company, although there were plans for further promotion and it aimed to gather employee opinion on issues around work–life balance:

“Yes, the family-friendly stuff, probably within the last year, two years ... and with the flexible working and with... we have a really small minority, as you know, reflective of I guess national statistics in terms of take-up ... I doubt it's the first thing that fathers think of at this point in time. It is something that we do have plans to sort of promote more”.

“There are specific questions in [the employee inclusion survey] around how people feel, around ... flexible... all the sort of typical things you'd expect to see, so we'll continue to build that, and weaving into that would be re-launching SPL. We're looking at doing a whole bit around working parents, so linking it – so I think it needs to be linked to a more broader theme, which will be around working parents and how we support working parents”.

Despite research highlighting the importance of sharing unpaid work in the home (including childcare), the positive impacts of fathers taking solo leave to care for children (see Bünning, 2015), and the negative effects of long career breaks on mothers' careers (see Olsen et al., 2018), some members of senior management were unaware of the rationale for SPL. For example, an emphasis on enhancing Paternity Leave was the current focus for BankingCo, which deemed SPL problematic owing to the perceived notion of parent one being pressured into giving up leave entitlement (a barrier discussed earlier in this report).

Developing family-friendly policies was challenging even across larger organisations. A manager in one department of TechnologyCo2 described a family-friendly, family-centric subculture in which a father could be himself and the workplace was empathetic to the flexibility that families sometimes need. This was echoed by an HR manager in the same organisation, who underlined this inconsistency:

“The culture – I think it's fair to say there are pockets of culture, as there is with any organisation, for lots of different reasons. And so some areas are ... would probably feel much more family-friendly than other areas, and sometimes that's down to the nature of the roles they do and the extent to which they can allow – how much agile working they can work in there”.

When discussing enhancement, it is important to understand the budgetary constraints an organisation may be under. PublicSectorCo had experienced ongoing budgetary cuts, this being the third year without incremental pay progression. The organisation was keen to emphasise its particular working conditions, as described by senior managers:

“We can’t ignore the fact that this will be a third year of a non-incremental progression for people, but it’s not a bad time to actually say that these are the rewards that are available, so the flexibility, the opportunity to take the leave schemes we’ve got, the opportunity for people to take career breaks... So therefore other rewards, like parental leave, flexibility, flexitime, are seen as a reason for people to select [PublicSectorCo] as an employer of choice”.

“For colleagues who are in a position where they’re going through a service redesign and thinking about voluntary redundancy, flexibility is something that would perhaps prevent them from taking voluntary redundancy and making a decision whether they stay with the [public-sector organisation], definitely”.

There were also challenges for SMEs, where flexibility was often limited, particularly in businesses where being available to respond to clients’ needs was paramount. In SME1, balancing the needs of the business with those of different employees could be problematic:

“The issue comes when ... because we’re seven days a week, that’s ... Society wants to order things seven days a week, they want instant phone calls; it’s then the problems we do have with somebody with children, finding reasons why they can’t work the weekend, that then causes resentment from people who don’t have children”.

However, describing itself as a very family-oriented business, SME2 encouraged flexibility. Home working was a common feature there and an informal way of supporting family life, compensating or perhaps accounting for the low take-up of SPL, although there were plans to revisit this and related policies to reflect the values of the business:

“For some people, where they don’t feel the need to do ... or they personally don’t choose to do SPL, because actually they are at home quite a bit still with their family, because they can work from home two or three days a week. And we don’t really bat an eyelid, because if that means they get to be with their family a bit more, great. Yes, it’s something I’ve never really delved into with our guys too much. I probably should... Well, maternity and paternity pay has come up as a topic in the business anyway, because we’re saying, you know, we want our benefit to be ... to represent our values. If one of our values is about empathy and family, then this is a really obvious one to do, so it is under review this year”.

6.2.5 Approach to gender pay gap and gender pay gap reporting

All sampled organisations with 250 employees or more referred to their GPG in discussions around SPL, and to strategies to address this. Whilst not currently enhancing SPL, key themes for a number of companies were around developing family-oriented policies, challenging gender stereotypes and promoting females to senior positions. Although it was

recognised that GPG issues were complex and challenging to tackle, regular reporting on these was clearly focusing minds and incentivising action plans to make changes.

SMEs are not currently required to report on GPG issues, but those in the sample were aware of structural differences and gender issues across their businesses, such as male domination in senior positions and its impact on pay. SME2, a technology company, described half of its business as male-dominated and highly-paid, and the other half as focusing on pensions, largely administrative and dominated by women. SME1, a logistics company, was similar, as better-paid positions in IT tended to be occupied by males, although there were more females than males amongst the management team. Neither SME regarded SPL as playing a large part in alleviating the GPG issue, although SME2 was more inclined to promote family-oriented working practices. However, SME1 expressed reluctance and anxiety about accommodating flexibility, owing to its relatively small workforce.

There were also clear structural differences at BankingCo, with more junior females based at branches and at call-centre level, and more males in higher-level, back-office roles. As with other companies described above, this had implications for the GPG. Flexible, family-oriented working was described as key to tackling unconscious bias and working toward women and men working on a more level playing field, particularly as, according to an HR manager at BankingCo, the majority of female employees (95%) returned to work part-time following Maternity Leave:

“I think when it comes to career opportunities, even for someone who is unconscious about their bias, that they are going to be sitting there thinking, ‘Well, I’ve got a woman who works four days a week and a man who works five days a week; I’m going to get more out of the man and therefore I’m going to...’ But if you had a woman who works four days a week and a man who also applied for the job who worked four days a week, that would be a really interesting dynamic as to how that plays out over time”.

Although SPL had been welcomed as part of encouraging family-oriented working practices, there were concerns that the off-putting notion of sacrifice (see Section 5.1.1) was not conducive to its success. BankingCo was therefore focusing on Paternity Leave as a key tool to tackle its GPG at a cultural level, beyond target setting, although it was experiencing some push-back at board level, with concerns that this might be seen as offering yet more benefits to male employees. As a senior leader at this company explained:

“Every November we would release our gender pay gap; and we have targets around, you know, number of women in senior roles, etc., etc. So you know, we talked around, OK, you’ve got targets for this, but what are the tangible actions that we’re going to take? And actually, if we were to release the paternity proposition at the same time as stating where we are in gender pay gap and our gender targets,

then I think culturally it brings to the fore the link between the two genders, the men and the women issue”.

At TechnologyCo2, around a third of employees were male and the board of directors and senior leadership roles were male-dominated. The leadership was described by a manager at a lower grade as ‘the old boys club’. TechnologyCo2 described its recent GPG report as relatively favourable compared with other similar organisations in the technology industry, owing to more males working at lower grades than was typical:

“In terms of where we were compared to benchmarks in the technology, where we were compared to other UK ... we were better, so I suppose we were pleased from that perspective... So I suppose ours could be more balanced than perhaps you’d anticipate for a technology company”.

However, significant issues needed to be solved. TechnologyCo2 recognised that initiatives such as targeting women at lower grades for leadership training, using SPL to narrow the GPG, encouraging both males and females to take responsibility for caring, and reducing the burden on the traditionally female carer were all ways of moving toward gender equality in the workplace. As a senior manager asserted:

“It’s the females that have been taking those career breaks. I guess their financial earnings have been impacted by that ... Equal take-up of SPL would help achieve all sorts of things around gender pay gap and all sorts of other challenges that women typically have in moving into senior roles ... If you are the one taking the majority of the parental leave, typically you’re the one that also does the main caring afterwards. Typically in a relationship you’d be viewed as the one that’s always going to the doctor’s appointments, always going to be there when they get home from school”.

A recently appointed female assistant director at PublicSectorCo was believed to be driving a family-friendly agenda with regard to the GPG. With a female chief executive and gender balance at other senior leadership levels, there had been significant change over the last twenty years, although the organisation argued that it had consistently promoted flexibility despite any GPG discrepancies:

“I think the balance has changed in terms of, if you look at the senior structure over the years, so it was always very male-dominated ... I think [the organisation] has always been quite forward in looking at policies, and particularly family-friendly policies, so I think that it hasn’t changed as a result of the gender pay gap. I think it was always seen as a positive for employees of the [organisation] anyway, so I don’t think we were... I think we were sort of forward-thinking rather than backward-thinking”.

With 80 percent female employees and a concentration of males in senior positions, RetailCo 'were aware of the very visible gap [in pay] between females and males and were looking to promote the right behaviours to have an impact on this'. This would include encouraging 'more men within the business, going on SPL, or Paternity Leave'. It highlighted plans to bring SPL in line with Maternity Leave, which was currently enhanced, linking this to challenging traditional gender roles and the GPG:

"By promoting men also being seen as the carers, the thinking is that there will be more of an uptake there, and consequently some women may be able to feel like they can concentrate on their careers more. And then therefore, over time, the gender pay gap could be closed, because we'll see more women in higher paid more senior roles".

6.3 Key learning points

The key learning points from interviews with these organisations that do not enhance SPL were around barriers, which included understanding and communication, financial implications, gender stereotyping and bias, flexible working, changing expectations, and Paternity Leave. The non-enhancing organisations also fit into two groups. The first, were very proactive around family-friendly policies and senior managers and HR were keen to support SPL and related policies, but they were not yet doing so because of specific structural factors, predominantly around previously over extending maternity pay enhancement or the gender make-up of their workforce. The second group were less focused on a family-friendly agenda and had not yet been proactively reviewing how they could better support parents in the workplace.

6.3.1 Need for improved understanding and communication of Shared Parental Leave

There was an awareness that more could be done to develop understanding of the policy amongst all employees, including HR personnel. Improving ease of access to information was a key issue in this respect. For example, at RetailCo, online policy information was available only to employees with intranet access mediated by line management. This was also a problem at PublicSectorCo, with a dispersed workforce that had intermittent access to intranet communications.

Lack of promotion of SPL was also a key issue. TechnologyCo2 described the management and delivery of policies as limited, with a lack of ongoing focus:

"Once that initial kind of the communication piece has been done, then we are back to the kind of self-service, the UK HR page, where you can find all the policies. There are links to raising an HR support case and, you know, lots of people will be familiar with having to raise an HR support case; but it isn't something that, you

know, we are regularly.... reminding people about, saying 'hey, here's an amazing policy!'"

Furthermore, at PublicCo there was frustration that it was not doing more to champion SPL, suggesting that it was missing an opportunity to reap the benefits of embracing this potentially culture-changing policy:

"And if we want to be forward-thinking and, you know, innovative and we want to do it, then like I said, people may tell you we're doing stuff, but we're not. Let's do it and like ... show that it happens and shout about it!"

6.3.2 Concerns about the financial implications of Shared Parental Leave

The possibility of a raft of employees taking up SPL was a concern to some organisations. For example, TechnologyCo2 was mindful of this issue:

"I suppose it's a risk of uncontrollable cost actually, which is probably the bigger risk, because if you are replacing someone, obviously you end up paying double".

SME1 had major reservations about the potentially negative impact of SPL, with loss of employee skills in the event of increasing SPL take-up. Although the business was tolerant of Maternity Leave and flexible working requests, it felt that, with less than 100 employees, there might be significant disruption in the event of SPL becoming popular. Of particular concern was the potential for take-up amongst client managers, whose absence would disrupt contingent relationships with clients. These anxieties were explained:

"Although we've got [less than 100] people that sounds quite big, by the time we divide it down into individual departments, you're still looking at specialists, and it's a... I've talked to other small businesses, and it's very difficult to cope when you've got a linchpin that wants to change their work arrangements. What you're trying to do is do the best for the company; then we all share in the prosperity... So it is a sort of a tug against how we best... So I think most normal business owners wouldn't want it. We'd go along with it, and we'd make our best out of it, but frankly, at the end of the day, we'd rather not have [SPL], yes".

Reflecting on the specific difficulties of smaller organisations, an HR manager at InsuranceCo offered suggestions for enhancing SPL, albeit to a lesser extent, underlining the importance that this company attached to driving the principle of the policy forward:

"I mean, for smaller employers, they will consider whether they can afford to have lots of people out at the same time, or I guess double the number of people out at the same time, potentially. Because we've often been able to backfill when people

have been off, as you would with maternity – we've been able to backfill with people internally; but maybe in a smaller organisation, they might struggle a little bit more. What we've said to that is, you don't need to necessarily do a year or six months or whatever, but maybe you could offer four weeks instead of two. You don't need to use this as the benchmark that you've got to follow, that maybe just think about it and do something".

BankingCo had enhanced its maternity offer significantly above competitors (22 weeks) in order to attract and retain talented female employees, but faced affordability issues in matching this for SPL. On reflection, senior managers felt that they should have looked at equalising SPL rather than further extending Maternity Leave enhancement. For this reason, BankingCo was focusing on Paternity Leave, and the possibility of enhancing it from two to 12 weeks. They were also considering allowing this time to be used after the first 52 weeks. This was seen as avoiding the notion of the mother sacrificing any of her leave – a concern with SPL:

"At the moment you have 52 weeks as the kind of block of leave you could take. Actually, if you increased it from two weeks to 12 weeks, you could actually have... we would increase the period that you could take it from 52 to 62 weeks. So essentially, if the mum wanted to take the full year off and the dad wanted to take 10 weeks off, after the mum has gone back to work to just, you know, take the stress out of it".

6.3.3 Persistence of gender stereotyping

Gender stereotyping, such as assigning females traditional caregiving roles and attitudes and viewing males as breadwinners, was recognised as a factor impeding SPL take-up. TechnologyCo2 referred to this and the broader inhibitor of the GPG:

"It is really difficult, because I think what a lot of people ... a lot of feedback that we've had is that people just can't afford to do it. And I think this comes back to the wider societal issues around female versus male roles, and what roles females are doing".

Such stereotypes were reportedly exacerbated at times by an older generation of managers. TechnologyCo2 described how negative responses to requests for leave for childcare were overlaid with assumptions and expectations around gender:

"I just think the more old-school managers would be like, 'oh, I'm going to have 20 weeks off to look after my child, oh really?' Whereas it's thought nothing of when it's a woman, obviously; but I think with a man, it's a lot more difficult to get it over the line... I think you ... people expect older people not to get it, and the problem is, on most boards at the moment, is that they are 50 plus".

6.3.4 Impact of Millennials on working patterns

Organisations not enhancing SPL were mindful of the impact of employees from the Millennial generation on working practices, and of flexible policies such as SPL being part of a more agile attitude toward employment. An HR manager at RetailCo noted the tendency for this group to request flexible working patterns:

“We’re certainly starting to see that now ... whether that’s around, umm, working hours, whether it’s ... about working in an office, as opposed to being able to work from home, whether it’s having longer holidays, so that I can work like longer hours for a certain period of time and then I’ll take six weeks off to go travelling or to do something. So not huge numbers, but we are certainly starting to see differences of that coming through, which of course, we know will then start to play out from when we come into parental leave as well”.

The need to respond to Millennials was echoed by TechnologyCo2, which underlined the need to recognise and accommodate changing expectations, including policies:

“[Millennials] walk into an office and they expect things that we don’t have yet and at the moment we’re not doing; and if we don’t do them, they won’t work for us ... And if we don’t react now, we’ll be behind the curve by 2025.... So absolutely, they are going to expect everything to be in place, from a technology perspective but also the new policies”.

SME2 drew attention to the value of flexibility amongst this more ‘settled’ demographic – valuing flexibility, but willing to demonstrate loyalty in return:

“I’ve had numerous conversations with colleagues where we’ve talked ... I’m a Millennial myself, and we’ve talked about how as Millennials, pre-children we’d move jobs every two years, but post-children actually we are valuing the flexibility our employer gives us, we’re valuing that stability. And so we’ve all been there sort of four or five years now, and actually our loyalty has increased from a company supporting us as parents, so it’s worth that investment because the longevity of an employee is equally valuable”.

In contrast to this, SME1 indicated some anxieties regarding Millennials in the workforce. In this organisation, client managers were more likely to be from this generation, and therefore requests for SPL were seen as problematic and likely to disrupt key relationships in the business.

6.3.5 Paternity Leave

There was a notable interest in Paternity Leave. TechnologyCo1 had enhanced this benefit soon after enhancing its Maternity Leave offer, alluding to the enhancement of SPL as a more significant, risky step for the organisation. This related to a perception of unknown, possibly 'uncontrollable' costs. Other organisations were also looking to enhance Paternity Leave as a higher priority than SPL. These included TechnologyCo2, which referred to its intention to focus on Paternity Leave as a priority:

"...there's still work to do in the wider business, and I think we'll see more of that in the next year or two. We've talked about enhancing our Paternity Leave package as well, and that's probably the first thing we'll do before we look at SPL. So currently we offer one week full pay and one week statutory, and I think the thinking is that will move to two weeks full pay".

For RetailCo, developing a business case to enhance Paternity Leave was deemed less risky than enhancing SPL. Reasons for this related to employee acceptance, communication, implementation and costs to the organisation:

"I think... increasing our paternity policy is likely to have more beneficial impact on our colleagues than the SPL policy... I think we may be able to extend it to a minimum of two weeks full pay, and hopefully maybe a month or a little bit longer, maybe six weeks. And I think what we might do is, if we were to do that, then we might look at what the increased take-up is as a result of doing that, rather than start with SPL, if I'm honest..."

"So I feel it would be something that would be well received within the organisation, from both men and women... Personally, I think it would be easier to communicate and increase awareness of, and probably easier to implement".

This was echoed at BankingCo, where more mileage was identified in focusing on this (see Section 6.2.4). At SME2, the older age profile of employees in certain positions meant that grandparents' leave might have a larger potential impact. As a software development business, many roles had multiple employees, so there was some scope for coping with periods of leave. This organisation was looking to revisit SPL, with a view to promoting it more widely.

What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?

7. Considerations for Change

This section builds on the research presented above to offer considerations for change to encourage the promotion and enhancement of SPL by employers and increase uptake. Four key themes are focused upon: first, how large organisations might be encouraged to promote and enhance SPL; second, how smaller and less well-resourced organisations might be encouraged to enhance and promote it; third, how to encourage promotion of SPL for organisations who will never be in a position to enhance the policy, and finally, how barriers might be broken down in order to promote and encourage usage of SPL.

7.1 How to encourage large organisations to enhance and promote Shared Parental Leave

The research presented above suggests that large organisations are more likely to enhance SPL when there is a multi-faceted business case for doing so. Such cases are usually grounded in a need to recruit and retain top international talent in a global labour market increasingly made up of Millennials, who express a desire to work for employers that offer flexible working opportunities and support parents in the workplace. Organisations that do enhance their SPL offerings recount other benefits, including promoting gender equality in the workplace, supporting parents in the workplace, closing the GPG and encouraging women to (re-)enter the labour market after giving birth or adopting children, in order to widen the talent pool. This, in turn, means that organisations not facing the same pressures to recruit in an international marketplace increasingly populated by Millennials do not find themselves under the same pressures to promote or enhance family-friendly policies such as SPL. Organisations that are more locally focused in terms of their labour supply find themselves more influenced by cultural expectations in the UK around parenting and balancing worker and parent identities. The UK's social and cultural gender norms, along with many organisational and governmental policies and practices, assume overwhelmingly that mothers will be the primary caregivers in most families, and fathers will continue to be the family breadwinners. In this context, it is important to consider what are the most effective ways potentially to encourage different types of organisations to promote and enhance their SPL and related family-friendly policies.

7.1.1 Considerations for Change: Large Organisations

For large organisations that compete for much of their talent in a global marketplace, the impetus to change already exists, and government and the third sector can help promote this change by communicating with these organisations the benefits of enhancing SPL, and linking this and related policies with their strategic business priorities. This might include evidence briefs highlighting these business benefits. Another important lever is to use case studies in particular sectors to drive others in the sector to follow suit so as not to be left behind. For large organisations that source staff more locally and do not find that key groups of employees or potential employees demand these sorts of benefits, the key will be to use other levers to

encourage promotion and, where possible, enhancement. This might include highlighting how women's labour market attachment can be increased by encouraging more fathers to take leave, leading to lower turnover and skills retention, as well as supporting working fathers, encouraging increased well-being and loyalty to the organisation, and succession planning opportunities. These issues can also be related to the GPG discussion, and could fit with an organisations GPG reporting narrative, with resultant reputational benefits.

One particularly successful initiative adopted by some organisations in this research was to use SPL as an opportunity to grow the talent pipeline and make succession planning more inclusive. When significant periods of SPL were agreed, internal secondments were set up, particularly for more senior roles. These were then open to employees across the organisation to apply for. In this way, progress continued: further employees were able to build their skills base, and the organisations benefited from opportunities to build their talent pipeline. If this is done in an open way, it can also strengthen inclusivity and diversity across the organisation. In some cases, an organisation may even wish to use short secondments as a way to develop the skills of minority groups, or groups who may struggle to gain access to other opportunities owing to factors such as unconscious bias.

This research highlights changing generational attitudes to gender and caring in organisations. One key way to bridge this gap is through a programme of reverse mentoring, where up-and-coming Millennials act as reverse mentors to board members and members of the senior management team. Some best practice organisations currently relate this practice to their reward systems, requiring senior colleagues to participate in order to receive bonuses.

Summary of Considerations for Change: Large Organisations

- Best practice organisations in each sector could produce case studies of how they have promoted and enhanced SPL, highlighting the benefits they have realised.
- Where possible, particularly for larger organisations, enhance SPL offering to the same level as Maternity Leave. Where this is not possible, organisations should consider options for enhancing Paternity Leave to offer fathers more time with their children in the first year.
- Where appropriate, engage with available tools from government websites and third-sector organisations to better promote and enhance policies, and support for parents in the workplace.
- Where appropriate, engage with guidance from the GEO to develop a voluntary action plan for inclusion in your company's GPG report and consider inserting an enhanced SPL/ShPP policy in this to show how you are supporting parents to share caring between them.
- Organisations could use previously tested myth-busting messages around SPL to overcome perceived barriers to utilising SPL. For example, messages that clarify that both parents can use SPL simultaneously thus breaking down the myth that parent one must return to work for parent two to use SPL.

- Invest in developing staff and succession planning by covering parental leave periods with short internal secondments advertised across the organisation to support inclusive succession planning and the talent pipeline.
- Organisations could consider developing a parents' and carers' group, or joining a virtual one with other organisations in order to support parents in the workplace and make them aware of the options available to them.
- Develop a reverse mentoring programme with early career employees mentoring board and SMT members, to help improve intergenerational understanding and integrate changing cultural attitudes around gender and caring.
- Improve communication of SPL policies to employees, and communicate the benefits of SPL for the family, and particularly for the children using existing research. This may also require improved training for HR staff and line managers around family-friendly policies.
- Consider measures to increase transparency such as publishing of family-friendly policies for organisations with 250 employees or more, including parental leave and pay arrangements. Consider implementing voluntary questions within the GPG reporting platform for organisations with 250 or more employees on whether or not they enhance their ShPP offering and other parental leave policies.
- Devise a practical toolkit to engage more men nationally and at organisational level in conversations around caring (e.g., Icelandic government's Barbershop Toolbox; United Nations, 2015).

7.2 How to encourage smaller organisations to enhance and promote uptake of Shared Parental Leave

Small and medium-sized enterprises face unique challenges in enacting policies like SPL. These organisations are less likely to have HR departments, diversity and inclusion strategies, the capacity to cover periods of leave internally, and other resources to support their enhancement or even promotion of SPL. Despite these constraints, many are likely to be competing for talent in the same global labour market as many large companies, and to be passionate about gender equality in the workplace. In this context, we consider what are potentially the most effective ways to encourage different types of SMEs to promote or enhance their SPL and related family-friendly policies.

7.2.1 Considerations for Change: Smaller Organisations

Some of the considerations for change discussed for larger organisations are just as relevant for SMEs who are receptive to this agenda, although they need to be tailored to recognise the imbalance in resources. SMEs may benefit from specific guidance outlining the business benefits of promoting and enhancing SPL, as this would help allay the fears that many of these organisations have about how resource-intensive promoting SPL might be. Equally, SMEs may

benefit from case studies of SMEs that have actively promoted SPL and other parenting policies, and the benefits that these organisations have realised as a result. Key issues, particularly for smaller organisations that do not have HR departments, include a lack of knowledge around the policy and a lack of capacity to develop tools to support and communicate it. A practical toolkit aimed specifically at SMEs to make it easy for them to promote and enhance policies would also be particularly useful.

Existing incentives might be better communicated to SMEs. For example, currently, if a small business has contributed £45,000 or less in National Insurance within the last tax year, it is possible to claim back 103 percent of statutory ShPP (see UK Government, 2019b), which is deducted from the tax payable to HMRC. This means that some administrative costs of the policy can be covered.

SMEs might also think about innovative ways of integrating different types of parental leave with their succession planning processes, and reverse mentoring would potentially be a good way to start culture change across these organisations. In addition to this, small organisations might be encouraged to introduce family-friendly policies into their strategies, for example by encouraging job shares between parents.

Summary of Considerations for Change: Smaller Organisations

- Best practice SMEs could produce case studies of how and why they have promoted and/ or enhanced SPL, highlighting the benefits they have realised.
- Engage with available tools from government websites and third sector organisations, such as CIPD, Working Families, Business in the Community and the Equal Parenting Project to make it easier for smaller organisations to promote and enhance policies, especially if they do not have an HR department, for example, best practice policies, ideas for online or offline parenting groups, example champions etc.
- Consider reverse mentoring with early career employees mentoring senior managers as a way to start culture change in the organisation.
- Consider family-friendly strategies including encouraging job shares between parents.
- Communicate existing financial incentives for SMEs to encourage organisations to promote policies.
- Encourage SMEs to think about innovative ways to integrate different types of parental leave with their succession planning processes.
- SMEs could benefit from specific guidance, underpinned by research, explaining the business benefits of promoting SPL to help encourage more SMEs to support SPL and allay fears about the take-up of SPL.

7.3 How to support organisations that will struggle to enhance Shared Parental Leave

Some organisations in the UK will never be in a position to enhance SPL, for reasons such as financial constraints, size and capacity or philosophical approach. Where possible, these organisations should still be encouraged to promote SPL, or at least not to discourage its use. This might be done by providing them with an easy-to-use and practical toolkit, providing examples of policies, communications and advice. A key lever for this group is around retention and continuity. In encouraging greater use of SPL by both parents, they will be less likely to have any one person away from the organisation for more than six months. There are also opportunities for approaches more tailored to small organisations. For example, the government could communicate existing financial incentives for SMEs to encourage take-up. In addition, the encouragement of family-friendly policies such as job shares in SMEs for example, gives small organisations a way to access highly skilled employees. Such individuals might otherwise remain outside the labour market or who might be forced into low-skill roles in order to balance family and work commitments while children are small or in need of extra care.

One key reason why smaller organisations are not enhancing their SPL is concern around the cost if all men in the organisation start to take it, and worry that these men will not return to the workforce. Future research could be conducted into the actual take up rates of enhanced parental policies to determine if support for their parenting role might lead to greater loyalty to the company for most men, who would be likely to stay with the organisation for longer. This sort of research could really start to break these barriers down.

Summary of Considerations for Change: Organisations that will struggle to enhance Shared Parental Leave

- Encourage SMEs to make use of available tools from government websites and third-sector organisations to better support parents in the workplace, such as CIPD, Working Families, Business in the Community and the Equal Parenting Project.
- Provide research to allay SMEs' fears about the take-up of promoted SPL. Include specific guidance explaining the business benefits of promoting SPL.
- Consider further research to better understand how to support small businesses to take up SPL by exploring the affordability of enhanced ShPP for small businesses, the awareness of the policy, and delivery of the policies in a small business context.

7.4 Breaking down barriers to promotion and take-up of Shared Parental Leave

In order to drive the take-up of SPL and encourage organisations to promote it, it is important to break down organisational barriers to using the policy. In particular, organisations should be aware of existing barriers, including communication, cultural and financial obstacles.

As the extant research (e.g. Birkett & Forbes, 2019) reflects, key barriers to employees using SPL and the organisations promoting it centre around the financial impacts. As observed in this research, Millennials increasingly expect these sorts of family-friendly policies, and parents are more likely to take SPL if pay is enhanced. Therefore, employers should attempt to enhance their SPL offerings to the same level as Maternity Leave, where possible. This will enable them to present themselves as family-friendly employers, advance gender equality in the workplace and improve female employees' labour market participation.

In the UK, organisations with 250 employees or more are required to report their GPG. They are encouraged to publish a narrative alongside their GPG statistics, but this is currently optional. It is also recommended that organisations produce a narrative and an action plan with their GPG reporting to outline how they will address the drivers of their GPG. Employers could declare on the GPG portal whether or not they enhance ShPP and other parental leave policies. SPL can be used as a key strategy to address the GPG, since it is recognised that if more fathers take on childcare duties, women will be better supported to progress their careers if they so wish.

Based on research undertaken by Birkett and Forbes (2019), it is recognised that managers and HR managers/officers are often unfamiliar with SPL, which may mean that employees do not feel properly supported in taking advantage of the policy, or are completely unaware that it is an option. With improved knowledge amongst managers and HR managers/officers, employees are more likely to understand their options earlier, and are more likely to apply for the leave. Communications must be active and ongoing, rather than a complex policy on an HR portal. Communication can also be improved by developing parenting groups within organisations, or granting access to national groups for smaller organisations.

SPL policies are often perceived as complex by employees and organisations (ibid, 2019). However, this is largely due to poor communication, and to confusing flexibility for complexity. In order for employees to better understand the policy, it is important that it is conveyed simply, and that this information is accessible before parents make decisions and approach the organisation to state what leave they would like to take. Communication of the policy should also be simple, using figures and images to convey different scenarios for its use, in order to present the policy's flexibility more clearly.

SPL is designed to give parents more choice in how they care for their children in the first year, and also to give fathers/parent two an opportunity to extend their Paternity Leave. Having both parents taking on childcare duties within the first year is beneficial to children and their development (e.g. Huerta et al., 2013). Communicating the benefits for children's development and family bonding might be an important way to encourage parents' use of SPL.

Summary of Considerations for Change:

The research highlights the following future considerations for organisations and Government:

Change initiatives

- Where possible, particularly for larger organisations, enhance SPL offering to the same level as Maternity Leave. Where this is not possible, organisations should consider options for enhancing Paternity Leave to offer fathers more time with their children in the first year.
- Where appropriate, organisations could invest in developing staff and succession planning by covering parental leave periods with short internal secondments advertised across the organisation to support inclusive succession planning and the talent pipeline.
- Develop a reverse mentoring programme with early career employees mentoring board and SMT members, to help improve intergenerational understanding and integrate changing cultural attitudes around gender and caring.
- Examine the UK's emphasis on policies which encourage mothers' caring by continuing the momentum towards a more gender equal approach to parental leave at Government and organisation level. This could include removing disparities in economic incentives between SPL and other policies.
- Consider measures to increase transparency such as publishing of family-friendly policies for organisations with 250 employees or more, including parental leave and pay arrangements. Consider implementing voluntary questions within the GPG reporting platform for organisations with 250 or more employees on whether or not they enhance their ShPP offering and other parental leave policies.

Communications initiatives

- Best practice organisations in each sector could produce case studies of how and why they have promoted and enhanced SPL, highlighting the benefits they have realised.
- Improve communication of SPL policies to employees, and communicate the benefits of SPL for the family, and particularly for the children using existing research. This may also require improved training for HR staff and line managers around family-friendly policies. This could be as simple as a short outline of each policy for line managers and contact details for more information.
- Organisations could use previously tested myth-busting messages around SPL to overcome perceived barriers to utilising SPL. For example, messages that clarify that both parents can use SPL simultaneously thus breaking down the myth that parent one must return to work for parent two to use SPL.
- Encourage organisations, including SMEs, to make use of available tools from government websites and third-sector organisations to better support parents in the workplace, such as CIPD, Working Families, Business in the Community and the Equal Parenting Project. Drawing upon these available resources ensures that it is easier for organisations to promote and enhance policies, especially if they do not have an HR department, for example, easy to implement practices such as parenting groups, example champions etc.

- Devise a practical toolkit to engage more men nationally and at organisational level in conversations around caring (e.g., Icelandic government's Barbershop Toolbox; United Nations, 2015).
- Organisations could consider developing a parents' and carers' group, or joining a virtual one with other organisations in order to support parents in the workplace and make them aware of the options available to them.
- Where appropriate, engage with guidance from the GEO to develop a voluntary action plan for inclusion in your company's GPG report and consider inserting an enhanced SPL/ShPP policy in this to show how you are supporting parents to share caring between them.
- Clearly communicate existing financial incentives for SMEs to encourage organisations to promote policies.
- SMEs could benefit from specific guidance, underpinned by research, explaining the business benefits of promoting SPL to help encourage more SMEs to support SPL and allay fears about the take-up of SPL

8. Conclusions

This research aimed to understand why some organisations have enhanced their SPL policies and ShPP entitlements for employees. This includes what motivated them to push this agenda, why they have chosen to enhance SPL, if they have done so, how they have promoted and enhanced SPL, and what the outcomes have been. The key research questions for the project were therefore as follows:

1. What examples of best practice exist of improvements to SPL/ShPP offers, and what lessons can be taken from these by employers, government and other stakeholders?
2. What motivates employers to enhance their SPL and pay offers?
 - What forms do such improvements take?
 - What does the employer's journey to an improved offer look like?
 - How is this affected by company characteristics such as size, sector or composition (e.g. women in senior positions)?
 - What are the impacts of improving the SPL/ShPP offer, for example in terms of take-up?

The analysis has identified that UK organisations are adopting a broad range of approaches to SPL and ShPP, and that each organisation's approach relates largely to factors such as size, the sector in which it operates, who runs it, and whether it sources an important part of its labour from an international pool of talent, which is increasingly made up of Millennials.

Large multinationals, particularly in the professional services sector, are clearly the most likely to promote SPL and enhance ShPP, and this is starting to become a norm across the sector. In other sectors of the economy, it is becoming apparent that more large and medium-sized organisations are enhancing their SPL policies, taking advantage of the opportunity to be regarded as best practice in this policy area. Generally, organisations in this group argue that the market is moving in this direction, and that they are just positioning themselves ahead of the curve. They also argue that gender equality is central to who they are as an organisation and their ethos, and they envisage direct business benefits in terms of recruitment, retention, reducing the GPG and reputational advantages. These organisations engaging in best practice tend to have a top management team who are passionate about the agenda and have pushed it through the senior management team and the board. Interestingly, while some are actively promoting SPL as it stands, and often enhancing ShPP to the same level as Maternity Leave and pay, others are building on the current scheme to offer something they regard as more gender-equal, more inclusive and more in line with their company ethos. This involves simplified eligibility criteria, making SPL a right from day one, and allocating paid leave to each parent. Many of their employees may therefore be using policies to share care in the first year, but this will not

necessarily be recognised as using SPL by HMRC or in any future government reporting on SPL. This group also tends to use the policy to develop their talent pipeline further and to improve inclusivity and diversity by using blocks of leave as opportunities to encourage short internal secondments across the organisation.

Another key group of organisations were actively promoting family-friendly policies and gender equality in the workplace, as well as SPL, despite not yet enhancing ShPP, usually for cost reasons. More specifically, concerns arise that if they are forced to offer both men and women a large proportion of well-paid leave in the first year after adoption or birth, this will double the cost and cause more disruption to the organisation. Some organisations are also concerned that some work undertaken by male employees is incompatible with long periods of leave, generally because the roles are seen as difficult to backfill, for example in financial services roles where employees have their own client base built up over a long period of time. Interestingly, in one key case an organisation was in a structural bind because it had enhanced and expanded Maternity Leave so far beyond that of its competitors, in order to recruit and retain female talent, that enhancing SPL leave to the same extent was financially impossible. This left the organisation with only three unsatisfactory options: enhance SPL to the same level as Maternity Leave, which would put undue pressure on the business and would not be backed by the board; reduce the level of enhancement given to mothers for Maternity Leave to the level of competitors and enhance SPL or Paternity Leave to the same level, risking a significant backlash within the organisation and from the media; or maintain the status quo and the unequal treatment of mothers and fathers across the organisation.

Other than those engaging in best practice, SMEs are not tending to enhance SPL and are doing very little to promote it to their employees. This is generally because these organisations have tighter resources and often have no one explicitly focusing on issues such as talent management, retention, equality and diversity. The focus of these businesses tends to be around delivering the business products or services, rather than issues around HR and employee well-being. SMEs are often very committed to employee well-being and are deeply concerned about recruiting and retaining good employees, but often lack the time and resources to do this as effectively as they may wish. They therefore need support in promoting and enhancing these policies. This might be done either by developing easy-to-use resources such as a toolkit, or through financial incentives. Other reasons why these organisations are not enhancing their SPL offering include concerns about how women in the organisation might react to new policies seen to be supporting men in the workplace, difficulties in getting the proposal agreed by a board whose members might be from a different generation and might not see the value of these sorts of policies, and concerns that some roles (often those occupied by males) are incompatible with career breaks. Organisations with many low-paid frontline staff also worry about the costs, and are concerned that if the policy were enhanced, large numbers of men would all take leave at the same time, causing significant business disruption.

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What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?
