

Time off for new fathers raises bias awareness

Level: Intermediate to upper intermediate (B1–B2)

Time: 60–90 minutes

Business topics: Maternity and paternity leave, the gender pay gap, company benefits

Business language focus: Language associated with benefits such as maternity leave and the advantages these may present for companies.

Activities: In this lesson, students will:

- read a business article first published in the *Financial Times* and look at the language necessary to understand and talk about the article;
- look at business-specific words and expressions and apply them to their own personal work experience;
- discuss aspects of the article in greater depth;
- suggest possible future benefits that would attract new employees.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student, possible internet access for Exercise 6

Group size: All of the tasks can be completed in pairs or groups, so that as much communication as possible takes place in the class. However, this lesson plan can also be used in a one-to-one teaching situation.



This lesson is based on an authentic article from the *Financial Times*, republished here with its full, original text.

The article discusses the advantages of paternity leave.

1. Warmer

Students work in pairs to match the countries with the number of weeks of statutory maternity leave they typically offer. Make sure they give reasons for their choices. At the feedback stage, ask students if they were surprised by any of the correct answers and ask them

to compare the amount of statutory maternity leave in these countries with the amount in their own country or countries. (Note that there may be maternity leave in the USA but it is not a legal requirement or right. The amount of maternity leave may also vary depending on whether it is the first child or not.)

Key:

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. Estonia | 4. Japan |
| 2. The UK | 5. The USA |
| 3. France | |

2. Key words and expressions

Students search for words and expressions in the text and write them next to the definitions while noticing how the words are used in context.

Key:

1. eligible
2. financial risk
3. maternity leave
4. average
5. non-transferable
6. level playing field
7. impact
8. empathise
9. empirical
10. mandatory
11. productivity
12. work ethic

3. Understanding the article

Students work in pairs and decide if the statements are true or false. They correct the false statements.

Key:

1. False. He was thrilled.
2. False. Fathers are typically entitled to 2 weeks paid paternity leave while mothers can take up to 52 weeks.
3. True.
4. True.
5. False. First he was excited and then he became worried.
6. True.
7. True.
8. False. He believes it has a positive effect.

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4. Business language

In part a, students read the business words and phrases in the box and find and underline them in the article, noticing how they were used in context.

In part b they then use them to complete the sentences before, in part c, deciding which of them are likely to be useful for them and writing sentences of their own that contain these words but also reflect their own company's activity or the potential activity of a company they might work for in the future. For example, a student decides that *bias* and *policy* are not important for them but that being able to talk about *benefits* and *recruitment* is, so they concentrate on writing sentences that focus on the benefits a company or their company can offer and how this could affect recruitment.

Key:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <i>benefits</i> | 5. <i>career</i> |
| 2. <i>basic pay</i> | 6. <i>policy</i> |
| 3. <i>recruitment</i> | 7. <i>earnings</i> |
| 4. <i>bias</i> | 8. <i>budget</i> |

5. Discussion

In small groups, students discuss the questions which pick up on and expand on topics and quotes from the article. Hold a short whole-group feedback session and compare and contrast each group's answers and input.

6. Wider business theme – Benefits over and above basic pay

Suggest that students go online and use search engines to find information on the kind of benefits that companies typically offer their employees. Note that such benefits are sometimes described as 'perks'. A typical example would be the use of a company car.

Then ask students to work individually and make a list of benefits that would attract people to work for it. They then present their ideas to the class.

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1 Warmer

Different countries around the world offer different lengths of paid maternity leave. Match the countries with the number of weeks.*

- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| 1. 62 weeks | a France |
| 2. 39 weeks | b Japan |
| 3. 16 weeks | c Estonia |
| 4. 14 weeks | d The USA |
| 5. 0 weeks | e The UK |

*The number of weeks does not necessarily mean equal benefits. In the UK, for example, mothers on maternity leave receive 90% of their basic pay for just 6 weeks. It then reduces.

2 Key words and expressions

Find the words or phrases in the article that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

- allowed by rules or laws to do something or to receive something (para 1)

- the identification and analysis of areas that could affect the success of a business
_____ (two words, para 3)
- a period of time when a mother is allowed to be away from work after the birth of her child
(2 words, para 4) _____
- the amount, level, standard, etc that is typical of a group of people or things (para 5)

- belonging to one person and not legally able to be given to another person or used by them (para 6)

- a situation that is fair for all the people involved (3 words, para 9)

- to have an effect or influence on someone or something (para 11)

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8. to understand how someone feels because you can imagine what it is like to be them (para 12)

9. based on real experience or scientific experiments rather than on theory (para 17)

10. ordered by law or rule (para 18) _____
11. the rate at which goods are produced, especially in relation to the time, money and workers needed to produce them (para 18) _____
12. the belief that hard work is important for developing someone's moral character (2 words, para 18)

3 Understanding the article

Are these statements true or false according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Fahad Sayood was angry when he heard he would be eligible to take six months' leave at full pay.
2. In the UK new fathers are entitled to the same amount of parental leave as new mothers.
3. According to research, fathers who take more paternity leave are more involved in childcare than those who do not.
4. A study carried out in Sweden found that the longer a father stays on paternity leave, the more the mother is able to earn.
5. Mr Sayood was worried at first but then became excited at the possibility of six months' leave.
6. Mr Sayood believes that being in the same position as new mothers helped him to understand the issues that his female colleagues face.
7. Humanyze differs from the other companies mentioned in the article because all new mothers and fathers working for the company have to take 12 weeks leave at full pay.
8. The head of global commercial operations at Humanyze believes that mandatory leave has a negative effect on employee satisfaction and loyalty to the company.

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Changes to paternity leave policies help dads understand the challenges working mothers face

BY LAUREN FEDOR



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- 1 When Fahad Sayood found out in late 2017 that he would be eligible to take six months' leave, at full pay, after the birth of his second child, he was thrilled.
- 2 "It blew my mind," he says. "The opportunity to spend that time with my family for a full six months, and then come back and pick up where I left off, was incredible."
- 3 Mr Sayood is head of financial risk at Aviva, one of the UK's biggest insurers. Just over a year ago, the company introduced a worldwide "equal parental leave" policy, under which all new parents, male and female, can take up to a year off after the birth or adoption of a child, including 26 weeks at full basic pay.
- 4 In the UK, where Mr Sayood is based, fathers typically are entitled to two weeks of paternity leave, while mothers can take up to 52 weeks of statutory maternity leave. Since 2015 parents have also been able to take advantage of shared parental leave, which allows mothers to transfer some of their leave to fathers. However, only 2 per cent of eligible parents have used the scheme.
- 5 Aviva says new fathers took an average of 21 weeks' paternity leave in the year after it introduced the policy, compared with two weeks the year before. Stuart Mitchell, a security controls tester at Aviva, who also took six months' leave after the birth of his son, says he would do so again – it gave him a "real chance" to bond with his son while his partner returned to work.
- 6 According to OECD research from 2013, fathers who take more paternity leave are more involved during infancy and throughout childhood than those who do not. A separate 2015 study of Quebec's non-transferable

paternity leave policy, or "daddy quota", found that fathers who took paternity leave were likely to share childcare and household responsibilities more equitably with their female partners.

The Quebec study also said mothers whose spouses took advantage of the policy "spent more time in paid work, spent more time physically at the workplace and were more likely to be full-time employed".

A Swedish study published in 2010 found that each month a father stays on parental leave increases a mother's earnings. This led researchers to conclude that a lack of fathers' involvement in childcare and parental leave "could be one factor" behind the gender pay gap.

Caroline Prendergast, chief people officer at Aviva, says the insurer "wanted to create a level playing field for men and women taking time out of their careers" with its equal parental leave policy. Over time, the policy should "reduce the opportunity for bias which sometimes occurs in recruitment and promoting talent, particularly [for] women", she says.

"What we have noticed with men who are taking paternity leave, by asking the same questions that women tend to ask, they are getting to understand what it feels like," she says. "The simple thought process of going through those questions will help reduce bias when people go on leave for a period of time."

Mr Sayood recalls that after his initial excitement at the possibility of six months' leave, he became worried about taking so much time off. "Would my job be safe? What would it mean for my career? How would it impact my team?" Then, he adds: "It hit me like a freight train. These are worries that women in the workplace have been facing for generations.

"It is all well and good to try and empathise with others, but actually being there, in those shoes, having to face it, really opened my eyes to the issues that my female colleagues had been facing," he says.

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Worksheet



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13 While few employers offer such generous paternity leave for new fathers, Aviva is not the only company to expand its benefits in recent years.

14 Since 2016, Spotify, the Swedish music-streaming company, has offered its male and female employees six months of parental leave, at full pay, at any point up to their child's third birthday.

15 Etsy, the Nasdaq-listed crafts online marketplace, also offers new parents 26 weeks of fully paid leave, at least eight of which must be taken in one block in the six months after the birth or adoption of a child, with the remainder taken before the child's second birthday.

Mandatory paternity leave

16 Humanyze, a US analytics company, offers new parents less time off — 12 weeks at full pay — but has taken an arguably more aggressive stance by mandating that all new mothers and fathers take the leave.

Gregg Carman, head of global commercial operations, says the decision to require leave was based on empirical evidence about what was good for both individuals and companies.

“The data suggest that both mothers and fathers of newborns getting mandatory leave, getting that time to bond as a family [and] support each other, without the distractions of the workplace, have a direct relationship to employment engagement and satisfaction, loyalty to the company, as well as productivity and work ethic,” he says.

“A mandatory offering by our chief executive was not seen as a forced exercise, more as an affirmation about how important we think it is.

“This is something [new parents] should take ... It doesn't show up in the dollars of the budget but does in the performance and output at the end of the year,” he adds.

4 Business language

a. Find and underline these business words and phrases in the article. Note that the word *policy* appears several times so underline all examples as the context will help with the meaning.

bias policy earnings benefits recruitment
 budget career basic pay

b. Use the words in the box to complete the sentences below.

- _____ are extra money or other advantages that you get in addition to your salary from your employer as part of your job.
- Your _____ is the pay you receive before any extra amounts of money or benefits are added.
- _____ is the process of finding people to join a company.

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4. _____ is an attitude that people have that makes them treat someone in a way that is unfair or different from the way they treat other people.
 5. A _____ is a job or series of related jobs that you do, especially a profession that you spend most of your working life in.
 6. A _____ is a set of plans or actions agreed by a business.
 7. A person's _____ are the amount of money they receive for their work.
 8. A company's _____ is the amount of money it has to spend on something.
- c. **Decide which of the words are useful for you, and then use them in sentences of your own that reflect your own work situation or previous work experience.**

5 Discussion questions

- The article suggests that equal or shared parental leave benefits both parents and the company they work for. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
- The article also says that men who take paternity leave begin to understand how women feel about their job when they take maternity leave. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
- Do you think all companies in a particular country should offer the same benefits to women and men? Give reasons for your answer.
- The US analytics company mentioned in the article requires all new mothers and fathers to take mandatory parental leave. Do you agree with this policy? Give reasons for your answer.

6 Wider business theme – Benefits over and above basic pay

Imagine that you are the head of human resources at a new company. You need to recruit well-qualified staff to help develop and expand the company. Make a list of at least five benefits (e.g. paternity leave) that you could offer potential employees to attract them to the company. Present your ideas to the class.