

Time off for new fathers raises bias awareness

Level: Advanced (C1–C2)

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;
- research and discuss company benefits and suggest a possible future benefit that would be attractive to employees.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student, 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
2. The UK
3. France
4. Japan
5. The USA

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 | 7. bias |
| 2. paternity leave | 8. impact |
| 3. statutory | 9. empathise |
| 4. non-transferable | 10. stance |
| 5. spouse | 11. empirical |
| 6. level playing field | 12. productivity |

3. Understanding the article

Students work in pairs and answer the questions with as much information as possible from the article.

Key:

1. He was thrilled. (It 'blew his mind').
2. 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.
3. Two weeks for fathers and 52 weeks for mothers.
4. It found that fathers who took paternity leave were likely to share childcare and household responsibilities and that their spouses spent more time in paid work, more time physically at the workplace and were more likely to be full-time employed.
5. He was worried that his job might not be safe and that taking so much time off might affect his career and impact his team.
6. It only offers 12 weeks at full pay but all new mothers and fathers have to take this leave as it is mandatory.

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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 *statutory* and *insurer* 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. *benefits*
2. *pay gap*
3. *insurer*
4. *basic pay*
5. *recruitment*
6. *statutory*
7. *career*
8. *policy*
9. *earnings*
10. *budget*

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

Ask students to 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 or a private health insurance scheme. Then ask them to find any unusual or unique benefits that companies offer (e.g. free fruit in the office, games rooms, on-site laundry services, etc).

As an alternative way of doing this exercise, you could give each group a company or two to research (e.g. Google, Facebook, Walmart, John Lewis, etc), and ask them to fill out standard and non-standard benefits they find.

Then ask students to work individually and think of a benefit that would encourage loyalty to their company or attract people to work for it. They should note the advantages and possible disadvantages of introducing the benefit. They then present their ideas to the class. Take a class vote to find out which benefit would be the most popular.

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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)

- a period of time when a father is allowed to be away from work after the birth of his child (2 words, para 4)

- ordered by law or rule (para 4) _____
- belonging to one person and not legally able to be given to another person or used by them (para 6)

- a husband or wife (para 7) _____
- a situation that is fair for all the people involved (3 words, para 9)

- 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 (para 9) _____
- to have an effect or influence on someone or something (para 11)

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

10. an attitude or view about an issue that you state clearly (para 16)

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

12. the rate at which goods are produced, especially in relation to the time, money and workers needed to produce them (para 18) _____

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

BY LAUREN FEDOR



Lauren Fedor, 8 March 2019.
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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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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.

3 Understanding the article

Answer the questions with as much information as possible from the article.

1. How did Fahad Sayood feel when he heard he would be eligible to take six months' leave at full pay?

2. What is the 'equal parental leave policy' introduced by insurance company Aviva?

3. What is the typical paternity and maternity leave entitlement in the UK?

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4. What did a 2015 study in Quebec find?

5. What worries did Mr Sayood have?

6. How does US analytics company Humanyze differ from the other companies mentioned in the article?

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.

insurer	statutory	policy	earnings	benefits
recruitment	budget	pay gap	career	basic pay

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

1. _____ are extra money or other advantages that you get in addition to your salary from your employer as part of your job.
2. A _____ is the difference between what men earn and what women earn.
3. An _____ is a person or company that sells insurance.

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4. Your _____ is the pay you receive before any extra amounts of money or benefits are added.
 5. _____ is the process of finding people to join a company.
 6. If something is _____, it is required by law.
 7. A _____ is a job or series of related jobs that you do, especially a profession that you spend most of your working life in.
 8. A _____ is a set of plans or actions agreed by a business.
 9. A person's _____ are the amount of money they receive for their work.
 10. A company's _____ is the amount of money it has to spend on something.
- c. **Decide which of these 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 describes different approaches to paternity and maternity leave. Which of these approaches do you support? Give reasons for your answer.
- The article mentions several benefits of extended paternity leave. Which of these benefits do you think is the most important? Give reasons for your answer.
- In paragraph 9, the author refers to the 'level playing field' that insurance company Aviva wanted to create. Do you agree that this policy will reduce bias and promote talent 'particularly for women'? 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.

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6 Wider business theme – Benefits over and above basic pay

a. Use the internet to research the following:

Common financial benefits companies offer their employees

Any unusual or unique benefits and perks companies offer their employees

b. Think of a benefit that would encourage loyalty to your company or attract people to work for your company. Describe the advantages and possible disadvantages of this benefit. Present your ideas to the class.