1. Introduction

1.1. EY is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. In the UK, we employ 16,900 people working across the country in our offices, at client sites or in a location that enables them to deliver exceptional client service and to balance their personal and professional lives.

2. Our Policies

2.1. EY have ‘equalised’ all our parenting policies, such that the same pay and leave applies to maternity, adoption and shared parental leave.

2.2. EY pay 6 weeks at 100% of pay and 33 weeks at 50% pay. Up to 52 weeks of leave are available.

3. Rationale

3.1. Our aim is to encourage take up by making the enhanced policies as accessible as possible by minimising restrictions such as:

► Qualifying periods (which are the same as for statutory pay and leave);
► Minimum periods of leave (again same as statutory requirements);
► Requiring leave be taken within a certain time frame (there are no requirements to take leave within a certain number of weeks of the date of birth/adoption in order to receive any enhancement); or
► Taking into account weeks of leave taken by the employee’s spouse when calculating the rate of enhanced pay resulting in a lower rate of enhancement or none at all (EY will enhance statutory pay for employees based on the number of weeks that individual takes).

3.2. We actively considered abolishing maternity and paternity leave policies in order to simply our approach and offer shared parental leave for all employees becoming parents. The retention of statutory maternity, adoption and paternity leave and pay made this too complex to adopt when SPL was introduced. Our recommendation is to combine all statutory leave into a single Shared Parental Leave option. This would simplify the arrangements for employers and employees, as well as emphasising that parenting is gender-neutral.

3.3. When considering our response to the SPL legislation we consulted with our employees, via the EY Parents Network, using a questionnaire and focus groups, and considered the cost impact on the business. Our Parents Network reported that there is some discussion among men that, while they celebrate the existence of the new policy, they are still to be convinced that time away from their careers will be viewed positively by their superiors. We anticipated this and it is one reason why we set the full time pay level at 6
weeks, on the basis that this could be perceived as a manageable amount of time to take off and, at full pay, it was sufficiently enticing. We hoped to get many men taking shorter time initially, to build up confidence and role models. From there we hope that the take up and length of time may continue to grow.

4. Outcomes to date

4.1. 20 men and 3 women have taken, or are taking, SPL since the regulations were introduced in April 2015.

4.2. They are generally quite senior; their length of service with EY ranges from 3-20+ years with the average being 6.8 years and the salaries range from £20k to £100k+.

4.3. Most have taken between 3-6 weeks with two women and two men taking over three months of SPL.

4.4. To give a very rough sense of scale we estimate that since SPL was first taken there have been 290 people taking maternity/adoption leave so SPL represents 7.9% of that at present. This is very encouraging because, although it was difficult to gauge the likely take up, the estimate (from Working Families hosted employer forums) was that 5% of fathers would take SPL initially, increasing to 10% over 5 years.

4.5. We expect that the impact of SPL on the numbers of women taking maternity leave will be minimal, so our costs will not significantly reduce. And, we expect that our men will take SPL and thus there will be a new cost. However, the longer term benefits of enabling both our male and female employees to balance the priorities of new babies with work, in terms of our employee engagement, recruitment and retention, will compensate.

4.6. The external evidence [can we reference this?] tells us that the next generation entering the workforce expect greater balance and greater involvement with their children and families. Our own employee engagement survey tells us that our people, men and women, greatly value the flexibility they have to balance their professional and personal goals.

4.7. Shared Parental Leave only applies to the first year after the birth, but the challenge of balance and flexibility while fulfilling parenting responsibilities persists much longer. We have numerous informal and formal flexible working practices and position these very clearly. The most attractive is informal flexibility, empowering our people to have ‘greater choice over how, when and where they work’. Creating a culture based on trust and measured outputs, not inputs, is a key starting position.

4.8. We extend support to parents equally. For example we offer coaching to those taking leave of three months or more, to help ensure a smooth transition out of and back into the business. This Career & Family coaching is offered to mothers, fathers and adopters.
4.9. Training line managers to understand their role in the success of any parental leave is important. This is not about understanding the policy and process but about how their own attitudes and assumptions influence the culture and the success of those who take leave or work flexibly. EY mandate training for line managers of all those taking leave, both prior to the leave and again just ahead of the return to work.

4.10. Knowledgeable and consistent administrative support is essential. EY have a small team, as part of our HR Shared Services providing support to parents taking leave and their line managers. Employees are provided with a named individual from the team to contact for support and our systems for communication and information are excellent. All information, from policies to advice and case studies, are also available for employee self-service via our intranet. This in-person and virtual support is an essential feature, particularly as most of our people work away from offices at client sites, often with significant amounts of travel.

February 2016