

# CASE STUDY

## EQUALISING PARENTAL LEAVE



In November 2019, Bain & Company in the UK announced a new policy to offer equal parental leave for all employees. New parents – regardless of gender, or how they became parents – are eligible to receive up to 52 weeks of leave with the first 29 weeks fully paid. This case study outlines how they did it, and the key lessons learned on the journey.

### About the company

[Bain & Company](#) is a global consultancy that helps the world's most ambitious change makers define the future.

### The burning platform

The conversation on equalising parental leave at Bain & Company in the UK started in early 2019 with a review of their existing maternity policy, reflecting a desire to offer the best support they could at key life stages. “Only talking about maternity leave felt too narrow” reflects Helen Walker, EMEA Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Director.

Metrics played a key role in focusing attention. Despite setting a target to get to parity within their client-facing team, Bain & Company faced a continuing gender pay gap driven by low representation of women at the top of the firm.

Analysis showed that the biggest driver of this gap was the long-term consequence of recruiting outcomes – which drove the firm to mobilise an effort that has resulted in more than 50% of female

hires across all levels. The analysis also showed that once recruited, women and men had equal retention, and near parity in promotion rates – except for time taken out for maternity leave. This turned the firm's attention to its parental leave policy.

Furthermore, the main beneficiaries for improving parental leave policy were the firm's project leaders, who represented a growth constraint for the business. Retention of this population was critical, as employees at this level have taken significant time and investment to develop - with 'replacement' recruitment and integration being expensive and time consuming.

### **‘ONLY TALKING ABOUT MATERNITY LEAVE FELT TOO NARROW’**

The value of this policy as a retention tool helped form the ‘business case’ of economic benefits of money saved relative to the obvious cash costs of implementation. “Thinking about this in terms of retention was critical,” said Matt Trebilco, Vice President, Business Planning & Analysis. Phasing



the policy in over a two-year period, from 13 weeks in 2020 to 29 weeks in 2021, ensured the impact of retention upside came *before* the visible costs and consequences of paid leave.

### Engaging senior stakeholders

The group driving this effort worked hard to build supportive leaders when scoping and testing the policy, the majority of whom became huge advocates for change. There was a desire to do something bold and ambitious, and set a higher bar for the professional services industry.

Introducing equalised parental leave also aligned with Bain & Company's broader talent philosophy – of 'being there' at critical moments in employees' lives, demonstrating a visible commitment to supporting family life and equalising caring responsibilities, making a high-profile commitment to Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DE&I).

### Outcome

Following the launch of the equal parental leave policy, the organisation saw a 100% take-up in the phasing year (2020) and similar levels of engagement to date. The impact of the policy announcement was profound: "A colleague approached me in tears within minutes of the announcement - it was the proudest she had ever felt of an employer in 15 years of her professional career," shares UK Chief Talent Officer, Barney Hamilton.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Offering equalised parental leave is one of the most powerful and effective commitments to advancing workplace gender equality an employer can make.

If you are considering a similar policy, Bain & Company offers the following suggestions to help make this a reality.

1. Build a burning platform and outline why this needs to be done now.
2. Build a business case for change.
3. Find (or create) senior decision-making sponsors willing to make this happen.
4. Be thoughtful about the list of stakeholders, but don't allow caution or conservatism to derail your ambition.
5. Be bold - the effort will be worth it.

### CASE STUDIES

“I feel extremely fortunate to have been able to pursue Bain & Company’s extended parental leave. Being able to disconnect from the laptop and adapt to parenthood, and the new demands of family life, was very helpful in those precious early months. Having the flexibility to choose when to take the time allowed us to manage it around both our personal and professional commitments, as well as help enable dedicated, undisturbed time together as a family.” **James Langman, Partner**

“Our daughter was born in April 2020, and my wife spent seven months at home looking after her. Being able to hand over daily parenting responsibilities to me meant she felt ready and able to go back to work in November, which was good timing for her from a career perspective. She also valued being able to focus on her transition back to work, without the additional pressure of settling our daughter into childcare at the same time. For me, having the paid leave took all the financial considerations away and made this a very easy decision. I built a wonderful relationship with my daughter and felt recharged coming back to work. Crucially it has enabled us to create an effective sharing of parental responsibilities now we are both back at work full time.” **Matt Trebilco, Vice President for Business Planning & Analysis**

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