

The benefits or challenges experienced because of the amendments

- Whether the extended leave provisions and flexible working rights have benefited families

Children and parents are having an opportunity to spend the first year together, to build positive relationships and attachments. This has benefited both Mums and Dad's that appear to be using their maternity/paternity rights flexibly. Not all parents appear to be using their full entitlement; this anecdotally is because parents can't afford to take a full year out of work due to finances and some parents choose to go back early because it's right for them, it gives parents choice.

The flexibility the parental leave gives parents support them to make informed choices for their family and individual needs.

Parents receiving paid time to attend anti natal care is a positive support arm for expecting parents. Anti natal care is essential for positives outcomes of pregnancy for both the parents and the child.

On the other side of this we are observing both parents and children experiencing significant separation anxiety when they initially start nursery.

The separation issues appear greater now and potentially are projected onto the child. Parents approach and style of parenting also has significantly changed which could suggest parents are needing support.

Children are taking extensive periods to settle into nursery life than once seen. Children now on average are starting nursery at the age of one years old rather than previously on average at 6 months old. It could be argued the prolonged separation anxiety and the later age of starting nursery is having an impact on children's development and outcomes.

- How have these changes impacted your members and their businesses?

The changes to the law have had an impact on business, as highlighted above its great parents have choice and flexibility. Settings are managing their business with children on average starting nursery at 1 year old rather than 6 months old previously. If the parental leave was extended further nurseries may find themselves in a position of having to review their business model and questionably some settings wouldn't be able to maintain a sustainable business in the longer term, reducing capacity in the sector.

It would make more sense for positive outcomes for children, support to parents and sustaining businesses, if the funded childcare hours were extended to 2-year-olds for 30 hours (15 hours does not help working parents) rather than extend parental leave further. By increasing funded hours for parents, it would have a positive impact on the

island workforce, the economy but most importantly children having the opportunity to reach their potential and be prepared for starting statutory education.

- Have the amendments had any unintended consequences?

Over the last few years, we have seen a significant change in parenting styles and parental expectations for their children. We are aware of children with additional needs however we have seen a significant shift in the general population of children and an increase in their developmental needs. Particularly in their social development and emotional regulation.

The impact on settings, is higher resources are required not just for children with additional needs but also the general population of children. It's becoming more common, settings are having to put additional resources and one to one time with these children, due to children particularly not being able to self soothe or emotional regulate in line with normative development.

Settings find it a challenge to access appropriate support for children with additional needs. Therefore, accessing support for children without additional needs is practically impossible and the financial burden is held with the business.

- Do you believe the legislation has been effective in supporting employees while balancing business needs?

If you have a member of the team that goes on parental leave, in the current climate, i.e. the sector has a workforce crisis and is desperately short of qualified staff. It's extremely challenging to recruit on a temporary basis to cover parental leave. It's not unusual for parents not to have a concrete plan on when or if they will be returning to their role. However, the law states that their role must be protected for 12 months.

What typically happens is the employer carries the vacancy for the maternity period, and the burden falls on the rest of the staff team to do additional hours.

As the sector is not a highly paid career choice most employees do not return following their parental leave due to the cost of childcare. Therefore, we are losing staff in a workforce crisis unless the setting takes on the financial burden of reduced nursery fees, that has an impact on the business. Not all settings are in a financial position to offer discounted nursery spaces for their staff. Again, funded hours for parents from the age of 2 years old (30hrs) would help to ease this challenge.

- Are there any further improvements or adjustments you would suggest?

It would be helpful if there is any further amendments to the law that the sector is consulted and involved to ensure we get it right for families and the balance for employers.