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PwC makes parental leave more flexible for dads, mums and foster carers

Anna Patty | The Sydney Morning Herald

Jack Bell was relaxed about taking more than three months off work on parental leave but knows some other men would not feel as comfortable taking that much time away.

Now his colleagues at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Australia will have greater flexibility in how they take the leave – whether it is in one 90-day block or two or three days a week combined with work.

"It was something I was keen to do for me myself and my wife. But I know a lot of guys have a few hesitations in taking a chunk of time off," Mr Bell said. "By making it more flexible they can do it over a longer period or a couple of days a week."

Mr Bell, who works for PwC's Melbourne office, took three weeks off last year when his son Charlie was born and another three and a half months off this year.

"I had a great time. My wife was returning to work and we weren't comfortable for Charlie to go to day care yet," he said.

"It helped her transition back and gave me one-on-one time with Charlie. I loved every minute of it."

PwC has decided to make parental leave more flexible and to make it available to males and females from the day they start working for the company.

"We've updated our paid parental leave policy to make it more flexible and accessible to all new parents at PwC regardless of their particular circumstances," PwC chief diversity and inclusion officer Julie McKay said.



Jack Bell took 18 weeks of paid parental leave from PwC which is giving giving male and female workers greater flexibility in the way they take parental leave. Photo: Jason South

"This means our people can take the full 90 days in one block, or work two or three days a week for several months combined with days at work.

"We're hoping this change will encourage more dads to act as primary carers in the first 12 months of their child's life."



Jack Bell said he "loved every minute" of his parental leave. Photo: Jason South

Ms McKay said the paid parental leave offer was also open to foster carers and kinship carers and parents facing the tragedy of stillbirth or infant death, "which is unique among Australian businesses".

"We've done this because at PwC we recognise that parenting can take many diverse forms, and that things don't always go to plan," she said.

"When you sign up to be a foster carer every member of the family has a role to play"
-PwC's Michelle Hogg

"These changes, enacted through a simplified policy, challenge gender stereotypes, respect different family models, and enable us to better support all of our people at this pivotal moment in their life. We also believe they will deliver commercial benefits to our firm through higher levels of retention, engagement and productivity."

Andrew McPherson, partner in PwC's Assurance Practice, is a foster carer. He and his wife have three children and have fostered 14 other children.

"We've always been passionate about caring for underprivileged children and providing them with a better life. We also want our boys to appreciate what they have and have empathy for others," Mr McPherson said.

"Over the years we've cared for 14 children, mostly aged two and under, alongside our own three boys."

Michelle Hogg, director in PwC's Financial Advisory Practice, is currently on 12 months leave to be a foster carer.

"It is not a role that one member of the family takes on, when you sign up to be a foster carer every member of the family has a role to play," she said.

"We have been carers for almost four years and during that time have done emergency, short-term, long-term and respite care."

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies also issued a statement saying it was "delighted to have partners in the corporate world who are providing a tangible and concrete contribution to the work we are doing with foster care recruitment".

In a written statement issued through PwC, Family and Community Services Minister Pru Goward welcomed the new PwC workplace policy to provide a flexible policy around leave for foster and kinship care.

"Vulnerable children and young people in out-of-home care need people from the community to help them find a safe, permanent and loving home for life. This might be by providing a home while their parents get the help they need to change or by becoming kinship carers, guardians or adoptive parents," she said.