



Arbenigwyr mewn Busnes  
Experts in Business

John Griffiths AM  
Chair  
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018

Dear John

**RE: Inquiry into Pregnancy, maternity and work in Wales**

Thank you for your invitation to give evidence to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's inquiry into pregnancy, maternity and work in Wales. FSB Wales is Wales' largest business organisation with around 10,000 members and a Wales Policy Unit that directs our policy activity.

FSB Wales shares the objectives of the committee of protecting the rights of pregnant women and those on maternity leave, and of helping employers navigate all elements of the legislative landscape so that their business can flourish.

The vast majority of small businesses agree that supporting pregnant women and those on maternity leave is in the best interests of their organisation, and society. Business has a powerful role to play in promoting a working culture which empowers and supports women.

Ensuring women want to, and do, return to work after maternity leave is good for their employers and the wider economy. Understanding the rules and legal rights of employees who are pregnant or on maternity leave, alongside sharing best practice, is essential to achieving this.

Consideration should be given however, to the challenges faced by smaller businesses – particularly micro businesses where the workforce might only number three or four employees. The loss of any one employee for significant periods can often leave a business significantly impacted and businesses often have to navigate this challenge without professional HR or resourcing support.

Employers of all sizes worry about making errors in relation to the rights of employees who are either pregnant or taking maternity leave. FSB research shows 29 per cent of small firms find maternity and paternity leave among the most time-consuming and difficult areas of legislation to comply with.

This is also borne out by data collected by Acas: it received over "14,000 calls last year about pregnancy and maternity issues, an increase of almost 10% on the previous year". It's not surprising that employers can become confused. The laws protecting women who are expectant or taking maternity leave are quite complex and detailed.

This suggests to us that some small businesses need help to navigate their responsibilities, and so FSB will continue to work with organisations, like Acas and Welsh Government, to ensure that small businesses have the systems in place to protect the rights of their female employees. This is critical if we are to achieve a truly inclusive workplace.

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Indeed, it is likely that a significant number of SMEs are unable to secure professional advice in this area and therefore how Welsh Government marshals its business advice and support in this area will be crucial.

We are also aware that Acas has recently produced [helpful guidance](#) that can help employers of any size best navigate employee pregnancy, maternity leave and their return to work following pregnancy. We feel this guidance is a must read for any employer or HR professional and as a practical takeaway we would suggest that Business Wales continues to be aware of this guidance and can sign-post employers to it.

For our part, FSB provides its members with employment and legal advice in order to help them comply with the legislation in this area. We also work closely with Acas to ensure our services closely reflect latest practice.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Francis', written over a light grey grid background.

**Ben Francis**  
**Wales Policy Chair**  
**Federation of Small Businesses Wales**