



Buddle Findlay

INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

FINALIST

**WATCH
VIDEO**



THE STORY

Research shows the ‘motherhood penalty’ in New Zealand limits a woman’s potential earnings by 12.5 per cent over her entire career, translating into lost income in the hundreds of thousands.

Furthermore, many women who are mothers pay an extra penalty in foregone KiwiSaver contributions, leaving them with less money in retirement.

Buddle Findlay, one of New Zealand’s leading commercial and public law firms, has launched a market-leading parental leave package and made a commitment to removing the negative impacts parenthood creates for its working mothers as part of a bid to create gender equity and support its people to thrive.

Director People and Culture, Lucy Ryan says the firm began to look at the issue in 2021 through workshops run by Diversity & Inclusion subcommittees in each office and a written survey sent to current and former team members.

“We found the motherhood penalty existed at Buddle Findlay. Whilst this often resulted from well-meaning intentions, such as sheltering people from high workloads, we knew it was something we needed to address.”

A working party was formed, with 11 partners and people and culture representatives meeting fortnightly in 2022 to explore, test and recommend a new way forward.

One of the first decisions was to agree to pay KiwiSaver contributions during paid and unpaid parental leave, as well as ensuring holiday pay was of full value on return from parental leave.

Following numerous hui, in November 2022 the partners confirmed a progressive paid parental leave package, effective from 1 January 2023.

“Both parents are eligible for 26 weeks of paid leave while they undertake the primary care of the child. We also provide four weeks paid partner’s leave. Both can be taken within the first 24 months of the child being born. The hope is that this will result in the responsibility for childcare being shared more equitably between the parents,” Lucy says.

Alongside the leave package is a series of commitments the firm has made to help its people work to their full potential and support their career aspirations by doing what it can to remove (and not create) barriers to their growth. This includes ensuring that parental leave is a smooth process before, during and after periods of leave.

Buddle Findlay supported the introduction of the new package with coaching and online resources for leaders and those going on leave. The coaching, which helps people navigate managing their career and care responsibilities is available to everyone and can apply to a variety of circumstances including caring for elderly whānau or dealing with menopause.

To track the success of the recently introduced package, Buddle Findlay plans to measure career progression right through to partner level.

“Our goal is to increase female representation in the partnership and at senior leadership team levels. Our current percentage of women in partnership is 33 per cent - this is set to increase significantly over the next five years,” Lucy says.

The new policy is already having a positive impact for parents in the organisation.

People and culture manager Margot Elworthy was one of the first people to become a parent after the change was implemented. “The package has allowed us to focus on what’s important and put everything in to giving our child Bowie the best start. It means we can enjoy the special moments and time as a whānau with less pressure while away from work.”

For senior associate Mark Mulholland, it’s been a positive for the whole family: “The increased focus on gender equality has given me the opportunity to spend more quality time with my daughter, while enabling my wife to continue developing her career.”

THE CHALLENGE

Buddle Findlay wanted to mitigate any negative impacts being a parent was creating for its working mothers.

“The package has allowed us to focus on what’s important.”

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Investigate issues faced by parents through workshops and a survey of past and present team members
- Co-opt senior leadership to explore solutions in collaboration with people and culture representatives
- Introduce a parental leave package providing up to 26 weeks' paid leave for either parent and paid partner's leave
- Provide coaching to team members taking parental leave and their leaders
- Continue to test that the firm is providing a fair package of financial benefits and remuneration, ensuring parents are not penalised for taking parental leave
- Include parental leave management in the partners' action and accountability framework



RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Buddle Findlay partners and senior leaders are growing their leadership capabilities through coaching introduced as part of the parental leave package
- Buddle Findlay is better placed to attract and retain the best talent and contribute to lowering the gender pay gap and creating more equal parenting opportunities
- Sharing the policy via LinkedIn has created awareness of this mahi to mitigate the motherhood penalty among other organisations in the sector and client organisations

KEY LEARNING

By addressing the financial and career penalties faced by working mothers, Buddle Findlay is supporting its own people to thrive and contributing to a societal change that will mean childcare responsibilities are more evenly distributed between parents, creating better gender equity in New Zealand workplaces.

**DO WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WELL
AND DO WELL BECAUSE OF IT.**

Visit diversityworks.nz or call 0800 DIVERSITY (0800 348 377)