



Top Employers for  
Working Families

**Benchmark  
Report**

**2019**



changing the way we live and work

# Top Employers for Working Families 2019

## Top 10 (in alphabetical order)

- American Express
- Crown Prosecution Service
- DWF
- Experian
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- Lloyds Banking Group
- Pinsent Masons
- Public Health England
- Royal Bank of Scotland
- Southdown Housing

## Top 11-30 (in alphabetical order)

- Allen & Overy
- Bank of England
- Citigroup
- Deloitte
- Dentsu Aegis Network
- Food Standards Agency
- Hogan Lovells
- Imperial College
- Independent Living Fund Scotland
- Intellectual Property Office
- Mayer Brown
- Ministry of Justice
- Mishcon de Reya
- National Assembly for Wales
- Norton Rose Fulbright
- Royal Bank of Canada
- Simmons & Simmons
- UBS AG
- Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield
- Yorkshire Building Society

## Introduction

Working Families' employer membership is made up of some of the UK's leading public, private, and third sector organisations. Members are invited to take part in the Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark, providing an annual assessment of their flexible, agile, and family-friendly working policy and practice.

The Benchmark is unique, capturing both the detail of policy and the culture in which it operates. Working Families' employer members use their individual results to compare against peers and competitors, create an evidence base of their achievements, and identify improvements. For organisations that want to progress, it provides an invaluable platform to learn, assess, and develop.

The Benchmark constantly evolves to reflect new practice and thinking, ensuring that participants are focussing on current and emerging issues: it measures not just best practice, but provides a guide to what employers should be paying attention to. This summary report considers some of the main findings from the 2019 Benchmark, and gives an insight into the policies, practices, and cultures within some of the UK's most family-friendly employers.



Media partner

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## Culture and attitude towards flexibility

The true cultural attitude toward flexibility is perhaps the most important issue for organisations that want to excel.

Culture determines policy success; it has a crucial role in underpinning strategic planning and it affects the lived experience of employees at all levels in their use of flexibility. Understanding workplace culture is essential, as it provides a guide to what actions employers need to take to build a flexible organisation.

Taken individually and collectively, the barriers to flexibility in organisations (figure 1) reflect the prevailing cultural attitude toward flexible working: that it does not enjoy the resourcing it needs, that the rationale and benefits have not been communicated, and that key personnel (line managers) who are crucial to delivering it have not had the investment in training that they need. While reported attitudes to flexibility are positive (for example, high agreement that work life balance is a normal part of life), they can only be sustained and improved if practical activities that build and embed the culture—such as training line managers—takes place.

Overall there was a mixed picture in 2019 around attitudes. Very few employers (17%) said that a life cycles approach wasn't supported, as employers recognise that flexibility needs change over time. Part-time workers are valued and generally considered as efficient (or even more so) than full-time ones. But there are some more negative findings. More than a third of respondents said that managers still don't trust people to work unless they can see them. And more than 40% reported moderate or high agreement with the statement that getting in early or staying late is still seen as a demonstration of commitment. This is problematic for two reasons. First, it gives people with caring responsibilities a disadvantage when it comes to career progression, as they are not able to put in these extended hours. And secondly, long hours are ineffective, rewarding time spent working instead of outputs.

Figure 1: Biggest barriers to flexibility are:

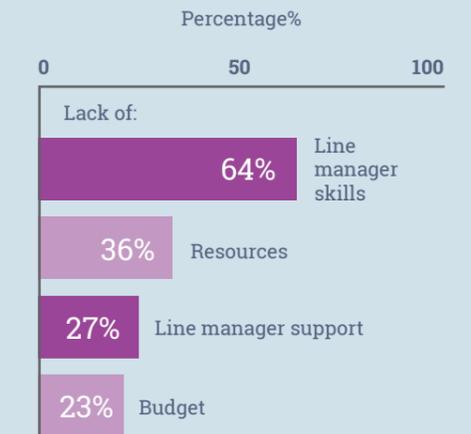
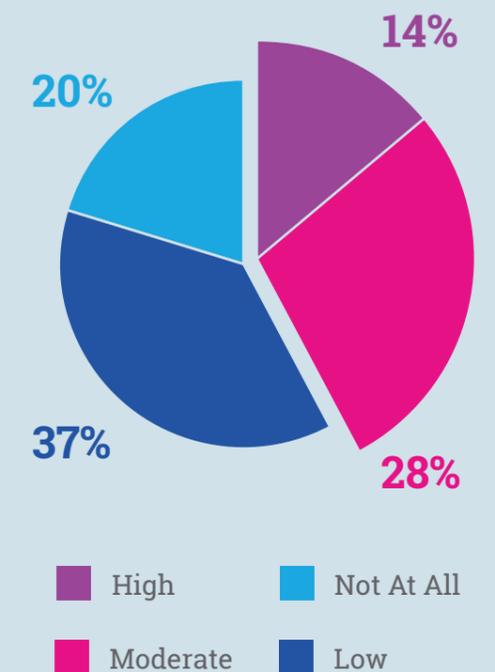
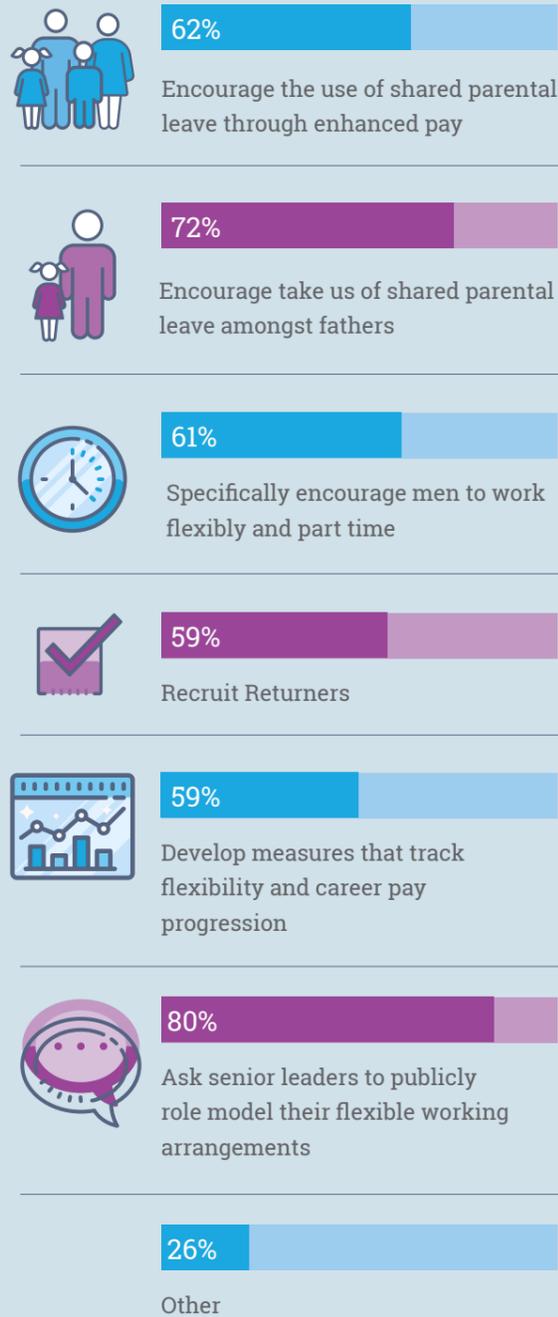


Figure 2: Arriving early or working late means high commitment:



# Gender pay and progression

**Figure 3:**  
Plans to address issues around gender pay and progression over 12 months



## In 2019 the Benchmark reflects employers' engagement with issues around gender pay.

Almost two thirds of employers (64%) said that addressing their gender pay gap is their biggest opportunity for developing work-life balance in the coming year. There are several ways in which they are planning to do this.

Encouraging fathers to make more use of leave and to work flexibly and part-time is a key strategy for employers to close their gender pay gaps. Rates of men working part-time are low among the employers surveyed: only one man for every three women works part-time, reinforcing the 'women care, men work' gender stereotype.

An important part of tackling gender inequality is understanding the career trajectories and opportunities of employees: determining where the pressure points and gaps appear and at what points are they exacerbated. There is work to be done here. Only 29% of organisations said they track their flexible working requests and outcomes by gender, a vital metric that can illuminate cultural issues about who feels comfortable making requests, as well as the outcomes of those requests. Organisations are better at measuring performance outcomes by gender – 65% do this – but are less good at measuring performance outcomes by working pattern, with only half collecting this data. The current gendered landscape of flexibility, especially around part-time work (and the part-time pay gap), means it is imperative that employers incorporate other perspectives on gender into their reporting, too.

# Parental Leave

Most employers surveyed are going beyond the statutory minimums in their maternity, paternity, and Shared Parental Leave policies. The most common maternity leave enhancement among respondents is to offer 26 weeks on full pay.

In order to qualify, mothers must have a minimum length of service (the statutory requirement), and in 37% of organisations must commit to returning to work post maternity.

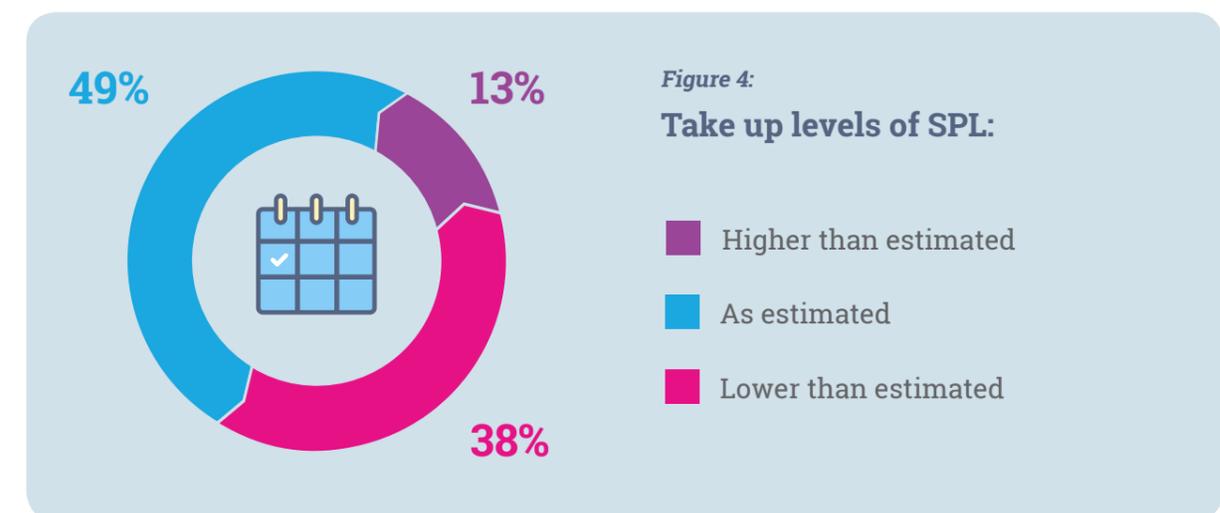
Most organisations surveyed (80%) offer two weeks' paternity leave (the statutory requirement), although 20% offer more than this. Seventy six per cent offer fully paid paternity leave for two weeks, with 16% offering longer periods of pay for longer leaves.

Shared Parental Leave (SPL) is more varied, with organisations taking different approaches to pay. Eighty two per cent match their SPL scheme to their enhanced maternity offer, with the remainder offering the statutory minimum. This meant that the most common SPL pay is for 26 weeks. Where SPL is matched to enhanced maternity leave, the most common way to do this is to use a 'family tied and floating' mechanism: leave can be taken at any time in the first year after birth or adoption, and the number of enhanced weeks available to the father/partner taking leave are the same as those available to the mother minus whatever weeks she takes (or intends to take), regardless of who her employer is. Seventeen per cent offer the gold

standard of individual matching: fathers/partners receive their own standalone entitlement to enhanced leave, regardless of any leave and pay taken by the mother

Take-up of SPL remains relatively low. Around two thirds (64%) of organisations reported take-up rates in single figures for fathers, and take-up is even lower for mothers. Only 7% of organisations had 10 or more mothers taking SPL in the last 12 months. However, this is not unexpected, as the chart below shows.

Reflecting on the ambitions that employers have for the use of Shared Parental Leave to drive changes in behaviour that will positively impact their gender pay gaps, there is clearly much more work that needs to be done. Setting higher targets and ambitions about take-up rates and supporting take-up by enhancing pay and flexibility of leave should be high priorities. Promoting flexible working to fathers post-SPL will both meet the needs of fathers and help to reduce gender stereotyping and the pay gap. Evidence that Shared Parental Leave does make a difference came through in the 25% of employers who said that it had resulted in women returning to work sooner after childbirth.



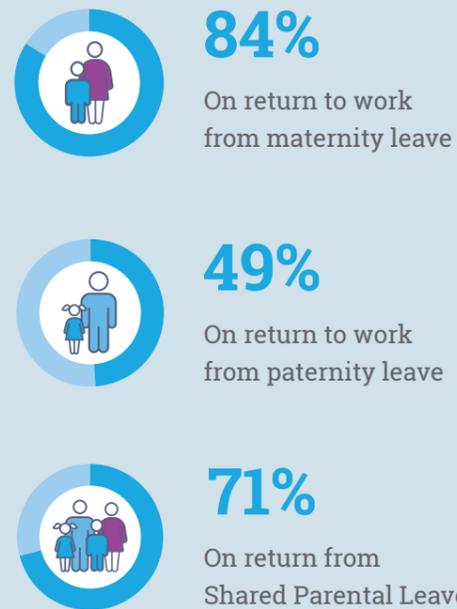
**Figure 4:**  
Take up levels of SPL:

- Higher than estimated
- As estimated
- Lower than estimated

## Supporting policy with practice

Employers are communicating their policy and practice around flexibility and family-friendly working in a variety of ways, from 'lunch-and-learns', to seminars, to speeches and messages from senior leaders.

**Figure 5:**  
**When do you remind employees of their rights and opportunities to request flexible working?**

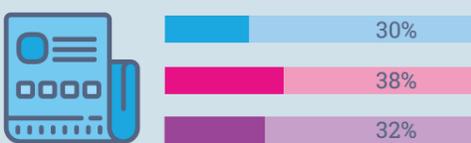


They are also making use of employee networks to address both specific employee groups (for example, working parents) and specific subjects (caring for elderly relatives, parenting teenagers, etc). These activities are vital as they show the organisation's support for family-friendly working. However, these need to be backed up with practical support, too, underpinning policy to make it a realistic and viable option. For example, there is scope for employers to focus more on fathers in promoting flexible working around family leave (figure 5).

Supporting flexible working requires line managers to understand not just its benefits, but to have the skills to be able to make decisions about flexibility and to manage it effectively. The Benchmark shows that 70% of organisations surveyed are providing training for line managers. But only 45% make this training compulsory. Consequently, only around a third (31%) of organisations have trained more than half of their managers. As line manager knowledge and skill were identified as a barrier to flexibility, increasing the number of managers who are trained will remove this barrier. Employers should consider making training compulsory, as leaving it as optional means managers might forego training to prioritise workloads. By not making training compulsory, it may also send the signal that flexibility is not a business priority but instead something that is optional for managers to engage with.

The adoption of flexible recruitment practices by the employers who took the Benchmark suggests an overall shift to a position where flexibility is a default way of working. Forty-one per cent of employers said that they analyse all jobs to determine the potential for flexibility before advertising the vacancy, and a further 41% said that they do this for some jobs. More than half ask managers to justify full-time hiring, 31% saying this happened for all vacancies. Thirty per cent of employers said that all their external job adverts include information about how flexible the position could be, enabling organisations to increase the size of the talent pool available for the role, as many people need flexibility from day one. Increasing the proportion of part-time and flexible jobs is desirable from a perspective of building an organisational culture where flexibility is intrinsic, rather than being retrofitted. The Government is currently considering how to incentivise employers to take a part-time and flexible-by-default approach to recruitment.

**Figure 6:** Yes No Some



**Do you require external adverts to identify how flexible a position could be?**  
(i.e. location, hours, time)?

## Measuring use and impact of flexibility

Employers who took the Benchmark were able to provide data about the use of flexible working, although identifying quantifiable impacts was more difficult.

The overall picture around flexible working use and patterns is further complicated by the use of informal flexible working that is not recorded. More than one employer said that flexibility within their organisation is widespread, but that it is largely unrecorded. The Benchmark recognises the issues of tracking flexible working and suggests ways in which informal flexibility can be assessed. It is important for employers to be able to come to an informed estimate of the levels of flexible take-up for a range of reasons, from productivity and performance to strategic planning decisions.

Employers are making use of the measures suggested in the Benchmark to understand the flexibility in their organisations. Ninety per cent use their staff survey, 77% use feedback from their HR business partner, 70% consider feedback from employee resource groups, 45% look at the use of office space, and 44% look at use of remote working tech. Less-used methods include exit interviews, line manager and 360 feedback, dialogue with trade unions, and take-up of non-mandatory training in managing flexible working by managers.

Employers were able to use their data on flexible workers to evaluate the effects on the organisation. For example, retention rates are higher for part-time workers, and flexible workers are less likely to take unplanned sickness absence. Part-time staff also had better satisfaction levels with their work-life balance and their control over working life: positive evidence of the effects of flexibility.

However, organisations could only offer limited evidence of the benefits of flexibility for the whole organisation. This reflects the complexity for many large organisations in showing a cause-and-effect mechanism for flexibility and family-friendly working, and suggests that perhaps the search for a one-size-fits-all business case is not going to be possible. Rather, organisations should focus on building up evidence from a diversity of metrics, some of which are outlined above, to win hearts and minds and change behaviours.

**Figure 7: Effects on Organisation**



## Summary

**The 2019 Benchmark shows that for many employers, flexibility is as much a culture change activity as it is a policy one.**

That's not to say that no more effort is required to improve policy. On the contrary, renewed effort is needed to address some of the cultural issues. Policy to support fathers to take more of a caring role is still required, brought into sharp focus by gender pay gap reporting requirements. And policy to drive job design and flexible recruitment is also required. Although many of the entrants to the Benchmark should be rightly proud of the policies and practices they have built within their organisations, new challenges that need to be met mean that employers must continually examine and develop their policy offer.

Supporting policy through practice is good in places, but in others needs development. Practice includes things like training line managers and ensuring equality of opportunity for all employees in accessing flexible working. But to do this requires a knowledge of how flexibility is playing out in the organisation, and this is one aspect of practice that is behind others. Employers are making real efforts to engage with the difficult business of measuring, but this is still patchy and many key indicators are still unexamined. For those HR and diversity colleagues charged with managing flexibility and tackling things like the gender pay gap, not having this information is fighting with one arm tied behind your back. The Benchmark shows that in this area, there is still work to be done.

## Get in touch



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