

Working Families Index 2022

**Flexible working post Covid:
actions for employers**



Working Families Index 2022 - Actions for Employers

working families 





The Working Families Index – what does it tell us and why does it matter?

Two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Working Families Index* provides a valuable tool to assess the impact of this seismic event on the work and lives of families. We surveyed 2,806 parents and carers from diverse backgrounds, gathering their stories to capture a snapshot of their lived experience. Hearing the voice of real families is crucially important in informing working practices, shaping policy, and ultimately improving the work-life balance and wellbeing of the wider population. This is where leading employers have a key role to play – catalysing change in workplaces by providing examples of best practice for others to follow.



Jane van Zyl
CEO, Working Families

The *Working Families Index* report is a valuable resource for employers and policy-makers who are eager to help improve the workplace experience of employees with caring responsibilities, ultimately enhancing their quality of life as a whole. Talking Talent is proud to partner with Working Families to share data-driven insight and help raise awareness and understanding of the challenges facing working families today.



Lucinda Quigley
Head of Working Parents, Talking Talent





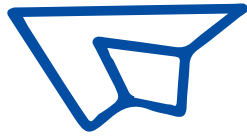
Flex and grow:

Take the lead and benefit from flexible working

Whether your organisation is large or small, parents and carers will make up a significant proportion of your workforce. As the population ages, and caring responsibilities increase, working to connect with and support your employees will be ever more important. In this briefing, to be produced annually, we highlight the key findings of the *Working Families Index* alongside actions that can be introduced in your workplace to support employees so they can meet their caring and work responsibilities and fulfil their potential within your organisation.

What is the Working Families Index?

The *Working Families Index* is a survey carried out by Working Families, in partnership with Talking Talent, to determine how working families are managing the balance between work and family life in the UK. It's part of our ongoing research into the challenges faced by working families and how these change over time, and builds on similar surveys we have carried out since 2012.



Key finding 1:

Families are struggling financially

The research shows that families are finding it harder to manage financially, with 3 in 5 parents and carers reporting it has become more difficult to raise a family. The pandemic has impacted the financial security of families. Over 4/5ths of single parent families and over half of two child couples already fall below minimum income standards, with the full force of the cost of living crisis yet to bite. Of the families surveyed, younger families, single parents, larger families, self-employed, those living in London and low earners have been hit the hardest and are likely to find it harder still to weather the approaching storm.



Action plan

Look at the Living Wage

Minimising the stress of money worries means employees are better able to focus whilst at work. Help employees at every level of your business meet rising costs by ensuring you offer the Living Wage with living hours, providing staff with a secure and regular income. Think beyond permanent employees. Are your seasonal and contract staff included? Do the companies in your supply chain adhere to the Living Wage as well?

Support childcare costs

Childcare can be prohibitively expensive, but there are many ways you can help with these costs. Subsidies towards ongoing childcare, holiday club provision or loans to cover nursery deposits can facilitate working for many families.



What is flex?

We asked parents and carers about the flexible working they do. When we refer to flex in this briefing, we are specifically talking about:

- Home-based working
- Hybrid working (both home and site-based working)
- Job share
- Reduced hours
- Term time hours
- Variable hours
- Control over when work is undertaken

There are so many possibilities for flexibility in the workplace and they should be tailored to your workforce to have the greatest benefit.

Key finding 2:

Flex fosters loyalty but go beyond policy

Flex is good for business. It boosts performance, increases productivity and as our research shows, it improves job retention. But unlocking these benefits takes more than policy, managers must be on board. Their understanding of the positive impact of flex can transform an employee's experience, resulting in longer term commitment. Parents and carers surveyed who felt the organisation cared about their work and home balance were almost two and half times more likely to intend to stay within their role than those who did not feel this way.

Action plan

Train managers

Help managers appreciate the benefits of flexible working through coaching or training. Broadening an understanding of different working patterns and how to manage flexible teams can make the difference in making flex work.

Talk about flex

Develop the channels of communication around flexible working, for example by making it part of the 1:1 process. Use training to empower line managers to have conversations and provide tools to facilitate discussion.

Lead from the top

Leaders who put flexible working into action can change perception. 'Walking the talk' can be a powerful force in shifting attitudes.



Key finding 3:

Flex isn't fair - yet

The pandemic accelerated flexible working, with over half of parents and carers reporting an impact on flexible working. But the shift has not been an equal one. Whilst knowledge-based industries have benefitted most from a growth in hybrid working, working from home is not an option, or the preferred choice, for all. When it comes to flexible working, there isn't one size that fits all. With solution-based thinking, the future of flex can be for everyone.

Action plan

Find the flex that fits

Consult with employees who can't work from home. Do they have an alternative vision for flexibility? You may discover they have their own solutions. A team that uses a variety of flex arrangements to suit everyone can be just as productive.

Experiment

Trial different working arrangements to see how they work. Many employees would be open to testing out an alternative to make sure it works in practice.



Key finding 4:

Flex can be good for careers but women in part-time jobs still report less progression

There's growing evidence that flexible working can support people in their careers, with just under two thirds of parents with flexible working arrangements reporting that they had also learnt new skills whilst working flexibly. Across the survey, parents and carers who had flexible working arrangements tended to report higher rates of career progression than those without. Whilst this seems to indicate a positive shift in attitudes toward flex that we can celebrate, it remains the case that people in part-time roles – who are predominantly women - are still more generally at a disadvantage when it comes to career progression.

Action plan

Keep track

Broaden your pay and career progression process to monitor working patterns as well as gender.

Celebrate flex success

Signal that flex works by publicising the flexible working patterns of newly promoted staff. Do your senior leadership team use flex? Let people know!

Make it about output

Measure performance by results, not where and when the work gets done.



Key finding 5:

Culture matters

The pandemic helped normalise flexible working. But individual experience was often determined by workplace culture. Maintaining boundaries between work and home life had become a challenge for almost half the parents and carers surveyed. Working additional hours was commonplace, with three quarters of parents regularly working extra hours, predominantly because of finances, workload, and expectation. Flexible working should not mean always being available. Flex, when done right, enhances wellbeing, allowing everyone to thrive and perform at their best.

Action plan

Set the limits

Agree 'ways of working' protocols that include employees taking breaks, not responding to emails outside working hours and alerting line managers when unable to deliver within working hours.

Fit for the job

Be realistic with expectations. Can the tasks allocated in a role be completed within the given hours?

Managing Flex

When it comes to flexible working, managerial support shapes the employee experience. This was especially true during the pandemic, when communication was highly valued.

'Fantastic. In the office my manager was difficult to get a hold of, she was always busy and talking to someone or in meetings. Now we can instant message and have a quick check in via video chat and she is much more widely available without distractions of an office.'

'Better, as we have communicated more now than before Covid.'

The future is flexible



Taking it forward

If you'd like support to put the suggestions from this briefing into action, or you'd like to make your workplace more family-friendly, we have a range of tools and a team of experts that can help. Contact our Employer Services team by emailing

employers@workingfamilies.org.uk to discuss how.

About Working Families

Working Families empowers employers to leverage the benefits of flex and family friendly policies and practices. Together with families, employers and policy makers, we're working towards a society where everyone has equal access to employment and career progression. This year, we are proud to be partnering with Talking Talent, the sponsor of the *Working Families Index* 2022, who work with clients to build inclusive cultures that drive belonging, engagement and performance.

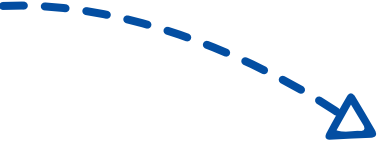
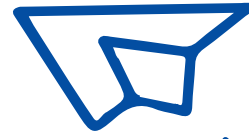


About Talking Talent, sponsors of the *Working Families Index*

For over 15 years Talking Talent has been providing some of the world's most successful organisations with transformational coaching and development programmes that encourage everyone, and every business to perform at its best. Its global delivery and deep local expertise are central to that. Talking Talent believes that coaching-led approaches to inclusion, purpose and belonging have the biggest impact on performance. Its deep, systemic approach to inclusion creates real behavioural change that lasts. Whether it is enhancing leadership capabilities, facilitating safe dialogue, guiding talent through career-life transitions, or delivering leadership programmes for under-represented groups, its coaching solutions inspire inclusive cultures so that people and business can thrive.







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