

Families and flexible working post Covid-19

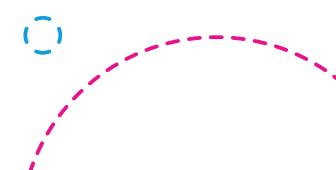






Key Findings

- Families across the UK are struggling financially, a trend exacerbated by the pandemic, and set to grow significantly with the cost of living crisis.
- Additional hours are routine for many, driven by financial need and working culture.
- Most of our sample worked with some degree of flexibility. Among those surveyed who didn't work flexibly, three quarters wanted to.
- Flexibility can foster a supportive culture in a workplace. Line managers are key to successful flexible working.
- Attachment to flexibility means many choose to stay in roles where they already have it.
- Employers can benefit from the loyalty of flexible workers.
- Flexible working can be linked to career progression, but mothers and particularly those in part-time roles still suffer disproportionately when it comes to career progression.
- Covid-19 accelerated some types of flexible working but there is work to be done to ensure that access to flexible working is fair and that more roles are advertised as being flexible from day one.
- Inequality of access is the next big challenge: access to flexibility continues to be tied to income and particular types of industry and job role.



Covid-19 had a clear negative impact on financial security for the majority of working families. While the pandemic has driven the growth of certain types of flexible working, access to its benefits remains unequal across industries.

The *Working Families Index* is the most comprehensive study of the experience of work and family life in the UK.

Based on a survey of 2,806 parents and carers in late 2021, it examines finances, working arrangements, managing and sharing childcare, and personal wellbeing – and tracks their development over time.

The Index, sponsored by our partners Talking Talent, builds on 8 years of previous research. It offers new insight into the effect of the societal impact of Covid-19 on working families. Most notably, we see the impact of the pandemic on family finances and access to flexible work. Compared with survey findings from just two years ago, significantly more parents report finding it financially harder to raise a family. This is now a clear trend.

Covid-19 has had a clear negative impact financial security. Younger families, single parents, and lower earners have been hardest hit financially. At the same time, there has been a 15% increase in the number of parents who work flexibly: 70% versus 55% in our research from 2019. This change has been driven largely by the pandemic.

Many employers are now offering flexible working where before it would have been unthinkable.

However, inequalities remain when it comes to both who can access flexible working and opportunities for career progression. Working parents and carers are represented in all walks of life, and every industry. Many of them work in knowledge professions in jobs that can be 'done from anywhere'. But many are 'place-based'.

For our society's keyworkers – doctors, nurses, teachers, nursery workers, those who keep shops open and work in vital trades – working at home is less of an option. Covid may have shifted the dial on home and hybrid working, but true flexibility has never been just about 'homeworking'. Flexible working can and must work for everyone, not just a few.

What's clear from the *Working Families Index* is that some industries and their employees are benefitting more from 'flex' than others. As we emerge from the pandemic and millions of families face a cost of living crisis, we shine a spotlight on the needs and interests of working parents to improve their experience of job quality and create fairer, more productive workplaces for all.



Jave van Jane van Zyl

CEO, Working Families



Lucinda Quigley

Lucinda Quigley
Head of Working Parents,
Talking Talent

"Flexible working can and must work for everyone, not just a few."





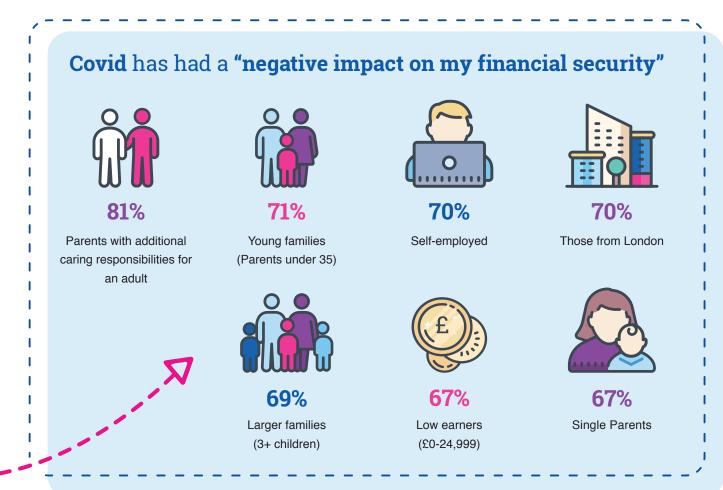
The majority of parents and carers surveyed were finding it financially tough to raise a family. Looking back, we can see an upward trend of financial struggle. The 2022 cost of living crisis will almost certainly increase the number of working parents and carers living in poverty.

60% of respondents reported that making ends meet and raising a family has become more difficult 'over the last three years'. This represents a significant increase from just 45% in 2019. This is now a trend, as year on year since this question was first asked in 2017, a greater number of parents agree that it is becoming financially more difficult to raise a family.

Three in five respondents agreed that making ends meet has become more difficult over the last three years.

Young families and parents with extra caring responsibilities are hardest hit.

61% of survey respondents said that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on financial security. Certain groups in particular were finding it especially hard:



Across the UK, more than half of two-child couples fell below minimum income standards.¹

To reach the Minimum Income Standard in 2022, a single parent with two children aged between two and eighteen would need to earn £36,100 a year. A couple in the same situation would need £41,267 between them. For single parents and coupled parents living in London this rises to £49,400 and £60,533 respectively.

Almost all - over 4/5ths – of two-child single parent households in the survey fell below this Minimum Income Standard.

Nearly 1/3 of parents and carers in our survey reported taking on paid work beyond their contracted hours because they needed additional income.

Childcare is fundamental to most parents' ability to work, but unaffordable for many. The experience of the pandemic is that availability of childcare impacts not just capacity to work but also career progression, particularly for mothers.

Most parents used a mix of formal and informal childcare provision, with people in London least likely to be using grandparents to support them.

Over half of parents surveyed said availability of childcare impacts capacity to work.

Mothers were twice as likely to report availability of childcare having a 'big impact' on their ability to work than fathers.

Seven in ten parents would need to consider childcare options before going for a new job or promotion.

This is particularly true for mothers. Over a third agreed strongly with this compared to a quarter of fathers.

Younger and larger families were most likely to find cost an obstacle to accessing childcare and parents from lower and middle income households were twice as likely than those in higher income households (£60K+) to say that affordability was a barrier.

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¹ Developed in partnership between the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Loughborough University, the Minimum Income Standard provides a household income baseline required to meet a standard of living that everyone in the UK should be able to achieve, as determined by members of the public.



Parents of young children are particularly attracted by flexible working because it helps with 'the juggle'. Among those surveyed who didn't work flexibly, three quarters wanted to.

While parents are increasingly likely to cite work-life balance and wellbeing for reasons to want to work flexibly, childcare was the main reason for wanting to work flexibly across the different types of flexible working arrangements, with hybrid working being a notable exception.

Hybrid workers on the whole were more likely to be men, and it remains the case that mothers were significantly more likely than fathers to link their desire to work flexibly with the need to manage childcare.

This year's Index suggests that the greater availability of home and hybrid working led to a positive impact around managing childcare with many parents saying they could find ways to enjoy more quality time with their children, though of course lockdowns presented well documented challenges for many with home-schooling and working.

There are signs that flexible working is changing the way some parents engage with formal childcare.

A significant minority (24%) of those not using formal childcare said they and their partners used flexible working arrangements to share childcare responsibilities between them.

Many respondents emphasised the importance of flexibility around hours was as important as location. As we've seen – availability of childcare affects ability to work, even with some degree of flexible working.

Many parents are not only caring for young children.

Almost a quarter of survey respondents had extra caring responsibilities for adults aged 18 and over as well.

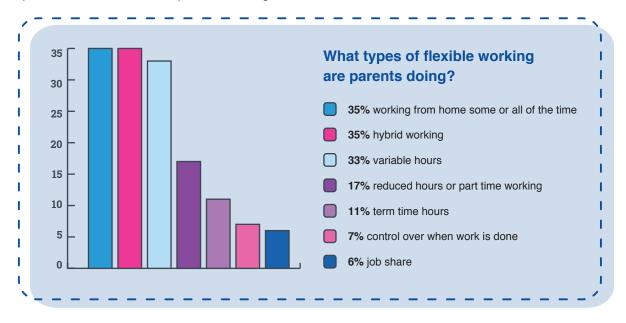
This is especially true for parents from a Black or ethnic minority background, who in our survey were more likely to be under 35, and single parents.

Just under a third of younger parents in our survey (under 35), had adult caring responsibilities which factored into their desire to work flexibly.

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Most parents want flexibility and the pandemic proved that 'flex' is possible in many more roles than employers had ever considered before. This year's Index sees a significant shift overall towards flexible working. However, access to flexibility continues to be tied to income and particular types of industry and job role.

70% of respondents reported working flexibly compared with 55% in 2019. Between 2019 and 2021, the growth in flexible working was largely driven by home and hybrid working. Over a third of respondents reported hybrid or homebased arrangements compared with 22% pre-pandemic. Hybrid workers were more likely to be male / higher earners / London based.



More dads work part-time post-pandemic but mums still work more part-time – the least flexible 'flex' . 11% of dads worked part-time hours compared with 4% in 2019. But 37% mothers versus 11% fathers worked part-time in our survey. Overall, people working reduced or part-time hours were more likely to be women, single parents, younger, and earning under £25k per annum.



The divide between those parents who have access to flexible working and those who do not (the 'flex haves and have nots') is drawn along sector lines, with knowledge-based industries benefitting most from the recent shift.

The Best and Worst Sectors for Flexible Working

Over **80**% work flexibly









Marketing, advertising, and PR

Creative arts and design

Business consulting and management





Not for profit and charity work

Accountancy, banking and finance

Less than 65% work flexibly









Retail

Healthcare

Engineering and manufacturing





Teacher Training and Education

Transport and logistics

The five industries with the least flexibility are clearly those in which roles are less suited to homeworking. Three of them overwhelmingly employ women, disproportionately affecting women's access to flexible work.

Other inequality indicators?

Most of our sample worked flexibly to some degree. A minority of those who didn't work flexibly, said they had no desire to, but this was not a universally held viewpoint across all the populations we surveyed.

Where non-white British parents were not working flexibly, they were much less likely to say they didn't want to than white British parents (18% versus 28%). This was also true for parents of younger children (17%) and those with over three children (20%).

This suggests that there may be additional equalities issues around unmet demand for flexible working.

Flexible working can be a good indicator of a supportive culture and employers reap the benefits of loyalty from flexible workers. But the standard practice of parents working beyond their contracted hours continues to be commonplace and a desire to keep the flexibility they have drives many parents' decisions to stay in their current roles.

More than 3/4 of parents report regularly working additional hours.

A fifth of parents reported that they felt working additional hours was the only way they could manage their workload. Men were more likely than women to say that additional hours were part of workplace culture.

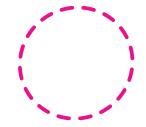
However, this year's Index also found that supportive attitudes from employers and individual managers towards family life and flexible working had a big impact on retention and loyalty.

Parents who did not work flexibly felt less supported at work and were twice as likely to feel that they could not talk to their employers about either work related or family issues than those with flexible working arrangements.

When asked directly if flexible working arrangements had increased their loyalty to their employers, 65% of parents with flexible working arrangements agreed.

Concern about losing out on the flexibility they currently have was a factor here, with 61% citing this as a reason to stay in their current role.





However, parents who felt confident their family responsibilities wouldn't affect how fairly they were treated were far more likely to stay with their employer compared with those who didn't feel this way, being twice as likely to see themselves staying in their role for the next two years.

Manager attitudes are key

The attitudes of managers on balancing working and family responsibilities had a similar impact on the likelihood of parents to stay within their role, highlighting that line managers are just as important as employer policies.

Flexibility need not be a barrier to career growth. This year's Index in fact shows that some types of flexible working seem to support career progression more actively. But inequalities persist, dulling the benefits of flexible working for certain groups.

Just under two thirds of parents with flexible working report learning new skills whilst working flexibly.

This is especially so for the minority in **job shares**, and for home workers and those with hybrid arrangements, with no difference between fathers and mothers here.

Of mothers who reported working flexibly however, 51% reported moderate to significant levels of career progression compared with 38% who didn't work flexibly. The signs are there that flexible working can support people across careers, not just in jobs.

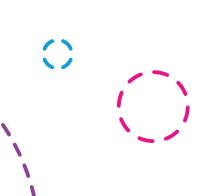


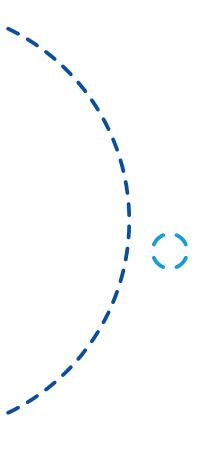
Inequalities persist when it comes to progression.

Women, low earners, and those working part-time were less likely to report that they had progressed in their careers and had control over their working arrangements.

People reporting signification the last 5 years:	eant to modera	te career progression ove
58% men	versus	47% women
59% full-time	versus	47% Part-time workers (predominantly women)
65% from £60k+ households	versus	43% from lower income households (< £25k)

Mothers of two children reported lower levels of career progression over the past five years than those who had one child, while fathers of two reported equal amounts of career progression to fathers with one child.





Now more than ever, we need to make 'flex' work for everyone.

This year's *Working Families Index* paints a picture of both hope and frustration. Undeniably the pandemic has created flexible working opportunities that were unimaginable pre-Covid, accelerating the rate of change and softening cynicism towards working flexibly.

However, the new landscape is one of inconsistency and the apparent leaps forward must be seen against the backdrop of harsh realities for many families. The reliance on childcare that's unaffordable for many, the huge numbers of families already struggling to manage and facing extreme economic hardship in the coming months, and the unequal access to flexible working that could help families better manage.

There is a clear appetite for more flexibility – not just home and hybrid working, but flexibility around hours too. But a lack of flexibly designed jobs and clearly advertised flexible working opportunities can make parents hesitant to move jobs and this in turn can have a knock-on impact on pay progression. Those in more place-based roles and sectors, and women in particular, are often still left wanting in their ability to access and progress in flexible employment. Part-time working continues to be associated with less career progression.

So whilst we can cautiously celebrate the turning of the tide towards more normalised flexible working, there is still considerable ground to be made up if we can truly say that flexible working is working for everyone.

If you're an employer, please take a look at our *Working Families Index* 2022: action briefing for employers on the Working Families website.

If you'd like to know how our team of experts can support you to make your workplace more flexible and family-friendly for everyone, email employers@workingfamilies.org.uk.

Media enquiries: please email press@workingfamilies.org.uk.



About Working Families

Our mission is to remove the barriers that people with caring responsibilities face in the workplace. We provide free legal advice to parents and carers on their rights at work. We give employers the tools they need to support their employees while creating a flexible, high-performing workforce. And we advocate on behalf of the UK's 13 million working parents, influencing policy through campaigns informed by research.

About Talking Talent

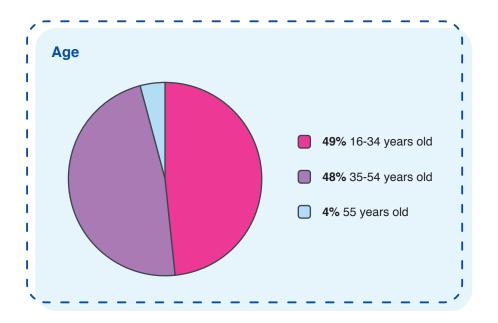
Sponsors of the *Working Families Index* 2022, Talking Talent provides some of the world's most successful organisations with transformational coaching and development programmes that encourage everyone, and every business to perform at its best.



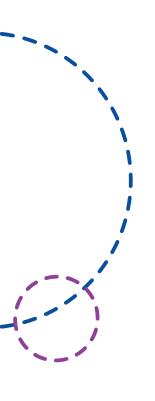
About the parents and carers represented in this survey.

2,806 parents and carers across the UK were surveyed in the *Working Families Index* 2022.

The majority of respondents were under 55. More women were represented in the survey than men. 18% of survey respondents were from London. All other UK regions plus the nations: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were represented.

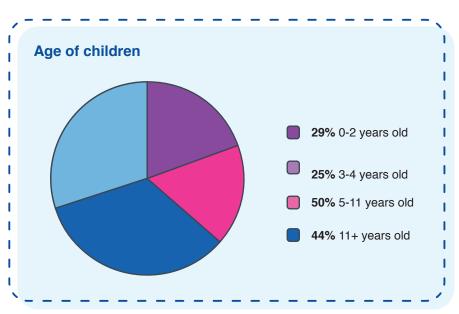


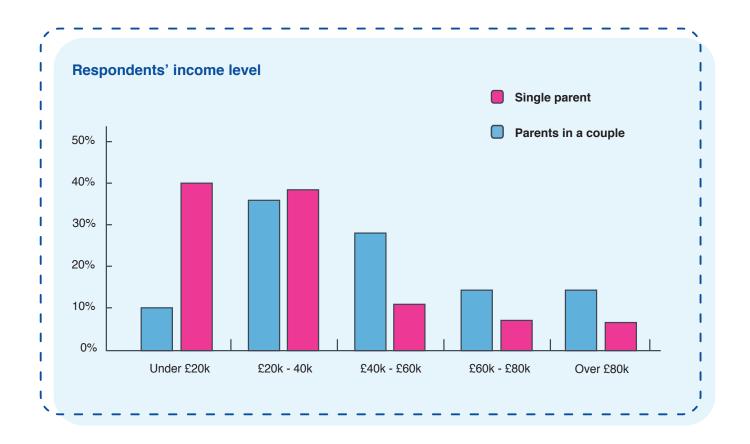














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