



Working Families Employers Benchmark 2022

Introduction

With the huge shift towards hybrid working in recent years, and the economically uncertain times we are currently living in, getting flexible and family-friendly working right is more crucial than ever.

In this report, we explore how Working Families employer members across the UK have put into place family-friendly and flexible working policies that have a real impact on employees' working lives. The experiences of these employers demonstrate that flexible working works for everyone – it allows employees to work in a way that fits with their circumstances, and enables employers to attract and retain talent across the labour market.

Every year, Working Families' employer members are invited to take part in the Working Families Employers Benchmark. The Benchmark provides each organisation with an assessment of their flexible and family-friendly working policy and practice¹. Employers tell us about the policies they've adopted to create a family-friendly work environment, their experiences and attitudes toward flexible working, and the opportunities and barriers they face – and we ask them for the data to show how they put these policies into practice.

This summary report outlines the key findings from the 2022 Benchmark, looking at how our employer members – a group of organisations who have committed to family-friendly and flexible working – make it a reality. As such, the report offers a window into best practice, based on the real-life experiences of this diverse group of employers, and a snapshot of the areas where employers can develop further.

The report concludes with a set of practical recommendations based on our employer members' experiences that will enable employers to further improve the lives of working parents and carers, and create a flexible working culture for all.

Who took part

Throughout this report we look at how flexible and family-friendly working differ according to our employer members' organisation size and the gender balance within an organisation, as well as their sector. A diverse group of 76 organisations took part in this year's Benchmark survey, ranging across finance, law, business and consulting, and technology, to the charity sector, public sector and local government, and education. Just under a third of the organisations who entered this year's Benchmark survey were smaller organisations with under 1,000 employees, while just over two-thirds had over 1,000 employees. The gender balance of the organisations varied across sectors: around two-thirds of charity, public sector and local government and law firms reported more women than men in their organisations – but all the business and consulting firms, and the majority of technology and finance firms reported they employed more men than women.

¹ 'Flexible working' is the term favoured by Working Families to describe a wide range of working arrangements, including where, when, and how people work (e.g. home-based, reduced hours, flexible hours). Other related terms, widely used by our employer members, include 'agile' or 'dynamic' working.

Culture and attitude towards flexibility

Organisations with a strong culture of flexible working thrive when it comes to creating a family-friendly work environment.

In any organisation, both a framework for flexible working and an understanding of how family-friendly and flexible working is operating throughout the organisation are crucial for creating a true culture of flexibility. As in previous years, nearly all organisations (96%) who took part in this year's survey have strategic plans to support family-friendly working. They use a variety of means to understand what is going on across the whole organisation, including staff survey responses (93%), exit interviews (84%), feedback from employee resource groups (74%) and HR partners or advisers (72%).

However, even the most committed organisations can face barriers to creating a culture of flexibility. External circumstances present a major barrier this year, with 25% citing the current economic climate. Within organisations, as in previous years, lack of line management knowledge and skill (29%), lack of resources (24%), and lack of budget (17%) were reported by entrants as the major challenges to cultivating family-friendly and flexible workplaces. A small number of participants across the sectors reported that they faced no challenges to flexible working, or that there were only external challenges.

This year, we also took a close look at the barriers to family-friendly and flexible working reported in each sector. As this was a small group of employers, their responses are not necessarily representative of attitudes across their entire sector. Nonetheless, they give a valuable insight into the varying challenges that different sectors may face in their journey to family-friendly working. For example, the business and consulting firms reported managing increasingly widespread flexible working hours and locations as some of their main challenges, whereas for law, public sector and local government organisations and the charity sector, the main barriers were the economic climate, lack of resources and budget, and lack of a sense of urgency. Additionally, law firms reported lack of line management knowledge and skill, and public sector and local government organisations reported estate reorganisation as common barriers.

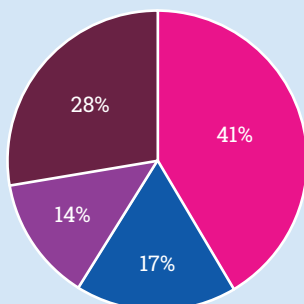
The ongoing impact of COVID on flexible working

The transformation in ways of working brought about by the COVID pandemic has stayed with us into 2022.

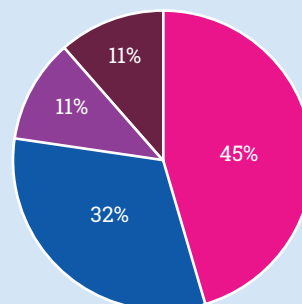
86% of small organisations (under 1,000 employees) and 64% of large organisations (over 1,000 employees) report that at least three quarters of their employees are currently working flexibly – compared to just 28% of small organisations and 11% of large organisations in the pre-COVID era (Figure 1). This amounts to an enormous triple-fold increase in flexible working for small organisations and nearly six-fold increase for large organisations – with a high proportion of these employees likely to be working from home or with flexible start and finish times.

Figure 1: **Proportion of organisation's employees working flexibly pre-COVID and now, by organisation size:**

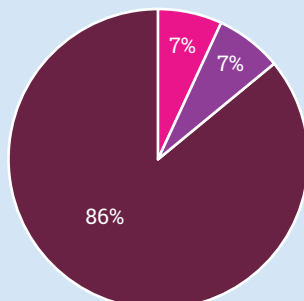
Pre-COVID - Under 1,000 employees



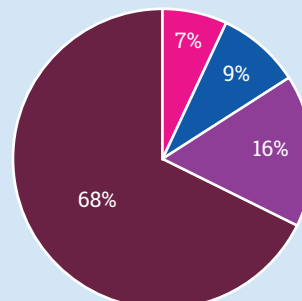
Pre-COVID - 1,000 employees and over



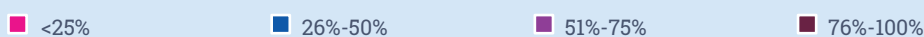
Now - Under 1,000 employees



Now - 1,000 employees and over



Key: Proportion of employees working flexibly



Again, we see variations in flexible working across sectors. The proportion of organisations that reported having more than three-quarters of their payroll working flexibly increased during COVID by a factor of 6 in technology and engineering, 5 in law and 4.3 in finance. The sector with the smallest increase is business and consulting – but this appears to be due to this sector having the highest proportion of flexible workers both before and after COVID, going from 67% to 100%.

The organisations we surveyed in this year’s Benchmark reported that they had seen a wide range of benefits resulting from this huge increase in flexible working. These included a reduction

in business travel costs (reported by 62% of organisations), reduction in real estate costs (54%), and increased productivity (50%). Smaller organisations reported reduced staff turnover as a particular benefit (52%) (Figure 2). Public sector and local government organisations, meanwhile, were particularly likely to report that they had been able to extend their operating hours due to the increase in flexible working (Figure 3). Our employer members’ experience therefore shows that flexible working has tangible benefits not only for staff wellbeing, but also for organisational productivity and efficiency.

Figure 2: **Areas in which organisations report benefits from flexible working, by organisation size, shown as percentage of all benefits reported by those organisations:**

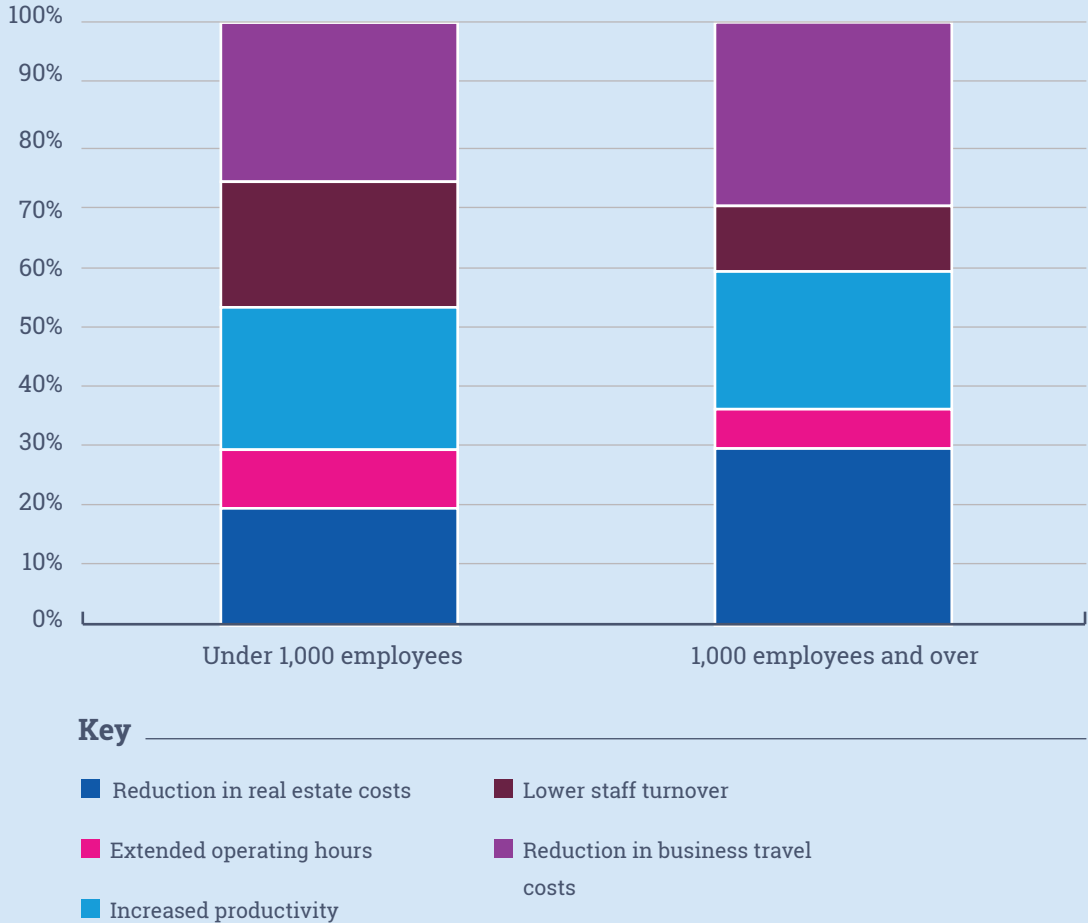
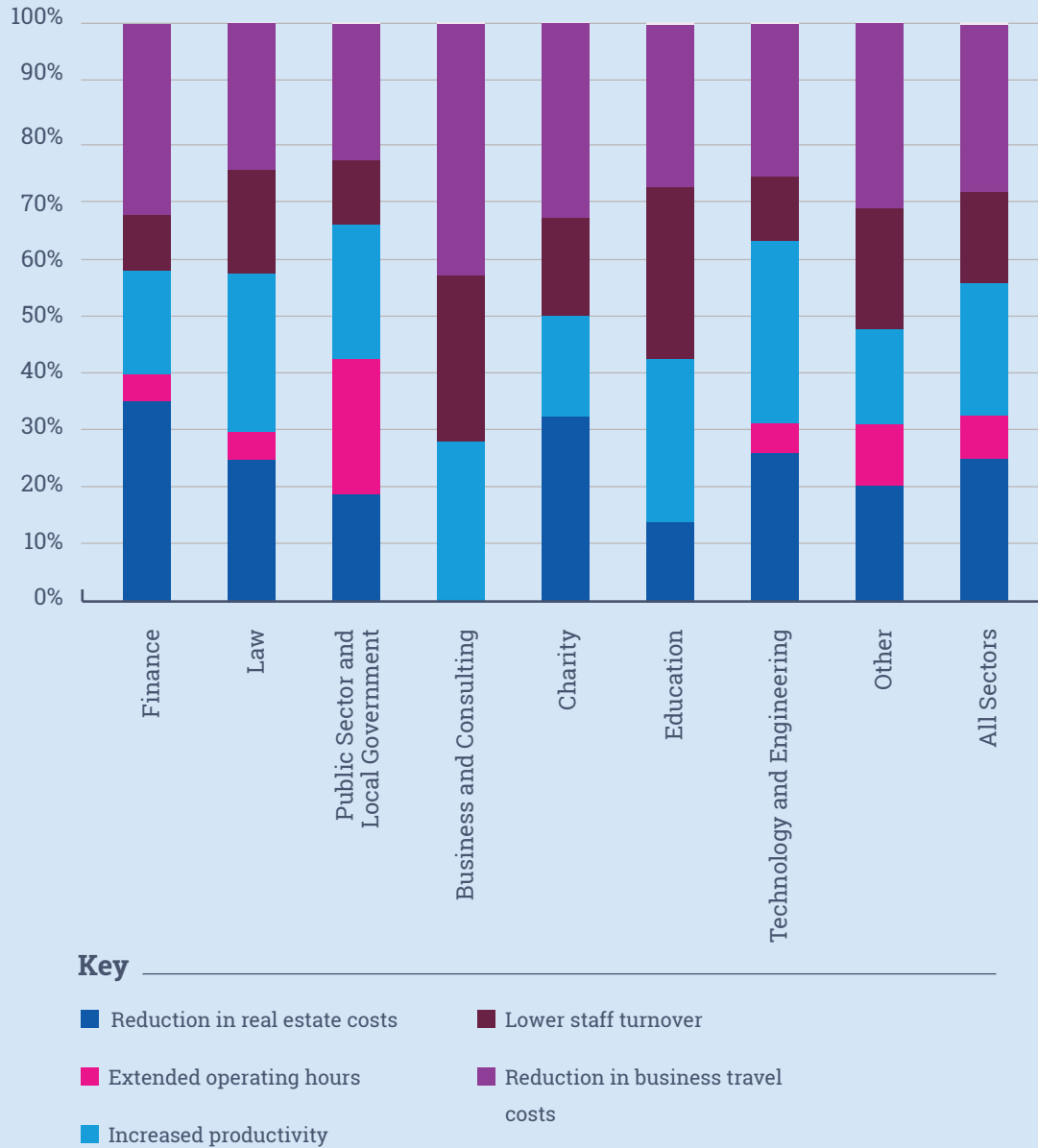


Figure 3: **Areas in which organisations report benefits from flexible working, by sector, shown as percentage of all benefits reported by those organisations:**



Embedding flexibility across the organisation

We want to see a working world where flexible working is open to all employees from the moment they start work at an organisation, and where all line managers know how to support their staff to work flexibly.

We were delighted to see that all the organisations who took part in this year's Benchmark survey reported that they provide specific measures to support their staff's physical and mental wellbeing, and to prevent burnout and over-working.

There is plenty of scope for organisations to create family-friendly work cultures. One key area is making flexible working available to all, from the moment a new employee joins the organisation. This year's Benchmark suggests that real progress is being made: 86% of the organisations we surveyed offer flexibility at the point of hire without statutory limitations and conditions, representing an increase of 16 percentage points from last year.

However, there are variations across sectors. While at least 84% of organisations in the technology and engineering, business and consulting, public sector and local government, law and finance sectors who took part in our Benchmark reported offering flexibility at the point of hire, only 75% of organisations in the charity sector said they did so. Larger organisations

were more likely to offer flexibility at the point of hire without statutory limitations (89%) than smaller organisations (79%).

Line manager knowledge and support is crucial to enabling a truly family-friendly working environment. Similarly to last year, we see widespread awareness of the importance of training in this area: 82% of organisations report that they train their leaders and managers in the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to develop and lead teams that support work-life balance and wellbeing. Once again, we see some variation by sector, with the charity sector being least likely to offer such training.

Furthermore, despite 82% of organisations offering such training, only 34% reported that more than three-quarters of their managers had received the training, suggesting that recognition of the importance of training about work-life balance and flexible working may not always be pervasive across organisations. Increasing uptake of line manager training therefore remains a key area for organisations to work on.

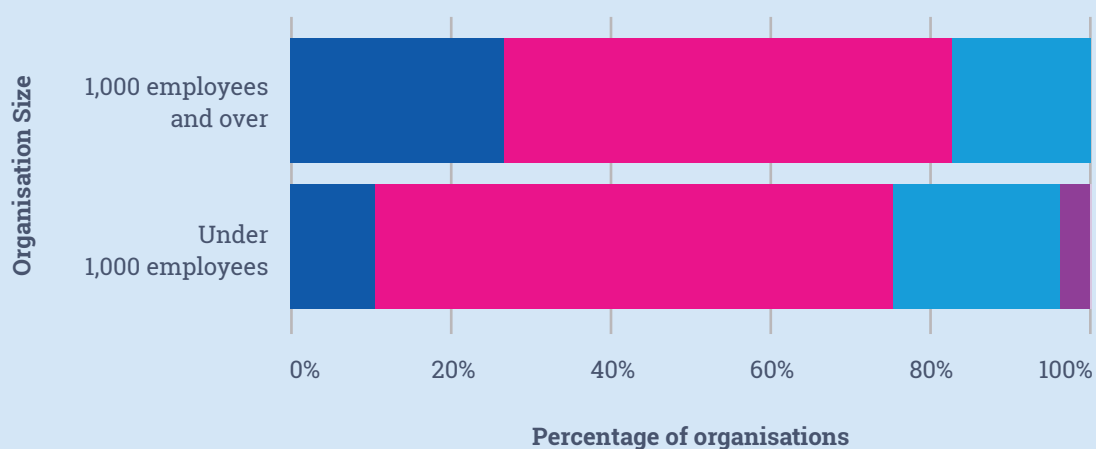
Gender equality and progression

Creating a culture that ensures men and women have equal opportunities to progress whether they work flexibly or not is an important step towards tackling gender inequality at work and closing the gender pay gap.

Of the organisations surveyed this year, 93% actively encourage their managers to work in a flexible or family-friendly way, helping to foster a culture of family-friendly working. Many said they plan to address issues around gender pay and progression through a number of measures related to work-life balance. These measures include asking senior leaders to publicly role model their flexible working arrangements; ensuring all job adverts indicate the flexible options available, encouraging take up of equal parenting leave or shared parental leave amongst fathers, encouraging the use of shared parental leave through enhanced pay, and specifically encouraging men to work flexibly and part time.

One measure of an organisation’s success in creating a gender-equal work culture is the number of women in senior roles in the organisation. There remains an imbalance between the number of men and women in senior roles in most organisations. Smaller organisations (Figure 4) and those with a majority of female employees (Figure 5) fare better in this regard, having higher proportions of women senior managers. Technology and engineering and education are among the sectors with the lowest proportion of women senior managers, and charity and public sector and local government are among those with the highest.

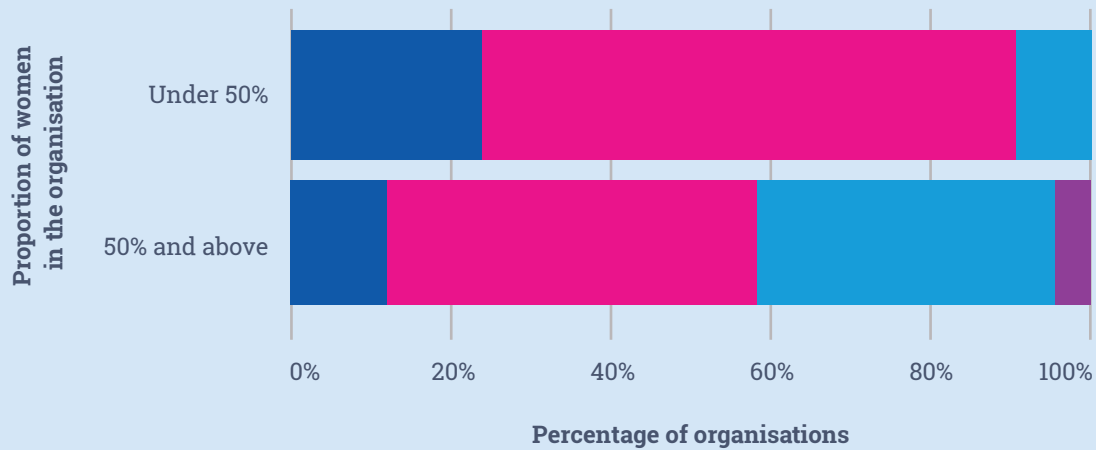
Figure 4: **Proportion of senior management roles held by women, by organisation size**



Key: proportion of senior management roles held by women

- Less than a quarter
- Quarter to half
- Half to three quarters
- More than three quarters

Figure 5: **Proportion of senior management roles held by women, by proportion of women in the organisation**



Key: proportion of senior management roles held by women

- Less than a quarter
- Quarter to half
- Half to three quarters
- More than three quarters

As women are significantly more likely to work part-time, it is crucial that part-time workers are not locked out of opportunities to progress. Overall, in the organisations we surveyed this year, only 7% of senior managers work part time – though this rises to 11% in business and consulting, but is as low as just 3.5% in technology and engineering.

Of those part-time senior managers, a huge majority - 70% - are women, demonstrating the importance of making part-time work available in senior roles in making progress towards closing the gender pay gap. In most sectors, women represent a much higher proportion than men of part-time senior managers; for example, in the law firms we surveyed, an average of 19% of part time senior managers are men. The

only exception to this is in public sector and local government, where just 43% of part-time senior managers are women.

It is encouraging to see that more employers are starting to offer longer periods of fully paid paternity leave; this year 37% of employers in our Benchmark offered more than 2 weeks fully paid paternity leave, compared to 22% of employers last year. Enabling more fathers and partners to take longer, well-paid periods of paternity leave not only means that they are more able to share care for their baby, but also makes an important contribution to gender equality in the workplace by helping to break down the assumption that only women take time out of their working lives to raise children.

Recommendations

- Employers should link their monitoring of flexible working arrangements to their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work. This will enable them to better understand how working patterns may impact the career progression of different demographics within their staff. Monitoring these differing progression rates will enable them to develop career progression ladders that respond to the individual needs of their staff, and ensure that they are cultivating talent across their organisation.
- Employers should make part-time and job share options much more widely available, including at recruitment stage. Evidence shows that job shares have great benefits for both employers and employees, and make a significant difference to career progression, particularly for women who would otherwise be working part-time roles. Offering these options will help ensure gender equality at senior level by making flexible working the norm in senior roles – research has shown that job shares may be the single most effective way of reducing the gender seniority gap².
- Employers should advertise roles with options for flexibility built into them from day one. They should discuss flexible working at interview and induction, not just when they receive a flexible working request, and should proactively promote flexibility for all.
- Employers should proactively promote part-time and job-share roles to their male staff, so that they are not seen as options just for mothers returning from maternity leave.
- We still need to see more equal support for both parents, including better paid leave for fathers and partners.
- Parental leave and other family-related policies should be promoted on employers' websites – not only will this offer greater transparency for parents and carers looking for new roles, it will also be of great value to employers looking to attract from a wider talent pool.
- There should be a continued focus on line manager training, equipping managers with the skills they need to lead flexible teams. Take-up of this training can be increased by making it part of a mandatory suite of training.
- Training should also focus on job analysis, which will give managers the skills they need to find the flexibility in every role. This will mean that managers know how to assess flexibility not just when they get a request, but at the recruitment stage too. This is particularly important for site-based roles where employees can't work remotely, but there are still opportunities for other kinds of flexibility.

² ABI, 'Job Sharing Toolkit', <https://www.abi.org.uk/globalassets/files/publications/public/diversity/job-sharing-guide---making-flexible-work.pdf>, p. 4; The Job Share Project, 'Job Sharing at Senior Level: Making it Work', <https://www.thejobshareproject.com/3434hjkv97fjb378fbv/jobsharefullreport.pdf>.



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