

**Working
Families**

Working Families

Benchmark Report 2024

Official Sponsor:



Foreword from our sponsor

At bp, we believe that our employees are most successful when they can be their true, authentic selves — both at work and at home. As part of our ongoing commitment to fostering a family-friendly and supportive workplace, we continue to invest in policies, resources, and initiatives that help employees balance the demands of work and family life.

Our Working Families employee network plays a vital role in this effort, providing a dedicated space for colleagues with caring responsibilities. This network, with over 1,900 members in the UK alone, is championed by our CFO, Kate Thomson, as the executive sponsor. Under her leadership, the network has driven key policy changes and created a welcoming, inclusive environment where parents, carers, and families can thrive.

Throughout the past year, we have made significant strides in advancing family-friendly policies. Notably, we introduced paid neonatal care leave, giving parents time to focus on their newborns in neonatal care. We also extended our emergency childcare bookings to offer greater flexibility for parents in urgent situations. These developments, along with the introduction of a maternity toolkit and plans to further extend our support for carers and fertility, demonstrate our ongoing commitment to supporting our employees during pivotal moments in their family lives.

Our network also hosts over 30 events each year, from family days to webinars and conversation cafes, covering topics such as work-life balance and returning to work after parental leave. These initiatives, along with our collaborations across other employee networks, help ensure that employees have the resources and support they need to excel both personally and professionally.

As we look ahead, our focus will remain on creating a workplace where families can flourish—where policies, resources and events continue to foster meaningful support tailored to individual needs. Our commitment to being a family-friendly and supportive employer remains at the heart of our values as we continue to promote inclusivity, equity, and well-being for all.

Thank you to our partner, Working Families, for their invaluable support in helping us build a more inclusive and family-friendly workplace.



‘Participating in the Working Families Benchmark allows us to better evaluate how effectively our policies and practices foster a culture where families can thrive, while also helping us identify areas for improvement. It demonstrates our commitment to supporting colleagues who balance work and family responsibilities, while strengthening our reputation and enhancing our ability to attract diverse talent.’

Kate Thomson, CFO and executive sponsor of UK Working Families business resource group, bp

Introduction

2024 has been a landmark year for flexible and family-friendly working, as we've seen a number of important new pieces of legislation come into force that give employees greater rights in the area of family-friendly and flexible working: these have included a day one right to request flexible working, the right to unpaid leave for carers, and greater protections against redundancy for expecting and new parents.

Following the 2024 General Election, the new Labour government has committed to a host of employment reforms which promise further steps forward in flexible and family-friendly working.

This year, we've also seen that while many of the gains in flexible working made as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have remained in place, there have also been calls for a 'return to the office', as if the only form of flexible working is working from home. In addition, flexible working isn't always available equally to all workers, and employers are still looking to understand more about how to make hybrid working work effectively for their organisation. Employees are increasingly looking for employers to be family-friendly beyond flexible working, taking on board the journey to parenthood and support across employees' entire working lives.

In this report, based on Working Families' annual Benchmark survey of best practice employers, we explore how these employers continue to lead the way in evolving supportive work environments. The Working Families Benchmark is a comprehensive annual survey of flexible and family-friendly working policies and practices, open to all Working Families employer members.

The Benchmark – now in its fifteenth year – allows employers to measure in detail the extent to which they've created a family-friendly and flexible work culture, highlights any areas they can develop further still, and enables comparison with other best practice employers across the UK. The Benchmark tracks both policy and practices, asking employers for in-depth data on how they've put family-friendly working into practice and how their staff actually work, as well as detail on their policies, strategy and vision for a more supportive workplace.

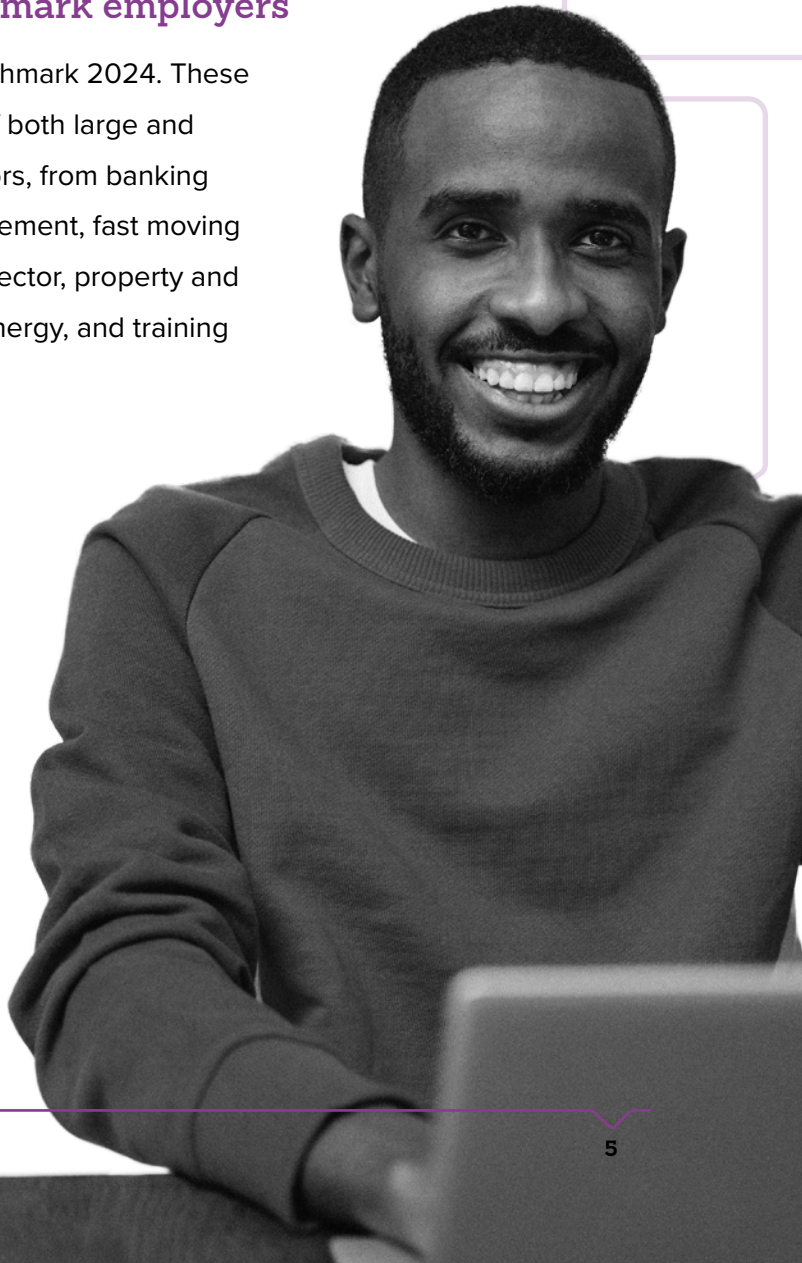
This report explores the findings of this year's Benchmark survey, looking at how best practice employers put family-friendly and flexible working into practice – and also at areas where there is still scope for future development, from line manager training to encouraging more men to take up part-time roles. The report ends with recommendations for all employers who want to be more family-friendly and flexible, enabling both their staff and their organisation to thrive.

This year's Working Families Benchmark employers

69 employers entered the Working Families Benchmark 2024. These organisations are a dynamic and diverse group of both large and small UK employers, across a wide range of sectors, from banking and finance, law, business, consulting and management, fast moving consumer goods, and technology, to the charity sector, property and construction, public service and administration, energy, and training and education.

Similarly to previous years, larger organisations (with over 250 employees) made up the majority of employers taking part in the Benchmark (93%), but there were some smaller employers, with under 250 employees (7%).

What all these organisations have in common is a shared commitment to family-friendly and flexible working, and a desire to continue to develop their working practices.



Creating a flexible and family-friendly work culture

Organisations that culturally support flexible and family-friendly working are places where parents and carers can thrive and progress in work, and where employers in turn are able to attract and retain talented employees.

Flexible work is at the heart of what parents and carers tell us they need from their employers: Working Families' polling in 2023 revealed that despite the gains in flexibility we have seen in many roles since the COVID pandemic, a third of working parents have nonetheless considered quitting their job because it isn't flexible enough.¹

Flexible working beyond COVID

The best practice employers who participate in the Benchmark lead the way in offering the flexibility parents and carers need at work, showing what can be done when organisations place flexibility at the heart of their work culture.

This year's Benchmark employers continue to report high rates of flexible working, maintaining the progress made during the COVID pandemic. Just under two-thirds (62%) of this year's Benchmark entrants report that over three quarters of their employees work flexibly. As in previous years, there are marked differences between smaller organisations (under 250 employees) and larger organisations (over 250 employees); this year, 100% of smaller organisations said they had over three quarters of their staff working flexibly, compared to 59% of larger organisations. Despite these differences, these are still huge gains on the pre-COVID era.

In spite of this widespread flexibility amongst the best employers, it's still important for organisations to keep working to make sure their employees are able to access the flex they need. With the post-COVID 'return to the office' ongoing in some organisations, we need to make sure that hybrid arrangements truly work well for both employer and employees, that staff who need flexible working arrangements are still able to access them, and that all forms of flex are available to staff where possible, not only hybrid working.

¹ Working Families (2023), 'Beyond Flexibility: The Emergence of "Generation Flex"', <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/news-events/blogs/beyond-flexibility-generation-flex/>

Taking a strategic approach to flexible and family-friendly working

Offering flexible working is just one step in creating a family-friendly work culture: the best practice employers who take part in the Benchmark also put systems and structures in place to support and monitor flexible and family-friendly working in their organisations.

Strategic plans to support family-friendly working continue to be in place in nearly all Benchmark employers, remaining at 96% of employers, as in previous years.

This year's Benchmark employers are making good use of a wide range of options to track how flexible and family-friendly their organisations are. Figure 1 below shows how this year's Benchmark entrants particularly make use of staff survey responses (91%), exit interviews (87%), feedback from employee resource groups (75%), and feedback from HR partners (71%) – but there were also other approaches looking more at the effects of flex, such as office occupancy rates and real estate savings (68%), business travel savings (48%), and monitoring the volume of new job advertisements specifying flexibility (49%). The least used option was monitoring feedback from unions, which has decreased from 28% in the 2023 Benchmark to just 22% of employers in this year's Benchmark.



How do you understand what is going on across the whole organisation and the extent to which a flexible working culture is truly embedded?

Key:

- ♥ Feedback from unions
- ♥ Take up of non-mandatory training in flexible working by managers
- ♥ Analysis of line manager 360° feedback
- ♥ Business travel savings
- ♥ Volume of new job adverts specifying flexibility
- ♥ Office occupancy rates and real estate savings
- ♥ Feedback from HR business partners/advisers on flex take up
- ♥ Feedback from employee resource groups
- ♥ Exit interview
- ♥ Staff survey responses

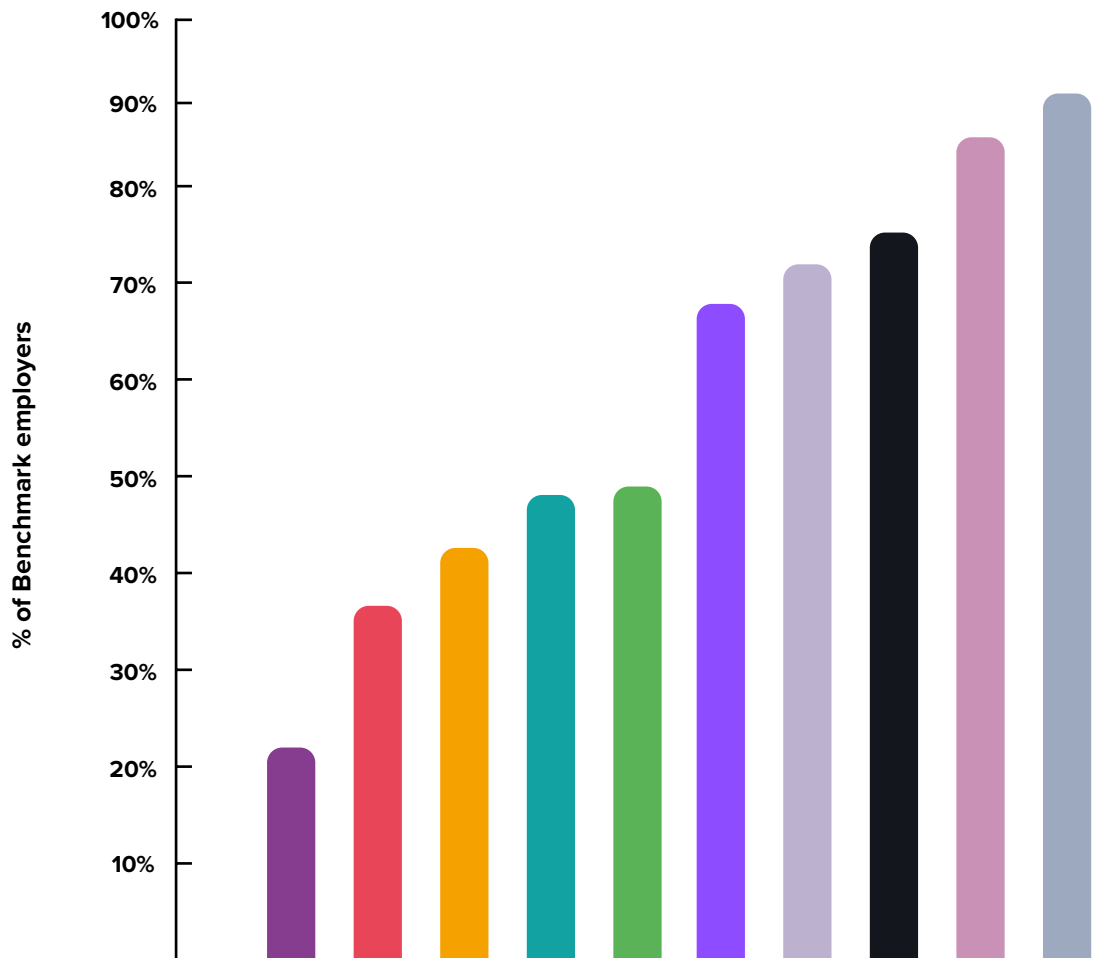


Fig. 1

The benefits of flex for employers

We know that flexible working isn't just good for staff – it has a whole range of important benefits for employers, too.

Benchmark employers consistently report that flexible working has delivered tangible benefits for their organisations. As in previous years, this year's Benchmark participants report reductions in real estate costs (51%) and reductions in business travel costs (54%) (see Figure 2). These proportions of employers reporting these benefits are slightly down on previous years, likely reflecting the fact that many organisations have already adjusted to the hybrid work environment and aren't now making further reductions in costs, or instead are now seeing more employees attending the workplace on a regular basis. Nonetheless, these areas still clearly continue to be perceived as a major benefit of flexible working.

Increased productivity (42%), lower staff turnover (36%) and extended operating hours (22%) also continue to be reported as benefits of flex.

Quantifiable benefits of flexible working for employers in the last five years

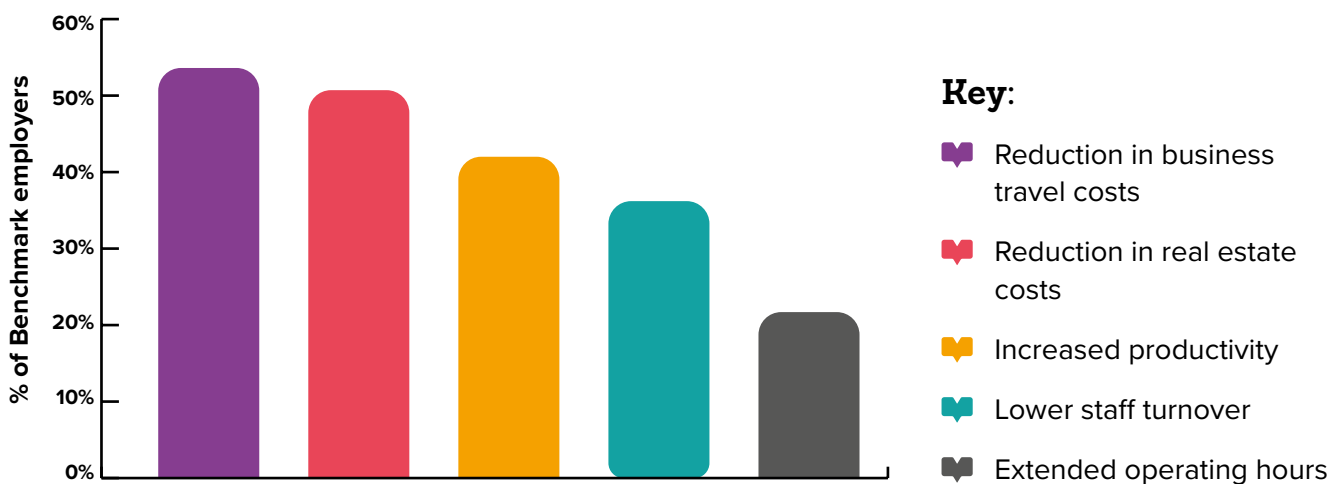


Fig. 2

Supporting line managers to create family-friendly work cultures

With nearly a quarter of Benchmark employers citing lack of line management knowledge as a barrier to flex, it's clear that training and supporting line managers is still a major need in creating family-friendly work cultures.

We were delighted to see that nearly all Benchmark employers (90% in 2024, up from 84% in 2023) provide their managers with training to develop and lead teams to work flexibly, meaning that they are equipping their line managers with this crucial knowledge.

However, there is still more that could be done to ensure uptake of this training throughout organisations; two-thirds of employers (68%) said this training is not compulsory, and only just over a quarter (29%) said more than three-quarters of their managers had undertaken the training (down from 33% last year). We recommend that, where possible, all line managers have access to training in managing flexible teams and are encouraged to take it up.

It is heartening to see that nearly all Benchmark employers (96%) actively encourage their managers to work in a flexible and family-friendly way (up from 92% in 2023). As well as supporting managers' own caring responsibilities, role modelling flexibility at senior levels shows staff that employers are living the values they espouse, reassures them that requests for flexibility will be taken seriously, and demonstrates that flexibility needn't be a barrier to career progression.



Barriers to flexibility

The employers who participate in the Benchmark are excellent employers who have fully committed to family-friendly working; nonetheless, like any employer, they still face a range of challenges in their journey to family-friendly working.

The current economic climate appears to be having a big effect on this year's Benchmark employers, with 54% citing the economic climate as a barrier to creating a family-friendly and flexible workplace.

As in previous years, lack of budget (28%) and lack of resources (26%) also remained significant barriers to flex, followed closely by lack of line management knowledge and skill (23%). A smaller proportion of organisations, 13%, reported staff reluctance to return to the office as a barrier.

What challenges and barriers are you facing this year, to creating a family-friendly, flexible workplace?



Fig. 3

Key:

- Current economic climate
- Lack of budget
- Lack of resources
- Lack of line management knowledge and skills
- Staff reluctant to return to the office

Embedding flexibility from day one

2024 saw the launch of new legislation that requires employers to offer employees the right to request flexibility from day one of their employment. This will make an important difference to the lives of working parents and carers, who can now ask for the flex they need as soon as they start a new job, and therefore won't have to limit their career progression simply because they may not be able to work flexibly in a new role.

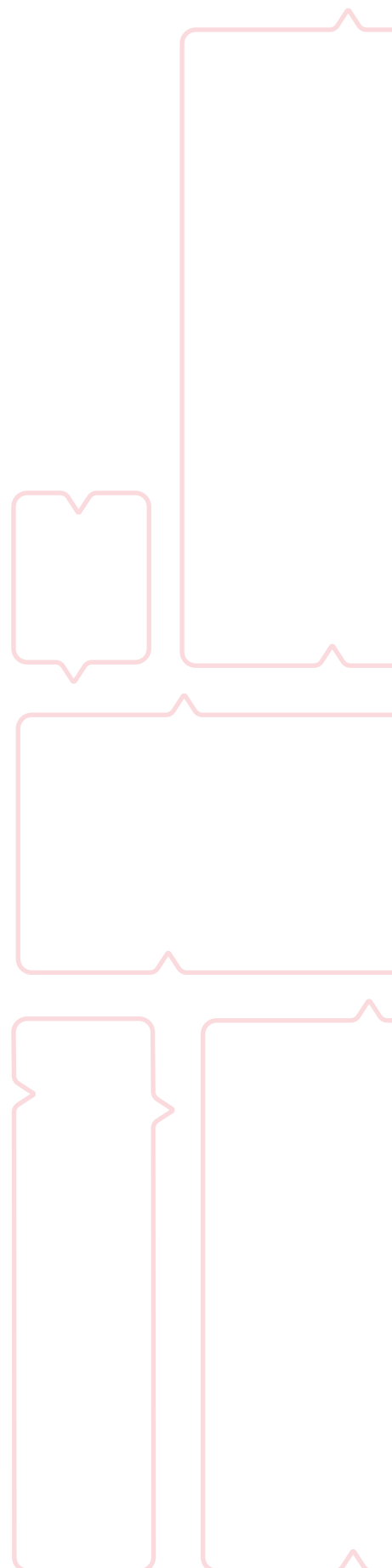
As best practice employers, the vast majority of Benchmark employers (86% in 2023) were already offering day one flex even before the legislation came into force.

And these employers go further still to ensure that flex is fully embedded in their organisation, right from the recruitment stage (see figure 4). 86% of employers carry out a job analysis on some or all of the roles they advertise, to determine the options for flexible working – the majority, 54%, carry out a job analysis on all roles, and a further 32% said they do so for some roles.

6 in 10 (61%) of this year's Benchmark participants explicitly include a statement about flexibility in some or all of their internal job adverts and 67% do so in external job adverts.

Just under two-thirds (62%) use the Happy to Talk Flexible Working strapline developed by Working Families and the Government's Flexible Working Taskforce on all or some of their job adverts – this can be a great way for employers to showcase their commitment to flexible working at recruitment stage.

We're pleased to see that this year has seen an increase in the proportion of Benchmark participants who provide details of options to work flexibly on their website, at 83% (up from 78% in 2023) – making this practice very much the norm for family-friendly employers.



However, we have seen less progress in employers detailing parental leave and pay policies on their websites – still only 58% of employers do so (compared to 64% in 2023). Giving details of these policies can reassure candidates that you are a family-friendly employer, making it more likely that talented employees who are seeking a family-friendly work culture will choose to apply to your organisation.

How do employers embed flexibility in their recruitment processes?

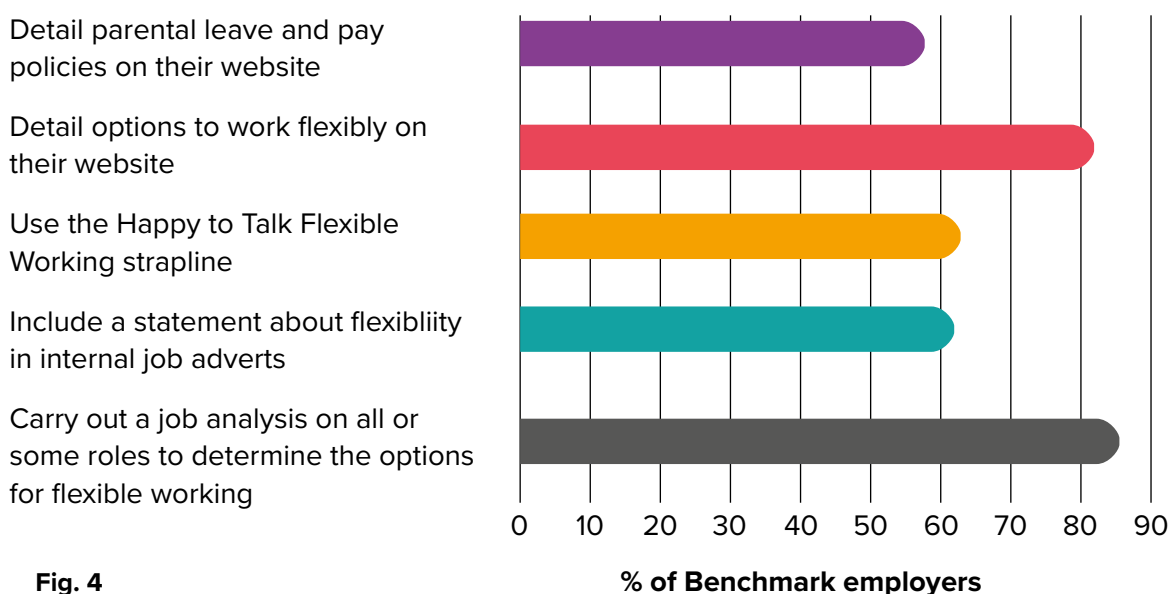


Fig. 4

The gender pay gap and career progression for flexible workers

There remains a part-time penalty in the UK's workplaces, with parents and carers who work part-time being less likely to have been promoted recently than their full-time colleagues.² Working Families' research shows that 37% of mothers work part-time, compared to just 11% of fathers – so it's predominantly women who face the threat of their careers and income stalling when they go part-time, unless they work for an employer who addresses the need to create career progression opportunities for part-time staff.³

² Working Families Index 2022: Families and Flexible Working Post Covid-19: <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Working-Families-Index-2022-Highlights-Report.pdf>.

³ Working Families Index 2022: Families and Flexible Working Post Covid-19: <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Working-Families-Index-2022-Highlights-Report.pdf>.

Making senior roles available to part-time workers is an important step employers can take towards reducing the part-time penalty - and in doing so, they can take action on the gender pay gap, too.

However, this year has seen little change in the proportion of senior managers working part-time amongst Benchmark employers – this year, just 7% of senior managers work part-time (compared to 8% last year) and, of these, the vast majority (78%) are women.

Overall, men still make up nearly two thirds (63%) of senior leaders in the organisations that participated in this year's Benchmark. Creating more part-time senior roles may allow more talented women to progress to senior positions, and may also allow more senior male staff to work part-time.

The Benchmark also assesses how employers are planning to address the gender pay gap in their organisations. While three-quarters (74%) of this year's employers say they will ask their senior leaders to publicly model their flexible working arrangements, only half (49%) specifically encourage men to work flexibly and part-time – without making flex more available and acceptable for male staff, flexible and part-time work may continue to be perceived as something primarily for women.



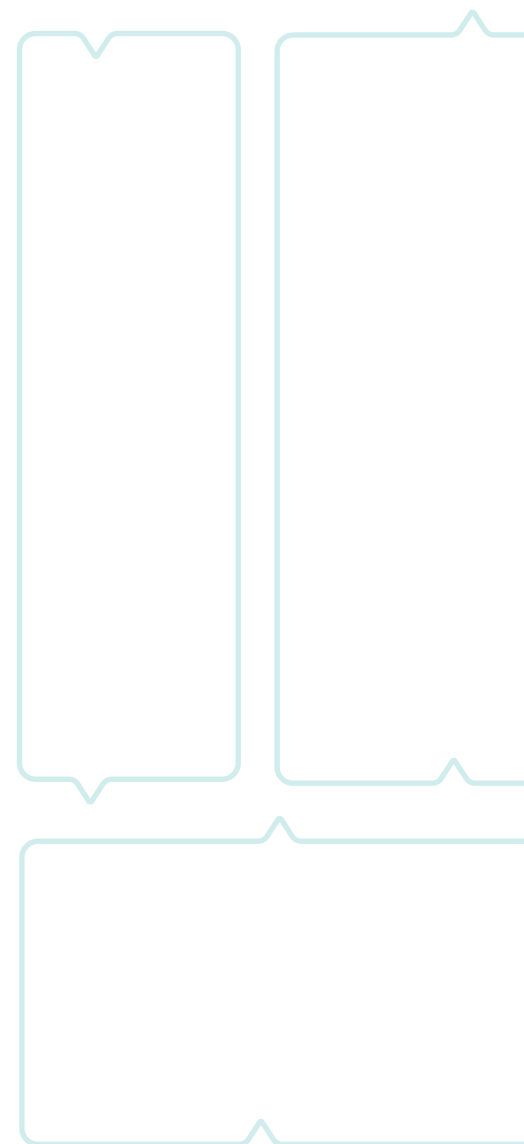
Beyond flex – how to support working parents and carers throughout their working lives

Flexibility is a major piece of the family-friendly working puzzle, but it's not the only support the best employers offer their staff. Employers are increasingly recognising that parents and carers thrive at work when their employers offer holistic support that acknowledges the way employees' needs change across their lifetime. From fertility challenges to caring, a new generation of employers is going beyond flex in their support for parents and carers.

Leave for new parents

Better support for new parents is high on both parents' and the government's agendas. Working Families' polling in the run-up to the 2024 General Election revealed that 92% of parents think it's important for new fathers and partners to take time off work to care for their new baby in its first year, and the new Labour government has promised to review the parental leave system within its first year in government.⁴

With Working Families' polling showing that two-thirds (65%) of parents say the rates of statutory maternity and paternity pay are not adequate to support new parents, best practice employers have an important role to play in supporting parents to take time with their new baby by offering enhanced leave packages that go beyond the statutory leave requirements.⁵



⁴ Working Families (2024), 'Poll results: Views on parental leave in areas with marginal seats': <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/news-events/news/poll-results-views-on-parental-leave-in-areas-with-marginal-seats/>

⁵ Working Families (2024), 'Poll results: Views on parental leave in areas with marginal seats': <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/news-events/news/poll-results-views-on-parental-leave-in-areas-with-marginal-seats/>

This year, Benchmark employers offered on average 18 weeks of fully-paid maternity leave as a day one right, 5 weeks of fully-paid paternity leave, and 14 weeks of fully-paid shared parental leave. Those organisations that offered equal parenting leave offered on average 21 weeks of fully-paid leave as a day one right.⁶

Benchmark employers offer, on average...



Fig. 5

The data suggests that new parents really value these enhanced leave offerings. Amongst Benchmark employers, there is a high rate of take-up of both shared parental leave (SPL) and equal parenting leave (EPL) by not only mothers but also fathers and partners. In 2024, 18% of eligible fathers and partners and 5% of eligible mothers took SPL, while over a third of eligible fathers and partners (38%) and 30% of eligible mothers took EPL. This compares to just 5% of eligible fathers and partners who took up SPL nationally.⁷

⁶Equal parenting leave is where the same amount of pay and leave is available to either parent, whether they are the mother or father/partner. It is different to shared parental leave which requires the mother to give up some of her leave - equal parenting leave, by contrast, is a standalone entitlement.

⁷Department of Business and Trade, Shared Parental Leave evaluation report, BEIS/DBT Research Paper Series Number 2023/010, 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shared-parental-leave-spl-evaluation>

Supporting parents throughout their parenthood journey

In recent years we've been pleased to see an upsurge of employers recognising the importance of supporting their staff throughout their lifetime and, in particular, at all stages of their journey to and through parenthood.

Best practice employers continue to lead the way in the support they offer employees throughout their journey to parenthood. Figure 6 shows that the vast majority of Benchmark employers offer special support for parents having a child through surrogacy (86%), for employees undergoing fertility treatment (90%), employees who have experienced a miscarriage or baby loss (97%), and menopause support (94%).

Which of the following do you offer special support for?

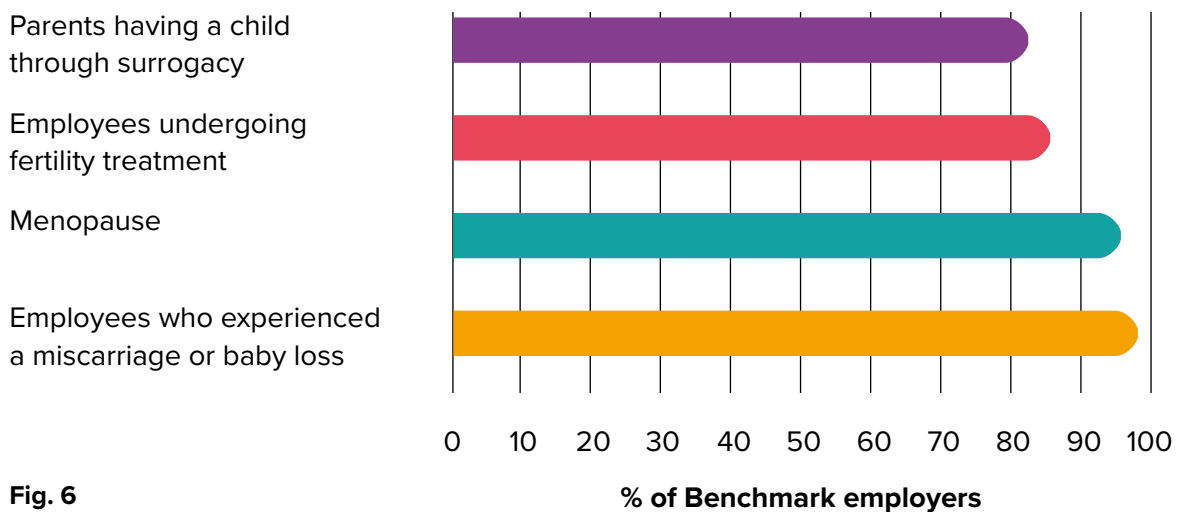


Fig. 6

Smaller organisations (under 250 employees) and larger organisations (over 250 employees) tend to offer similar support to their employees in this regard, though this year we saw 100% of smaller organisations offering fertility support (compared to 89% of larger organisations), while larger organisations were more likely to offer menopause support (95%) compared to smaller organisations (80%).

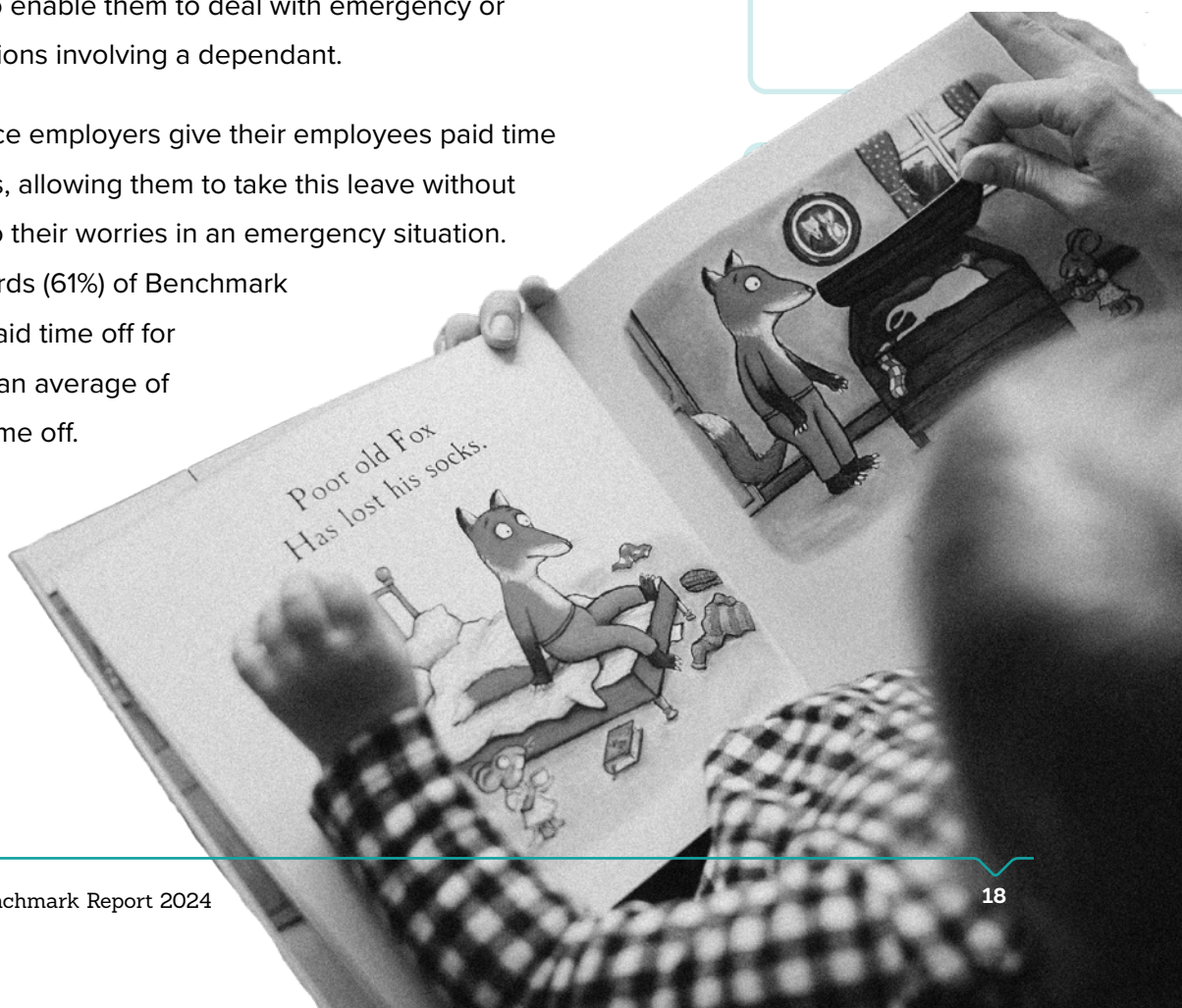
Parental leave and time off for dependants

All employees who have worked for an employer for over a year have a statutory right to 18 weeks of unpaid leave per child, up to the child's 18th birthday. Best practice employers go beyond this statutory requirement by offering their staff paid parental leave, giving parents peace of mind that they can afford to take the leave they need. This year, 17% of Benchmark employers offer paid parental leave, with 5 and 10 days' paid leave being the most common offerings. We encourage all employers to consider whether they can offer paid parental leave as a way of supporting their employees throughout their children's lifetimes.

Additionally, all employees are entitled to unpaid time off for dependants, to enable them to deal with emergency or unexpected situations involving a dependant.

Again, best practice employers give their employees paid time off for dependants, allowing them to take this leave without finances adding to their worries in an emergency situation.

Just under two thirds (61%) of Benchmark employers offer paid time off for dependants, with an average of 4.4 days of paid time off.



Support for carers

Support for carers is also widespread amongst Benchmark employers. In 2024, the new Carer's Leave Act came into force, guaranteeing employees the day one right to a week's unpaid carers leave per year.

We are pleased to see that many Benchmark employers are going further than this to support carers; 55% of Benchmark employers offer paid carer's leave, for an average of 3.5 days – and some offer as much as 10, 15 or 20 days of paid leave.

Wellbeing support

Working Families' polling in 2023 revealed that culture is the number one priority for working parents. While flexible and family-friendly working practices go a huge way in creating a positive work culture for working parents – 9 in 10 parents we surveyed said access to flexible working has, or would have, a positive effect on their wellbeing – we're also seeing a need for targeted wellbeing support for employees. Two in five parents in our polling said they would like mental health support at work.⁸

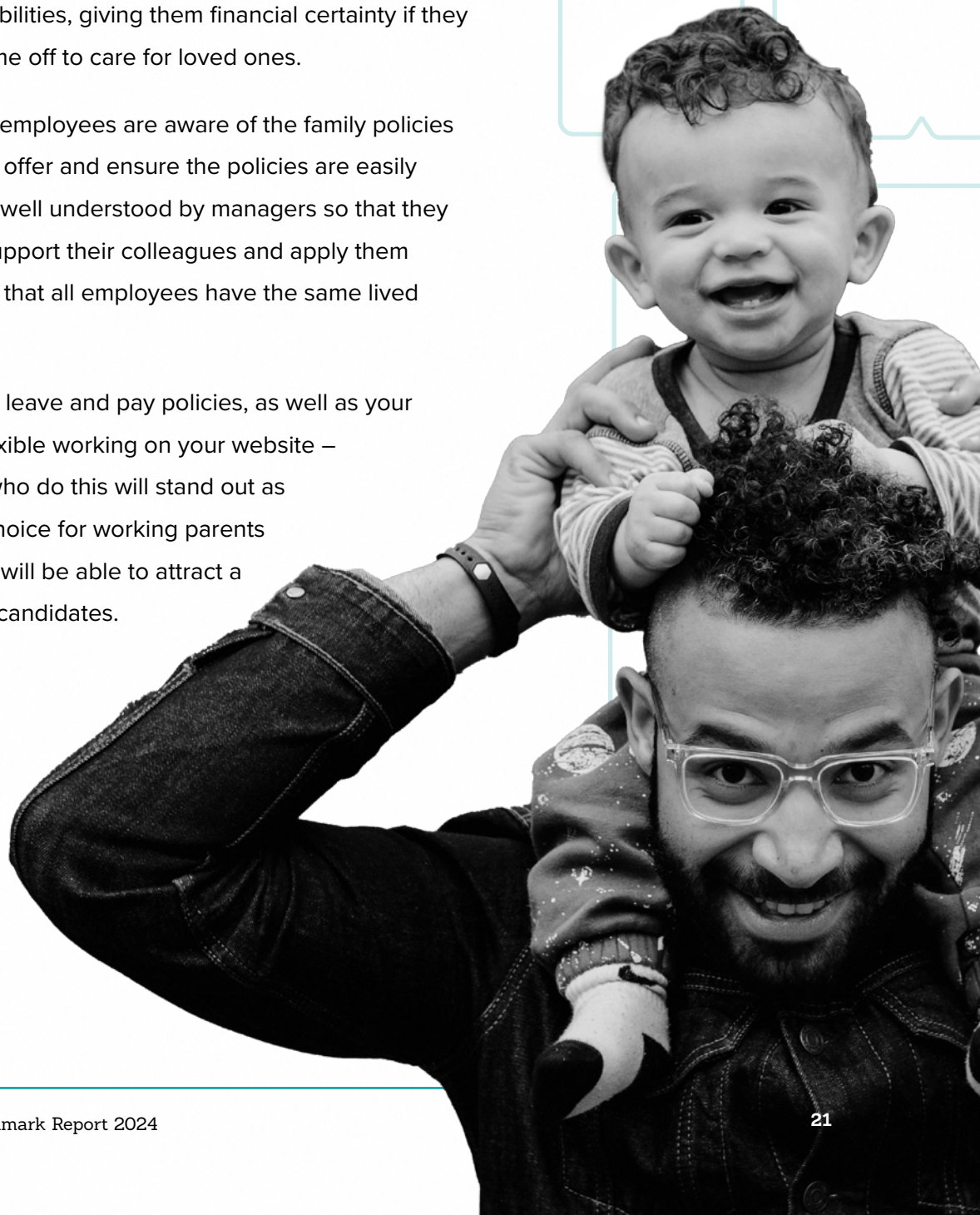
This year, we were impressed to see that 100% of Benchmark employers take measures to support their staff's physical and mental wellbeing, and to prevent burnout and over-working. This includes not only support directly targeting mental health and wellbeing – such as mental health first aiders and training for managers and staff to manage burnout and stress – but also measures related to job design, such as ensuring that staff have clearly defined, output-driven objectives, and designing jobs so they can be completed within their specified hours. This shows us that these best practice employers recognise that creating human-sized jobs that don't have overwork built into them is an important part of supporting staff wellbeing.

⁸Working Families (2023), 'Mental Health Growing Concern for Working Parents, says New Poll', https://workingfamilies.org.uk/news-events/news/nw1w2023_polling_news/

Recommendations

- ♥ Employers should prioritise rolling out training for managers on leading flexible teams, so that all line managers can easily access it. Senior leaders should emphasise the importance of this to managers, as part of the organisation's flexible working culture, to drive engagement and take-up. Take-up could be further increased by making it compulsory.
- ♥ Undertake job analysis to find the flexibility in every role. This not only helps managers to understand whether a flexible working pattern could work for their team, but also ensures that jobs are designed to be done in a flexible way from the outset, which could help attract candidates wanting to work flexibly. Job design and analysis could be incorporated into line manager training on leading flexible teams, to ensure a consistent approach is taken across the organisation.
- ♥ Advertise roles as flexible where possible, stating the flexible options available and an openness to discussing different ways of working, by for example, using the 'happy to talk flexible working' strapline and logo. Advertising senior roles as open to flexibility could attract more women into those roles; job-sharing, for example, could be a suitable option for people looking to take on a more senior position whilst working less than full-time, and combining the different skillsets and experience of two people can be hugely beneficial for organisations.
- ♥ Look within your organisation to see if you can offer career progression opportunities to people working flexibly and ensure that any personal development or training can be accessed within their flexible working pattern.
- ♥ Showcase examples of people at all levels and in different roles working flexibly and part-time within your organisation to encourage others to do the same and to help remove any stigma around flexible working. Remind men in particular of their opportunities to work flexibly before and after their return from equal parenting/paternity/partner leave or shared parental leave so that they know this is open to them and encouraged by the organisation.

- Review your organisation's family leave and pay and take steps to offer more equalised leave for both parents, ideally from day one of employment. This sends a clear message that families are fully supported to take an active role in caring for their child from the start, and it could ultimately improve gender equality. If equalising leave is not an option, employers could take incremental steps to increase paid leave for fathers/partners from two weeks upwards, improving their offer over time.
- Offering paid leave for carers and paid time off for dependants as part of your policy (rather than at manager's discretion) can also have a significant impact for people with caring responsibilities, giving them financial certainty if they need to take time off to care for loved ones.
- Ensure all your employees are aware of the family policies and support on offer and ensure the policies are easily accessible and well understood by managers so that they know how to support their colleagues and apply them consistently, so that all employees have the same lived experience.
- Publicise family leave and pay policies, as well as your approach to flexible working on your website – organisations who do this will stand out as employers of choice for working parents and carers and will be able to attract a wider range of candidates.



Working Families

Get in touch

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