Working Families

Benchmark Report 2025

Top Employers for Working Families 2025

Top 10 (in alphabetical order)

- Audit Wales
- DAC Beachcroft
- Grant Thornton
- Hill Dickinson LLP
- Imperial College London
- Independent Living Fund Scotland
- Mishcon de Reya
- NELFT (North East London NHS Foundation Trust)
- Pinsent Masons
- Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru)

Top 11-30 (in alphabetical order)

- Aviva
- Brodies
- Clyde & Co LLP
- Drax Group
- DWF
- E.ON
- EY
- Freeths
- Linklaters
- Lloyds Banking Group
- LSE
- Macfarlanes LLP
- Mayer Brown
- Norton Rose Fulbright
- PA Consulting
- Royal Bank of Canada
- Southdown
- Squire Patton Boggs
- Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield
- Unilever

Introduction

In 2025, we are at the mid-point of a decade that began with a global pandemic which pressed fast-forward on flexible working. But far from being a universal experience, the benefits have been concentrated in certain sectors and roles.

Government has responded to the clear appetite for flexible working, with large strides taken in legislation that will create more family-friendly workplaces. As we see in the Benchmark, many employers are outpacing legislators by implementing policies and practices that go above and beyond even the proposed changes.

As we take stock of our Benchmark data for the last five years, some areas such as flexibility, support across the journey to parenthood and the life course, and equal parenting have sped ahead. The jump in policies we're seeing for all stages of parenthood represents an acknowledgment of the intertwining of work and life and a broadening of supportive measures in response.

But there remain some glaring areas for growth before we can claim anything close to equality across gender and caring responsibilities. Looking to the future, there must be a focus on women in leadership, men working flexibly, part-time senior roles, and access to flex beyond home working in all sectors and for all parents and carers. And all of this with the backdrop of employees in some sectors being pressured to return to the office.

No business has the same starting point when it comes to family-friendly working, and some have further to go than others. But employers who go through the Benchmark all share the same commitment to doing things differently. Behind every statistic is the story of an employer who has dedicated much effort to making a change, with Working Families by their side. Many have made seismic shifts in the ways they work over the past five years, which makes a real-world, everyday difference to employees and their families. As is apparent from the case studies throughout the report and backed up by the data, employers who embark on a journey with us are definitively altering the way they work, and are all the more effective for it.

The next part of the decade will be marked by further significant policy changes, primarily the parental leave review and Employment Rights Bill. The Benchmark illustrates how employers can get on the best footing for the changes ahead, whilst benefiting from being a supportive family-friendly employer.

The Working Families Employer Benchmark survey

The Working Families Employer Benchmark is a comprehensive annual survey of flexible and family-friendly working policies and practices, open to all Working Families employer members. The Benchmark, originally devised in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies, asks 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 flexible and family-friendly workplace. It allows employers to measure their successes in creating a family-friendly and flexible work culture, highlights any areas they can develop further still, and allows them to benchmark themselves against other best practice employers across the UK.

In this year's Benchmark report, we explore how the world of work has changed for Benchmark employers across the last five years, as well as throwing a detailed spotlight on best practice amongst this year's Benchmark participants.

Who takes part

Every year, we see a range of employers across sectors taking part in the Benchmark - indicating the wide appeal of flexible and family-friendly working. Sectors such as finance, law and public services have remained prominent over the last five years, but encouragingly, employers from sectors with less of a reputation for flexibility, such as retail and construction, are now entering the Benchmark. In 2025, the 49 employers who entered the Benchmark echoed this wide range of sectors, from education to insurance and FMCG.

Most of the employers who enter the Benchmark are larger employers, and this year is no different, with 96% of employers having over 250 employees. This does not reflect the commitment of smaller employers to family-friendly working, rather it's indicative of the tendency of smaller employers to adopt case-by-case or informal flexible and family-friendly working, meaning they are less likely to take part in larger-scale initiatives such as the Benchmark.

Nonetheless, this doesn't mean smaller employers are absent from the Benchmark. Working Families has been proud to showcase the commitment and incredible results shown by smaller employers such as Independent Living Fund Scotland over the last five years.

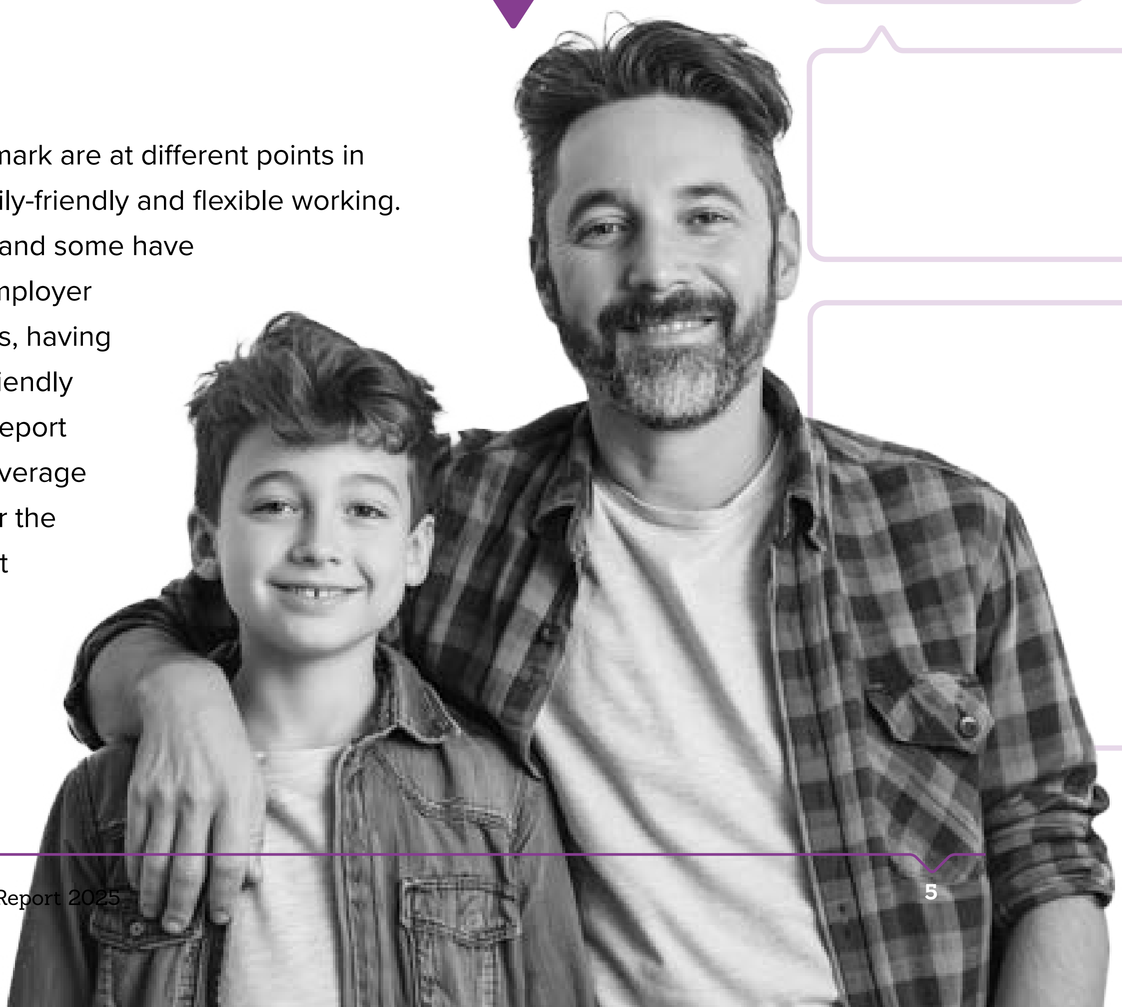
Working Families employer member case study:

Independent Living Fund Scotland

Independent Living Fund Scotland (ILF Scotland), a small organisation with under 100 employees, have embedded a life-friendly culture where their value of putting their people first means they have collaboratively developed a flexible working policy framework to reflect the diverse needs of the workforce. Staff are empowered and trusted to adopt the working pattern that suits them. Managers at every level, many of whom have caring responsibilities, role model flexible working from the outset. Maternity and Adoption leave is offered at 26 weeks full-pay and 26 weeks half-pay, along with paid time off for dependants and paid leave for carers. They are the first to be accredited the gold standard in Scotland by Kinship, for matching Kinship Leave to Adoption Leave. This caring approach is recognised by ILF Scotland as their strongest asset but is also seen as making good business sense due to the impact on attracting and retaining a high calibre of staff, despite being an organisation with limited resources. There is an extremely high level of satisfaction amongst both staff and the disabled people who receive funding from ILF Scotland.

Measure of success

Participants in the Benchmark are at different points in their journey towards family-friendly and flexible working. Some are just beginning, and some have been Working Families employer members for several years, having fully refined their family-friendly offering. The data in this report therefore represents an average across all those who enter the Benchmark, showing what best practice looks like for a range of employers committed to family-friendly working.



The flexible working revolution: five years of change

Five years ago, flexible working was still considered the exception rather than the norm. Before COVID, flexibility barely registered at scale. In 2020, even as the pandemic took hold and the working from home revolution began, an average of just 22% of staff at Benchmark employers were working flexibly. Rather than being an everyday practice, it was considered a perk.

Then came the catalyst that reshaped the workplace overnight. By 2021, 60% of Benchmark employers were reporting that over three-quarters of their workforce was working flexibly. Suddenly, what had once seemed impossible was not just achievable, but effective.

Today, that shift has solidified. In 2025, 71% of organisations entering the Benchmark say that more than three-quarters of their people now work flexibly. Flexible working for these employers means more than just home or hybrid working, where time is split between home and the office - it covers a range of different ways of working, from part-time work and compressed hours to job shares and term-time working. For these organisations, it is now a fundamental part of the way they work. In fact, over the past five years, between 96% and 98% of organisations have put strategic plans in place to support flexible working, embedding it at the heart of their business strategy rather than treating it as an add-on.

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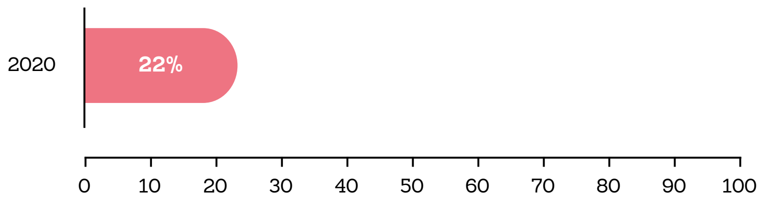
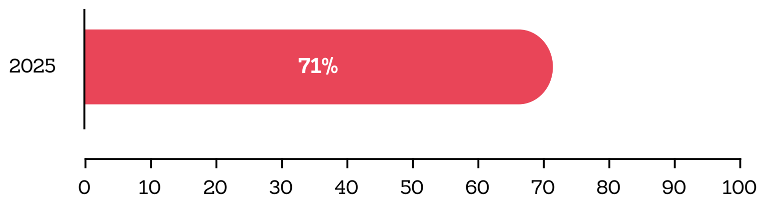
How rates of flexible working have changed for Benchmark employers between 2020 and 2025

22% of staff at Benchmark employers worked flexibly



71% of Benchmark employers say more than three-quarters of their staff work flexibly



A big change for small businesses

The most dramatic turnaround has been among smaller organisations. In 2020, small employers were much less likely to report widespread flexible working. By 2024, every single smaller organisation taking part in the Benchmark (under 250 employees) said over three-quarters of their staff now work flexibly, compared to 59% of larger employers. Not only have smaller organisations shown they can be ahead of the curve, they are also proving that flexibility isn't just for big budgets.[1]

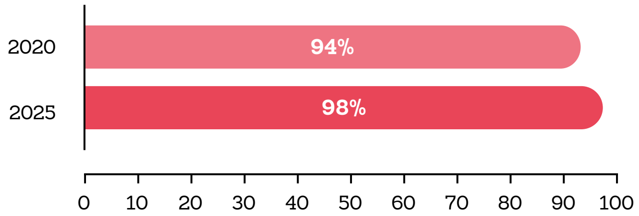
Understanding the bigger picture

Organisations are building a better understanding of flexible working. Tools such as staff surveys, exit interviews and feedback from employee resource groups remain the backbone of insight gathering. But many employers are now digging deeper by tracking the volume of job adverts offering flexibility, as well as measuring outcomes like real estate savings and business travel reductions - making the benefits of flexibility more visible than ever.

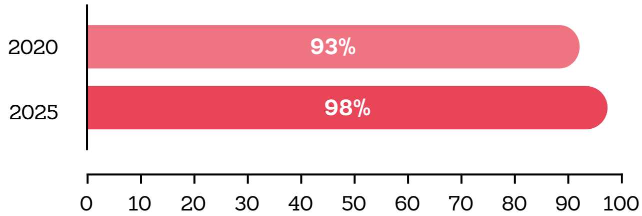
[1] We are not reporting on numbers of staff working flexibly by organisation size in 2025, due to smaller numbers of SMEs entering the Benchmark in 2025.

The tools Benchmark employers use to understand what is going on across the organisation and how a flexible working culture is embedded:

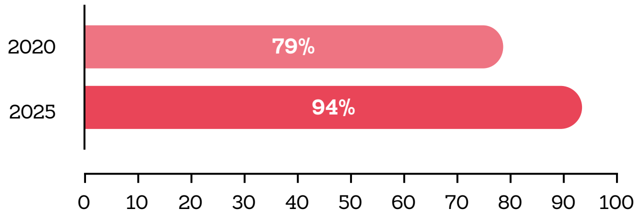
Staff Surveys



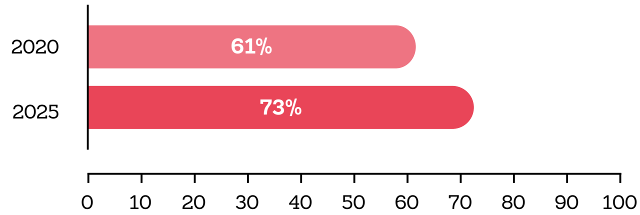
Exit Interviews



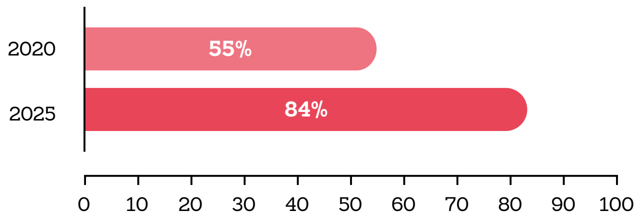
Feedback from employee resource groups



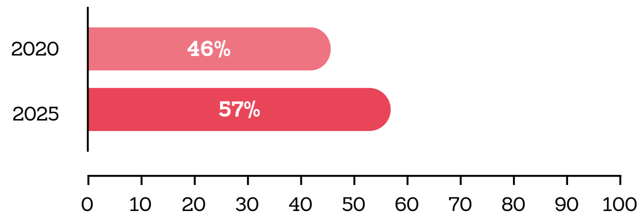
Volume of new job adverts specifying flexibility



Office occupancy rates and real estate savings



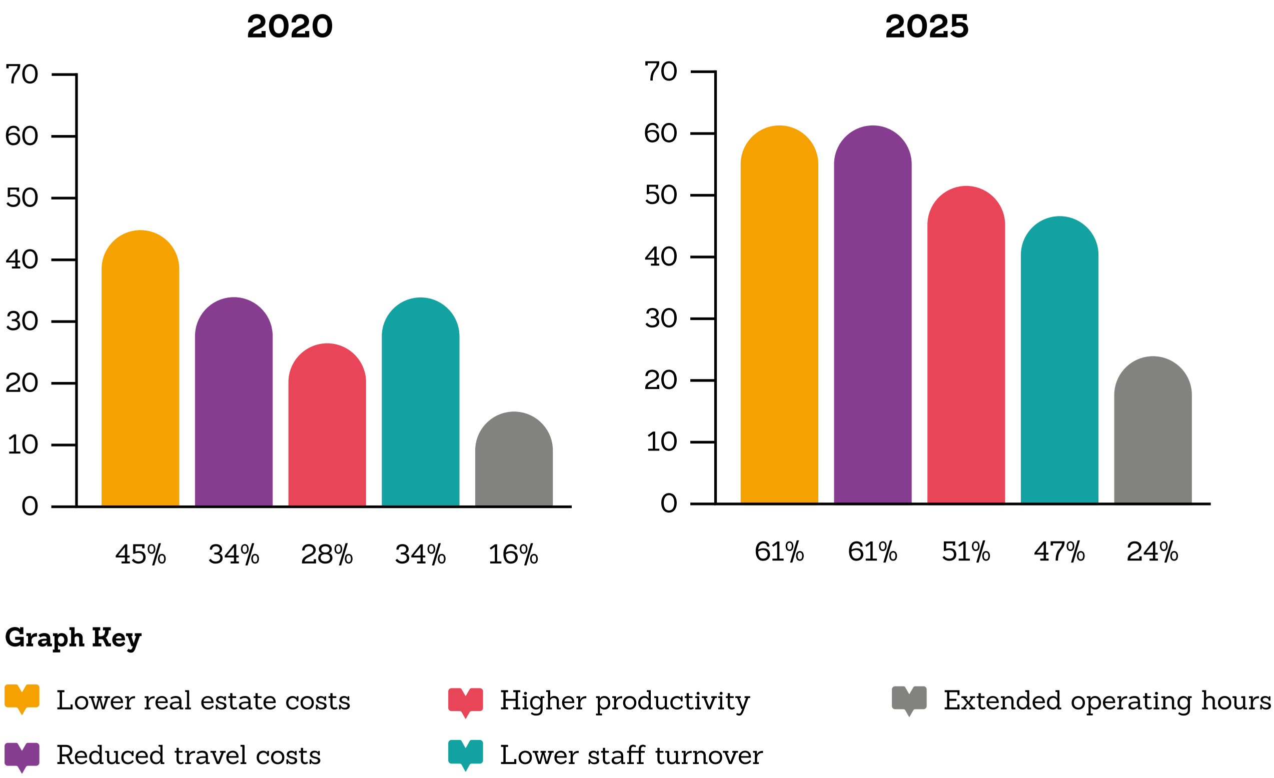
Business travel reductions



The payoffs: productivity, retention and cost savings

For organisations in the Benchmark, the advantages of flexible working are clear. Reduced office and business travel costs and higher productivity consistently top the list. Smaller organisations also highlight reduced staff turnover as a major gain.

Percentage of Benchmark employers reporting each quantifiable benefit of flexible working in 2020 and 2025



The increase in employers reporting each of these benefits of flexible working may reflect improved tracking of the benefits of flexible working amongst employers, but it also shows a genuine recognition amongst employers of the many ongoing benefits of flexible working for organisations as well as their employees.

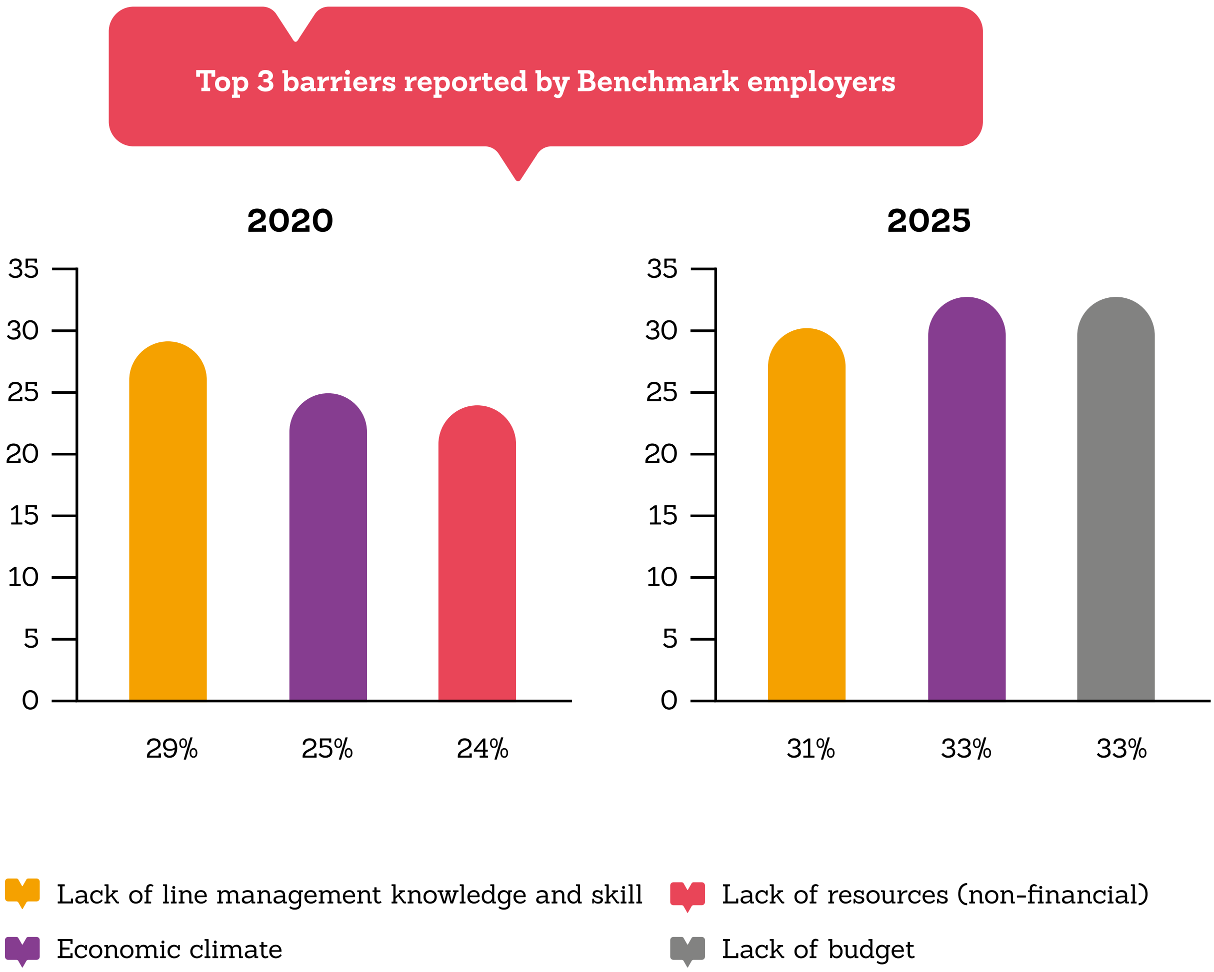
Managers as real models

Managers play a pivotal role in making flexibility work, so it is reassuring that almost all organisations (94% in 2025) have been encouraging line managers to model flexible and family-friendly ways of working over the past five years.

Training in leading flexible teams, however, remains a weak spot. While availability of training for managers surged from 46% in 2020 to 82% in 2025, there has been a decline in managers taking up the offer of training. 31% of employers in 2025 said that more than three-quarters of their managers had taken the training, down from 45% in 2020. It's a similar story with mandatory training, with just 35% of employers making it compulsory in 2025, compared to 45% in 2020.

Real-world barriers

Despite huge progress, challenges remain. Having faced half a decade of global turmoil, the economic climate is now one of the biggest barriers to flexibility, cited by a third (33%) of employers in 2025 compared to just a quarter in 2022. Budget constraints are also rising as an issue (from 17% of employers in 2022 to 33% in 2025), and a lack of line manager knowledge and skills remains a consistent challenge, affecting around 31% of employers, compared to 29% in 2022.



Parental leave:
a new era

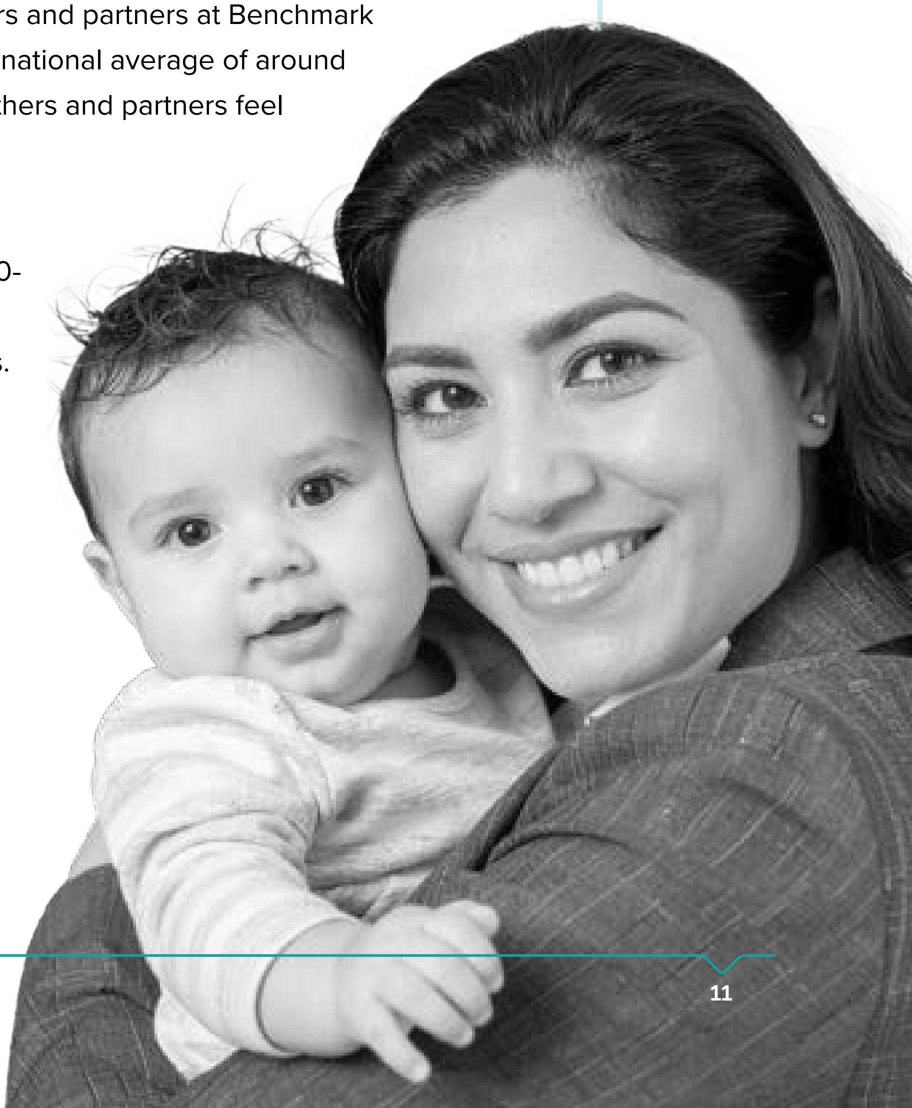
Across organisations in the Benchmark, extended periods of enhanced leave have become the standard, showing they are way ahead of the curve. 2025 reflects the trend over the past five years, with employers offering on average 22 weeks of fully paid maternity leave, 6 weeks of fully paid paternity leave and 19 weeks of fully paid Shared Parental Leave (SPL). These represent employers' most generous offerings, though some apply length-of-service criteria - typically requiring between six months and two years in post before employees qualify for the full entitlement.

A growing number of employers are going further still. Those offering Equal Parenting Leave (EPL) now provide an average of 20 weeks' fully paid leave, although the practice remains limited - only 16% of Benchmark employers currently offer EPL. Some organisations not offering EPL are finding other ways to bridge the gap by significantly extending paternity leave instead, showing there is more than one way to support families and drive equality.

A take-up success story

The real measure of success is in how policies translate into action. For three years running, about 20% of eligible fathers and partners at Benchmark employers have taken SPL, four times the national average of around 5%, evidence of an environment where fathers and partners feel supported to use what's on offer.

Equal Parenting Leave tells an even more encouraging story. Year on year, around 30-40% of eligible fathers and partners take EPL, alongside 25-30% of eligible mothers. These figures show a slow but steady shift in attitudes to caregiving and signal that Benchmark employers have created cultures where it is normal and accepted for fathers to take longer periods of leave.



Working Families employer member case study:

Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield

Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield's (URW) clear commitment to creating a supportive culture for fathers and partners means that from the beginning of their journey to parenthood, fathers and partners are kept informed about options, processes, and entitlements. They receive guidance that signposts support information and pre/during/post-leave checklists. Fathers and partners are entitled to enhanced Paternity Leave at four weeks full pay from day one of employment, which can be taken more than 56 days after birth. There is a recognition of the importance of father/partner involvement in a child's early life with Shared Parental Leave (SPL) being matched to enhanced Maternity Pay of 13 weeks full-pay and 13 weeks half-pay, which can be taken any time up in the baby's first year.

Fathers' and partners' transition back to work is eased through a return-to-work plan and weekly line manager catch-ups, as well as a new parents coaching workshop specifically designed for fathers and partners, where they meet other members of the family support network.

The take-up of SPL at URW was an impressive 50% in 2022, compared with a national average of 2%. 100% of fathers and partners took their full four weeks paternity leave and 100% of eligible employees opted to receive the new fathers coaching and rated it highly.

The transparency gap

Despite this progress, transparency remains a sticking point. For three years, around 6 in 10 of Benchmark employers have published their parental leave and pay policies on their websites (61% in 2025, up from just 43% in 2020). This means 4 in 10 employers are still not upfront about their what they offer. For potential new recruits, this lack of clarity can make a critical difference when considering where to work.

Gender pay gap and progression

Plans and progress

When it comes to tackling the gender pay gap, employers are turning to flexible working as part of the solution. In 2025, 82% of organisations are planning to ask senior leaders to model flexible working arrangements to signal from the top that it is an acceptable way of working. However, just over half (55%) of organisations are actively encouraging men to work flexibly or part-time, despite the fact that normalising flexible work for men is key to shifting workplace culture. This is up from just 40% in 2020, showing progress, but at a slow pace.

There's more consistent commitment when it comes to transparency. In 2025, 82% of employers say they plan to make their job adverts highlight the flexible options available, compared to 79% five years ago. Going above and beyond legislation, Benchmark employers appreciate that this simple change makes it easier for candidates to plan how a role could integrate with their caring responsibilities.

Encouraging fathers and partners to take Shared Parental Leave (SPL) or Equal Parenting Leave (EPL) also remains high on employers' lists, with 69% planning to do so in 2025 (up from 66% in 2020). This is an important area for growth, since evidence shows that fathers taking longer periods of leave has a positive effect on closing the gender pay gap.

Some approaches, however, remain underused. Job sharing at senior levels is still not commonplace, with just 43% of organisations planning to offer it in 2025 (up from 38% in 2022). Recruiting returners, a proven way of bringing experienced women back into the workforce, is also improving but remains modest, with 63% of organisations planning initiatives in 2025 compared to 55% in 2020.

A slow climb to the top

Despite these efforts, men still make up the majority of senior managers and board members. Progress over the past five years has been sluggish, with only a marginal shift from 2021 to 2025 (now at 61% male). Smaller organisations, those with a majority of female employees and the charity sector lead the way in having women in senior roles, a pattern that has remained consistent across the last five years.

The lack of part-time senior leaders appears to be ongoing trend. A very low 8% of senior managers and board members worked part-time in both 2020 and 2025, showing no real change.

Supporting employees through every stage

Increasingly, employers are demonstrating their understanding and support of employees through life's biggest milestones and challenges. Alongside the introduction of new legislation brought in in April 2025, that entitles employees to additional leave if they have a newborn in neonatal care, employers are stepping up support with an expanding of policies around surrogacy, neonatal care, fertility treatment, miscarriage, and menopause.

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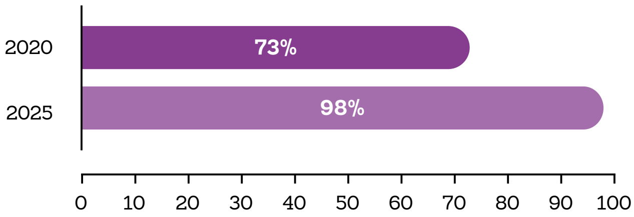
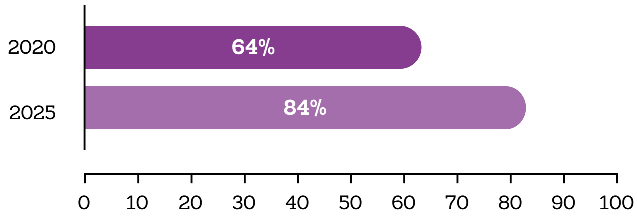
Proportion of Benchmark employers support across the life course:

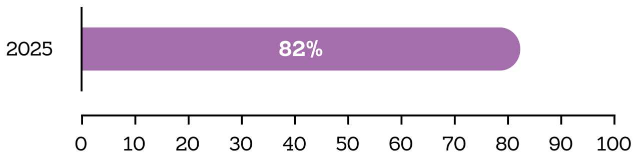
Menopause support for employees



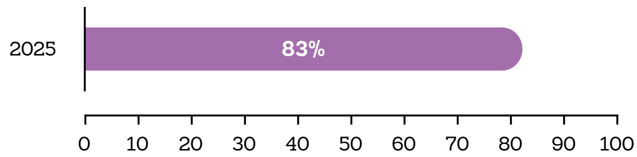
Support for parents having a child through surrogacy



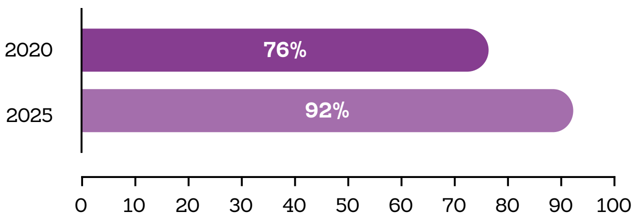
Support for parents whose baby is receiving neonatal care



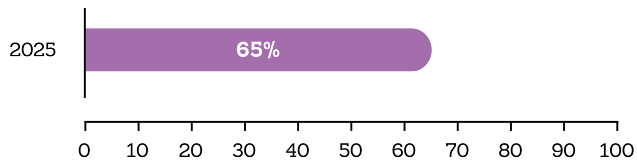
Neonatal leave and pay policy



Support for employees undergoing fertility treatment



Specific IVF policy



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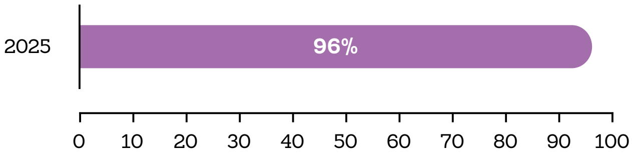
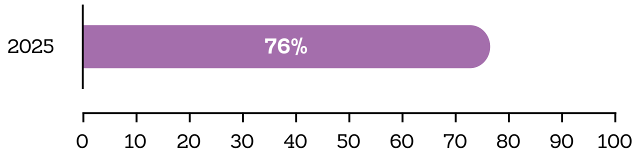
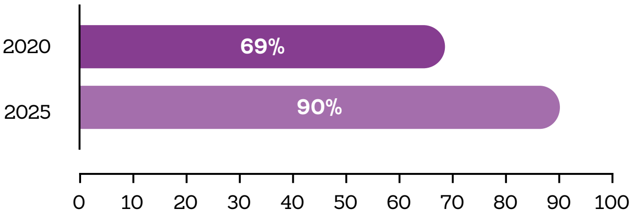
Support for employees who have experienced miscarriage or baby loss



Miscarriage policy



Line manager training and resources to support employees going through menopause



Note: we did not ask about as many forms of support for the life course in the 2020 Benchmark survey; the broader range of options in the 2025 Benchmark reflects the rapid growth in forms of support offered by employers over these years.

Working Families employer member case study:

Unilever

Unilever's aim is to ease any conflict between work and personal life so that everyone can explore pathways to parenthood. Unilever have merged maternity and adoption policies to ensure all parents have the same entitlements. Under the Maternity and Adoption Policy all employees, including those parents who adopt through surrogacy, are entitled to 16 weeks enhanced pay, and more after two years of service. Paternity leave has been renamed Partner Leave to be inclusive of same-sex relationships and is enhanced to three weeks. The Shared Parental Leave Policy enables parents, regardless of gender, to share the enhanced entitlements.

A Fertility Policy was introduced in recognition of the prevalence of fertility challenges and entitles eligible employees to up to £15,000 of fertility treatment through private medical support, where applicable. Fertility appointments are offered as paid leave and can be taken at short notice.

Under the Pregnancy Loss policy, all appointments relating to baby loss are taken as paid leave. If the baby loss occurs after 24 weeks employees qualify for their maternity, adoption, shared parental or partner leave.

Company-wide training is offered to inform and educate around fertility issues. Support initiatives focus on conversations such as the 'Time to Talk' teams who operate as mental health first-aiders, with some having recently been trained as 'Fertility Allies' so that they are better equipped in this area. Awareness raising events also help to bring the subject out into the open, for example the 'Let's Talk About Fertility' panel with experts from charities including The Fertility Network and BUPA.

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Supporting employees to care for loved ones with paid time off for dependants has steadily increased as well. In 2025, 65% of Benchmark employers offer this (up from 55% in 2020), with five days remaining the most common entitlement. Yet employers improving on the statutory unpaid parental leave offering (for parents of children up to the age of 18) by offering paid parental leave remains an area of slow-moving progress - only 12% of employers offer it in 2025, up only slightly from 10% in 2020. Where it exists, the most common provision is 10 days' paid leave. This support for parents can make a huge difference, allowing them more time to be with their children during the 13 weeks a year of school holidays, for instance, which can't usually be covered by annual leave allowances alone, even for households with two parents.

An area of standout success has been support for employee wellbeing. Across the last five years, nearly every organisation taking part in the Benchmark has offered some form of wellbeing support, 98% in 2025. Its consistency across the board highlights that employers see the value in wellbeing initiatives and are moving from a nice-to-have to an expected part of employee life.

What best practice employers are doing in 2025

Best practice employers support flexible working through a mixture of strategy, policy, attitudes and leading by example

A flexible mindset

The Benchmark results show a remarkable level of alignment when putting trust and wellbeing at the heart of working life; 96% say they can rely on colleagues to deliver on commitments, and 94% recognise that line managers have a proactive role in supporting wellbeing. Positive associations with flexibility are apparent, as 78% see flexible working as a tool for improving operational effectiveness. Just as importantly, the myth that working from home means lower performance is fading fast, with 96% of best practice employers rejecting this outdated view. Likewise, 78% disagreed that arriving early or working late equated to high commitment, and 71% dismissed the view that flexible working benefits individuals more than the organisation.

A level of success

With almost all organisations now having a strategic plan to support flexibility, it's clear that the groundwork is in place. But strategy is only as effective as the day-to-day experience. Benchmark employers recognise the need to encourage managers to lead by example, showing their teams what flexible and family-friendly working looks like and making it culturally acceptable. And the impact is visible. 71% of organisations now report that more than three-quarters of their staff are working flexibly, marking a striking shift from the pre-pandemic picture.

98%

have strategic plans to support family-friendly and flexible working

94%

actively encourage their managers to work in a flexible and family-friendly way

71%

of employers have over three-quarters of their staff working flexibly

78%

say flexible working is a means of improving operational effectiveness

Room for growth

Scratch beneath the surface however, and there are still gaps to close. Only 73% of employers say that part-time workers are seen as valued as highly as their full-time peers. One in five organisations (22%) still aren't confident that employees at every life stage can rely on their organisation to support balancing work and care commitments without having to ask. And cultural barriers still linger. Almost half of employers say staff remain concerned about children or household members appearing during video calls, suggesting they don't feel comfortable with their home life being visible, while 31% admit that customer expectations make it harder to enable flexibility.

Best practice employers train their managers to lead flexible teams, and build the training into their structures

Equipping managers to lead

Training managers to lead flexible teams can be one of the most effective ways to guarantee success, and best practice employers are leading the way. In 2025, 82% offer this training, and three-quarters (73%) are actively assessing managers' development needs in this area. Additionally, 65% provide mentoring for line managers in how to manage, support and engage parents and carers within their team. Aligning manager and organisational approaches means that 61% of employers disagree that flexible working options are dependent on individual line managers' discretion.

But progress is uneven. Only around a third of organisations have made the training mandatory, and just 31% of organisations have more than three-quarters of managers who have actually completed it.

Recommendation: To achieve consistency across the organisation, it is vital that managers are taking a consistent approach to leading flexible teams. Organisations should prioritise rolling out line manager training; including this as part of mandatory manager upskilling or part of the induction process would ensure that more managers take part. To further drive take up, the training should be easily accessible and managers should be actively encouraged to participate by senior leaders.

Working Families provides group coaching for managers, leaders and HR professionals, equipping them to lead high-performing flexible teams with confidence and clarity. Internal peer-to-peer support networks for managers can also be a useful forum for managers to discuss their approach and seek advice on any challenges they are facing around flexible working requests or managing a flexible team.

Best practice employers understand that flex goes beyond working from home, offering a range of flexible working options that recognise different employees have different needs

Expanding the range of flexibility

Flexibility today goes far beyond homeworking. All employers (100%) offer part-time roles, and homeworking and anywhere working options, though in some cases these are restricted to certain roles, and every organisation surveyed supports one-off flexible arrangements to navigate the demands of life. Compressed hours and core hours are commonly used, and job shares are relatively widely available too - and may in fact be used more than the data suggests, since employers often tell Working Families that they are not always able to track numbers of job shares in their organisation, so it may be that more are being offered than the data is able to show. Career breaks and sabbaticals are also offered by nearly all employers (98%).

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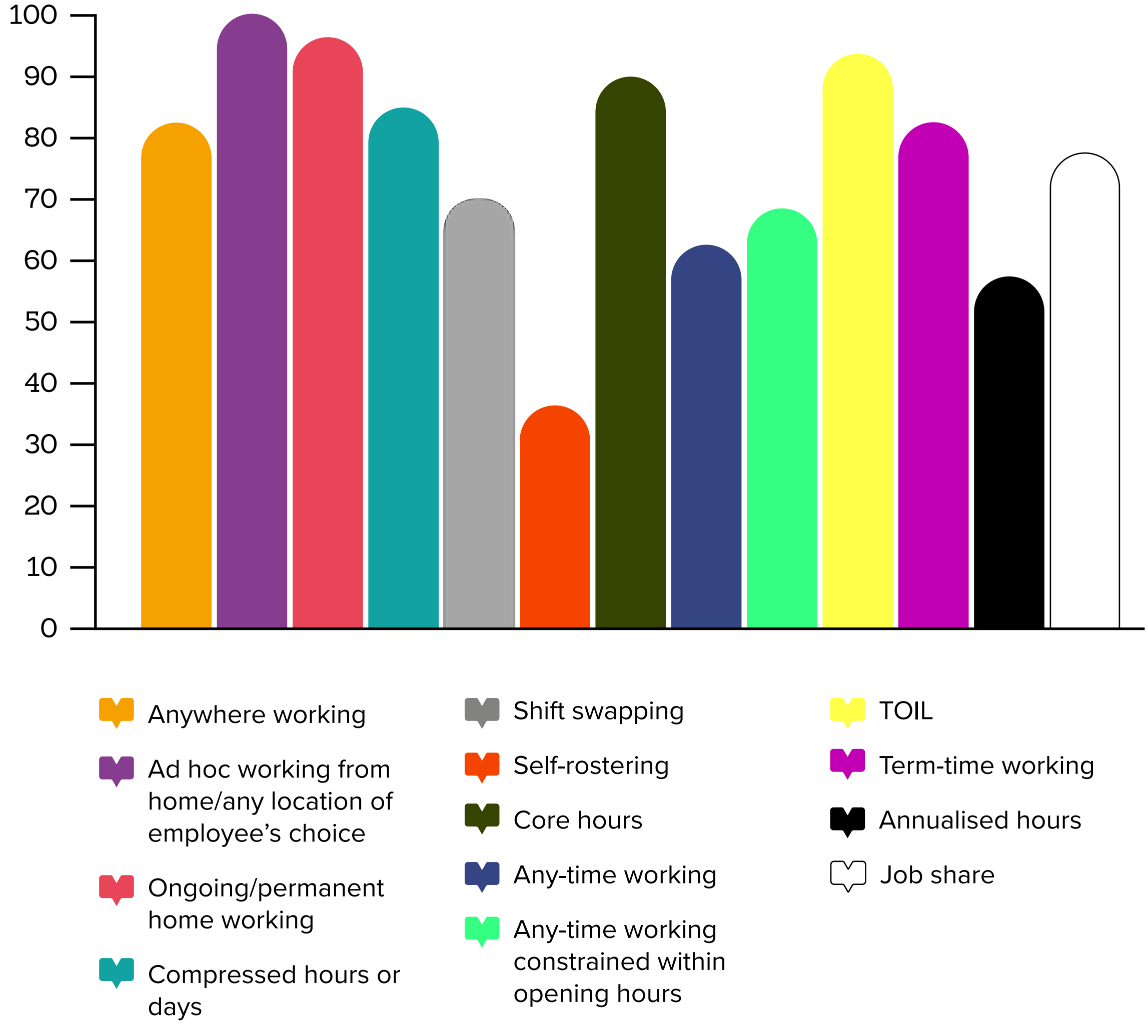
Percentage of Benchmark employers offering each form of flexible working (in some cases these are restricted by function)



Recommendation: To increase the take up of different forms of flexible working, organisations should ensure that employees are aware of the full range of flexible options available to them. This information could sit alongside the flexible working policy, together with examples of colleagues at all levels and in different roles working flexibly in different ways. This would allow employees to consider what might be possible for their role.

Best practice employers build flexible working into their recruitment to make it clear from day one how they support their employees

Designing flexible roles

Rather than an afterthought, best practice employers are building flex into the recruitment process right from the start. Job descriptions are written with flexibility in mind, with 80% of employers carefully planning their workforce needs in full-time equivalents (FTE) and 86% carrying out job analyses on vacancies to determine the possible flexible patterns.

Encouragingly, only a small minority of employers (14%) still ask hiring managers to justify a flexible work pattern on some vacancies, and only 8% ask for all vacancies. Yet, conversely, just over half (53%) require hiring managers to justify a full-time working pattern. That leaves nearly half of hiring managers free to default to full-time recruitment, without stopping to question whether flexibility might work just as well.

Even so, the progress being made is clear. The majority of organisations (80%) report that fewer than a quarter of roles they advertised without mentioning flexibility could, in fact, have been carried out flexibly. That suggests an increasing willingness for job adverts to represent the reality of the different ways roles can be fulfilled.

Recommendation: To ensure that flexibility is considered before recruitment, hiring managers should be encouraged to undertake job analysis on each role to identify the flexible options available. Job design and analysis could be incorporated into line manager training, to ensure consistency across the organisation.

Advertising flexibility

Best practice employers understand that flexibility must be visible from the start. While the Flexible Working Act 2024 has given employees the right to request flexibility from day one, Benchmark employers are going further by putting flexibility at the centre of the recruitment process. In 2025, 80% highlight flexible working on their websites, and two-thirds use the Happy to Talk Flexible Working logo to send a clear signal to potential recruits.

However, there is scope to do more. Only 45% of organisations include flexibility in all external job adverts, and just under half do so for all internal roles. Promisingly, more employers are also ensuring that flexibility is discussed during onboarding or at the end of probation, helping to normalise conversations from the start.

Recommendation: Advertising the specific types of flexible working suitable for the role could help attract a wider talent pool of candidates seeking flexible work and signals to prospective employees that the organisation has a flexible culture, and is open to discussing different ways of working.

Continuing the conversation

Employers invested in progressive ways of working don't stop at advertising, they carry the conversation about flexibility through every stage of recruitment and onboarding. A third of organisations (33%) make sure interview panels bring up flexibility with candidates, rather than waiting for candidates to ask. Most employers (78%) continue a dialogue during onboarding, helping employees understand their options from the outset. And more than half (53%) revisit the subject at the end of probation, recognising that employees may need to settle into the role before knowing what arrangements will work best for them, and that needs can shift over time.

Recommendation: Organisations should empower managers and employees to continue an open dialogue about flexible working by fostering a culture of openness. Check-ins at different touch points would enable employees and their managers to discuss any changes and review flexible working patterns to ensure they are working for the employee and for the team.

Working Families employer member case study:

Hill Dickinson LLP

With a focus on flexibility and inclusivity, Hill Dickinson's recruitment strategy makes a career in law more accessible. Hiring managers are trained in flexible job design so that roles can be assessed for their flexible potential prior to recruitment, and receive continued guidance on encouraging a flexible working environment.

Hill Dickinson has a transparent approach to flexible working, ensuring their receptiveness to flexible working is visible for prospective candidates by clearly stating in job adverts that they are always happy to discuss flexible working arrangements.

Conversations about flexibility can be held at interview stage, by interview panels briefed in how to discuss the work patterns that can best meet a candidate's needs. Agreed procedures are also in place with recruitment agents used, to ensure a consistent approach. Hiring managers are trained in unconscious bias to eliminate potential prejudice from the process.

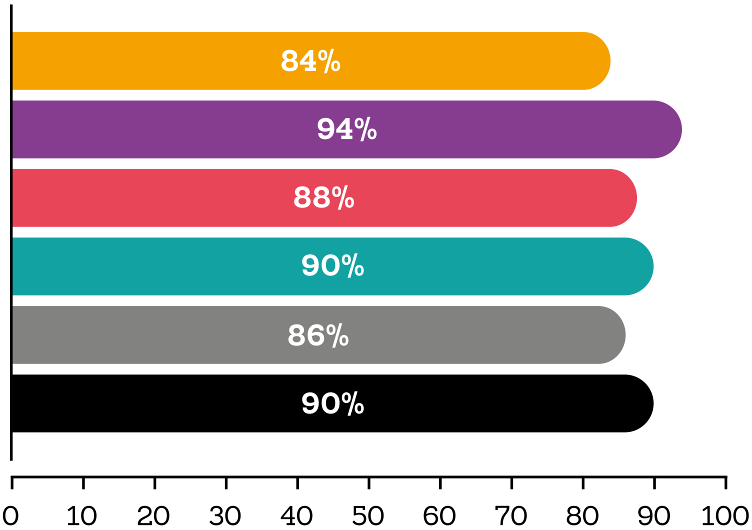
Hill Dickinson also offer career conversations to employees that have been away for an extended period. They are designed as coaching conversations and can help facilitate a smooth transition back into work, whilst also ensuring that individuals are supported in balancing their career aspirations alongside other commitments.

Best practice employers enable their flexible workers to progress

Equal opportunities

Flexibility should not be a barrier to career progression, so it is reassuring that best practice employers are almost universally building safeguards to ensure flexible workers are given equal opportunities to progress.

Percentage of Benchmark employers using each career development tool or measure



- Pro-rate objectives based on FTE
- Readiness for promotion based on demonstration of specific defined skills, knowledge and behaviour
- Employees can pause and adjust the pace of their career development depending on their need for work-life balance
- Measure performance continuously
- Measure performance continuously for job shares
- Measure performance continuously for field/home-based roles

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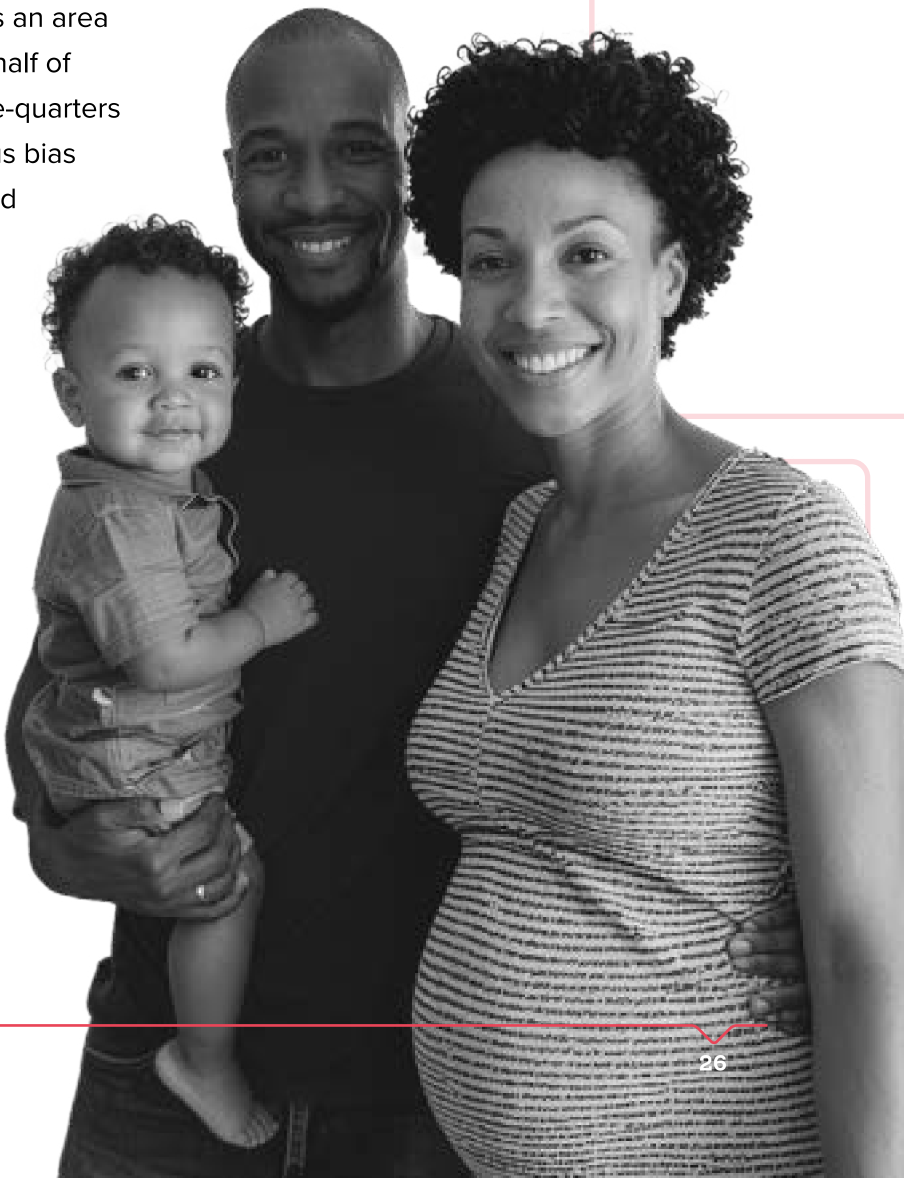
Recommendation: Organisations should advertise roles internally stating the flexible options available so that flexible workers looking for a promotion are encouraged to apply. A statement such as ‘Happy to Talk Flexible Working’ shows that the hiring manager is open to a conversation about different working patterns. Any opportunities for learning and development should, where possible, be made available during a flexible workers’ working hours and online learning should be accessible on demand.

Employers could also measure the number of flexible and part-time workers receiving high performance ratings and people being promoted on less than full-time contracts, as well as within 12 months of their return from maternity/ shared parental/equal parenting leave compared with full time workers, to help identify and address any challenges.

Best practice employers assess flexible working requests transparently

Transparency builds trust, which is why 80% of employers publish their approach to assessing flexible working requests, all of whom do this alongside their flexible working policy, ensuring employees know exactly how decisions are made.

But training for those approving requests is an area for potential growth. Currently, only about half of organisations have trained more than three-quarters of approvers on key issues like unconscious bias or the business case for flexibility, that could have significant influence.



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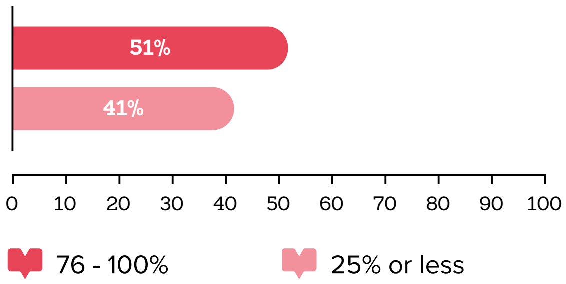
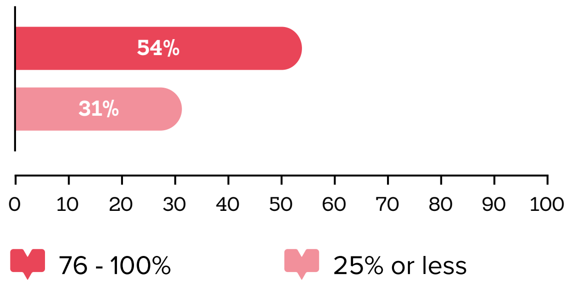
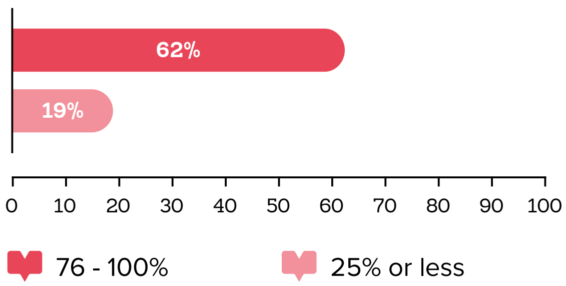
Approvers trained in the business case for flex:



Approvers trained in unconscious bias for flex working requests



Approvers trained in unconscious bias for performance



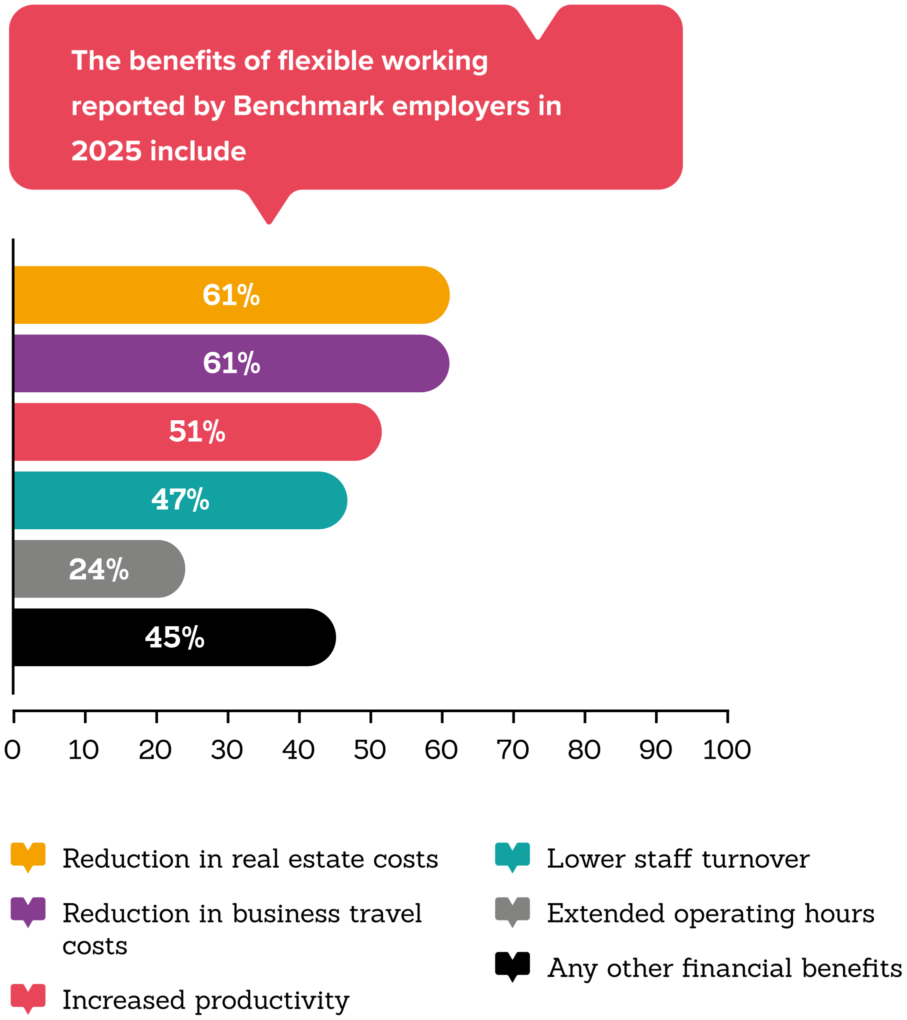
Recommendation: Equip managers with the necessary knowledge and skills to fairly assess flexible working requests and ensure that the flexible working policy is applied consistently across the organisation. Include the business case for flexible working and unconscious bias in training on leading flexible teams, to give managers the full picture of the business benefits and how to approach requests fairly.

Best practice employers are able to demonstrate the benefits of flexible working

Measuring the benefits

Perhaps most importantly, best practice employers clearly understand the business case for flexible working, and are able to demonstrate its impact for staff as well as for the bottom line.

Over half (55%) of employers were able to quantify its benefits, reporting financial gains as well as extending opening hours that could result in a better customer experience.



Recommendation: Demonstrate the link between ways of working, staff wellbeing and organisational performance to develop a strong business case. Find ways to assess the impact and benefits of flexible working and use this data to further refine policies and practices and identify any challenges to be addressed.

Parental leave

Best practice employers offer long periods of fully paid leave for new parents - both mothers and fathers/partners

Rethinking parental leave

For new parents, the support they receive from their employer can shape not only their first months at home, but also the trajectory of their careers. Best practice employers recognise this, and they go well beyond statutory requirements to offer generous and balanced leave policies for mothers, fathers, and partners alike.

On average, Benchmark employers offer:

22 weeks

22 weeks
of fully paid maternity leave

6 weeks

6 weeks
of fully paid paternity leave

19 weeks

19 weeks
fully paid Shared Parental Leave (SPL)

20 weeks

20 weeks
fully paid Equal Parenting Leave (EPL)

These represent employers' most generous offerings, though some apply length-of-service criteria - typically requiring between six months and two years in post before employees qualify for the full entitlement.

Employers taking part in the Benchmark are rethinking how parental leave is structured. Some offer extended paternity leave of 16, 20, 26, or even 52 weeks, though not always fully paid, effectively turning paternity leave into a form of EPL. Others take a different approach by keeping paternity leave shorter, perhaps four weeks, but then pairing it with more generous stretches of SPL or EPL for fathers and partners. Employers are designing policies that offer genuine choice for families, allowing them to share care in ways that work best for them.

Employers are also building flexibility into policies, giving families more control over when and how they use their leave. A striking 82% of Benchmark employers enhance how paternity or partner leave can be taken, over and above statutory minimum, making it easier for families to balance caring responsibilities with work.

Best practice employers support their staff when their leave ends

Continued support

Crucially, for these employers, support doesn't end when leave does. Almost all Benchmark employers (96%) help parents ease back into work with phased return programmes. 84% take a progressive stance by not requiring repayment of enhanced leave if an employee decides not to return after maternity, paternity, or EPL, avoiding placing financial pressure on families.

Best practice employers make their leave offerings clearly available at recruitment stage

Visible support

Transparency is a hallmark of best practice. While 61% of Benchmark employers now publish their parental leave and pay policies on their websites, that still leaves nearly 4 in 10 who do not. Making these details public doesn't just strengthen recruitment processes by signalling to candidates that the organisation values family-friendly policies, but it also builds trust with existing staff.

Recommendations:

Offer equal leave to either parent to send a clear message that both parents are fully supported from the start to take an active role in caring for their child, which could ultimately improve gender equality. If equalising leave is not feasible, consider incremental steps to increase paid leave for fathers/partners from two weeks upwards, to improve the offering over time. The more flexibility over how and when leave is taken, the better, so that employees can choose what's best for their family.

Ensure that all employees are aware of the family policies and support on offer and ensure policies are easily accessible and well understood by managers.

Publicise family leave and pay policies on company websites to stand out as employers of choice for working parents and carers and those considering starting a family in the future.

Gender pay gap and progression

Best practice employers take active steps towards closing their gender pay gap

Progressive action

The most forward-thinking employers understand the need to take pro-active measures to address the gender pay gap for the benefit of employees and for business. In 2025, nearly 9 in 10 (88%) plan to actively encourage flexibility for all employees and at every level, while 82% will make sure their leaders were out and proud about their flexible working arrangements. Encouragingly, 82% are planning to make flexible options clear in job adverts, and 43% want to offer job shares at all levels. Employers are also planning to take positive steps to recognise the value of women returning to work having had a child, with 63% looking to actively recruiting returners.

Shifting perception is a large piece of the puzzle when it comes to tackling gender inequality and so having more than half (55%) of employers planning to encourage men to work flexibly or part-time contributes to setting new norms. Likewise, by promoting EPL and SPL, as 69% of employers will do, moves the dial toward normalising equal caregiving.

Recommendations:

Proactively showcase examples of people at all levels and in different roles working flexibly to encourage others to do the same and to help remove any stigma around flexible working.

Advertise senior roles as being open to flexibility to attract more women, and highlight job-sharing as a suitable option for people looking to take on a more senior position.

Support across the life course

Best practice employers support their employees throughout their journeys to parenthood

Best beginnings

Benchmark employers are taking the lead when it comes to implementing support at every stage of life. For many, that begins with the journey to parenthood. Almost all have policies in place to support employees experiencing fertility challenges or loss, with 92% covering fertility treatment, 65% offering support around IVF, and 96% recognising the support required around miscarriage, including three-quarters having a dedicated miscarriage policy. Support also extends to surrogacy (84%) and neo-natal leave and pay (83%), as well as proactive help for employees during the transition to parenthood or caring (90%) and for their line managers (78%)

Best practice employers support their staff with flexibility and leave through all stages of their children's lives

Navigating parenthood

Parenthood can be a challenging journey, and best practice employers continue to provide practical support and flexibility throughout a child's life to help families thrive. Flexible working remains central - every single employer provides short-term flexibility, and 80% allow planned time off for family occasions, with 79% paying for this. There is widespread recognition (96%) of the importance of employee networks in supporting parents and carers.

Nearly all (98%) offer facilities for breastfeeding, and while few employers currently offer back-up dependent care (18%), childcare facilities (14%) or childcare deposit loan schemes (8%), these are best practice areas that are beginning to grow.

Best practice employers support their staff's wellbeing throughout their life course

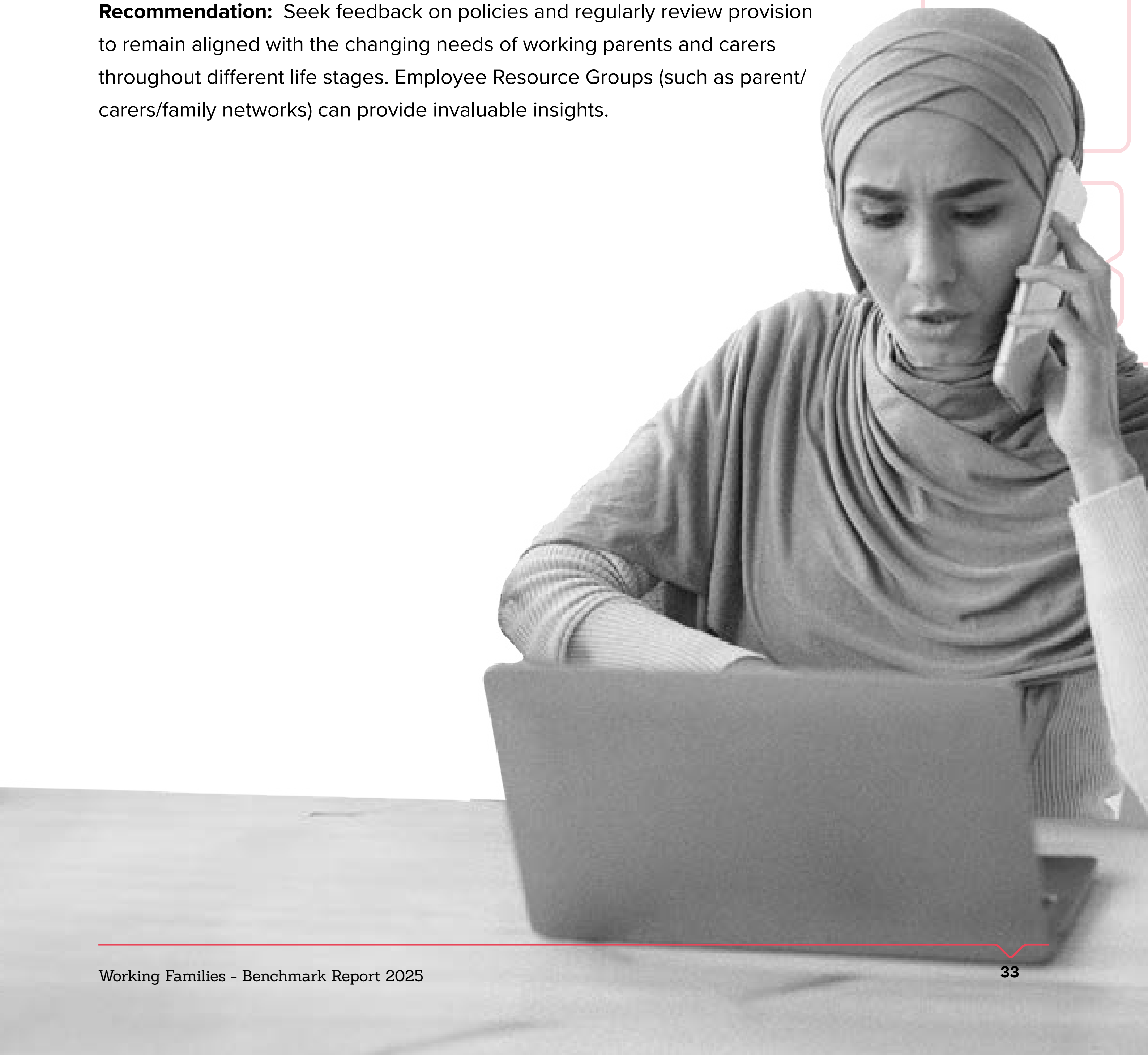
Menopause support

Best practice recognises the need for support throughout life, not just during early parenthood. Almost all (98%) Benchmark employers provide menopause support, with 9 in 10 providing training for line managers, reflecting an understanding of the significant impact that health and care needs can have on an employee.

An emphasis on wellbeing

With an overwhelming 98% of Benchmark employers providing wellbeing support, it is very much the norm rather than the exception to prioritise the care of employees.

Recommendation: Seek feedback on policies and regularly review provision to remain aligned with the changing needs of working parents and carers throughout different life stages. Employee Resource Groups (such as parent/carers/family networks) can provide invaluable insights.



Carers

Best practice employers support their employees who are carers

Taking care of carers

Employers are more and more acknowledging the vital role of carers. The majority go beyond the statutory unpaid leave requirement, with 55% offering paid carers' leave at an average of 5.3 days. In addition, 69% offer specific support to parents of children with disabilities, recognising the unique responsibilities and challenges many families face. 78% offer adjustment leave to allow employees to manage the transition to new caring responsibilities.

Recommendations:

Offer paid leave for carers and paid time off for dependants as part of company policy rather than at manager's discretion, to provide people with caring responsibilities financial certainty if they need to take time off to care for loved ones.

Working Families

Get in touch

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For more information on our work and mission, please visit

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