



Top Employers for  
Working Families

**Benchmark  
Summary Report  
2017**

# Top Employers for Working Families 2017

## Top 10 (in alphabetical order)

American Express  
Barclays Bank  
Crown Prosecution Service  
Deloitte  
EY  
Intellectual Property Office  
Lloyds Banking Group  
Pinsent Masons  
Royal Bank of Scotland  
Southdown Housing

## Top 11-30 (in alphabetical order)

Allen & Overy  
Bank of England  
Berwin Leighton Paisner  
Citi  
DWF  
Hogan Lovells  
Imperial College London  
Independent Living Fund Scotland  
LSE  
Mayer Brown  
Ministry of Justice  
National Assembly for Wales  
Oliver Wyman  
Public Health England  
Royal Bank of Canada  
Simmons & Simmons  
UBS AG  
University of Suffolk  
Westfield Europe  
Yorkshire Building Society

## Introduction

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The annual Top Employers for Working Families member benchmark is unique and comprehensive. It is the only benchmark measuring all aspects of flexible and agile and work life policies and practice, and how these are integrated into an organisation's values and culture.

It is for organisations that genuinely want to move on to the next level in terms of family friendly and flexibility. The Top Employers for Working Families member benchmark is not just a quantitative, tick box, tokenistic exercise; it is designed to identify the lived experience of your employees; to show you where your competitors are; and to provide a platform for organisations that want to progress to the next level. It can help you make the case, internally, for change and it will help identify the achievements you have made to showcase internally and externally.

Summarised here are the key findings from the 2017 benchmark, showing not just current practice but also the evolving way in which organisations think about work life balance and flexible working.

Media partner 

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# Building Your Flexible Culture

Organisational behaviour and attitude have a key role in developing family friendly and flexible workplace culture.

This includes explicit commitment to developing a flexible and family friendly workplace: in 2017 48 per cent of employers explicitly publicised their desire to be a flexible and family friendly workplace in their mission or vision statement. Sixty three per cent included their commitment in their organisational values and three quarters explicitly talked about the value they ascribed to flexibility in their recruitment activities, demonstrating the extent to which flexibility is both a powerful attractor and a necessity in a competitive labour market.

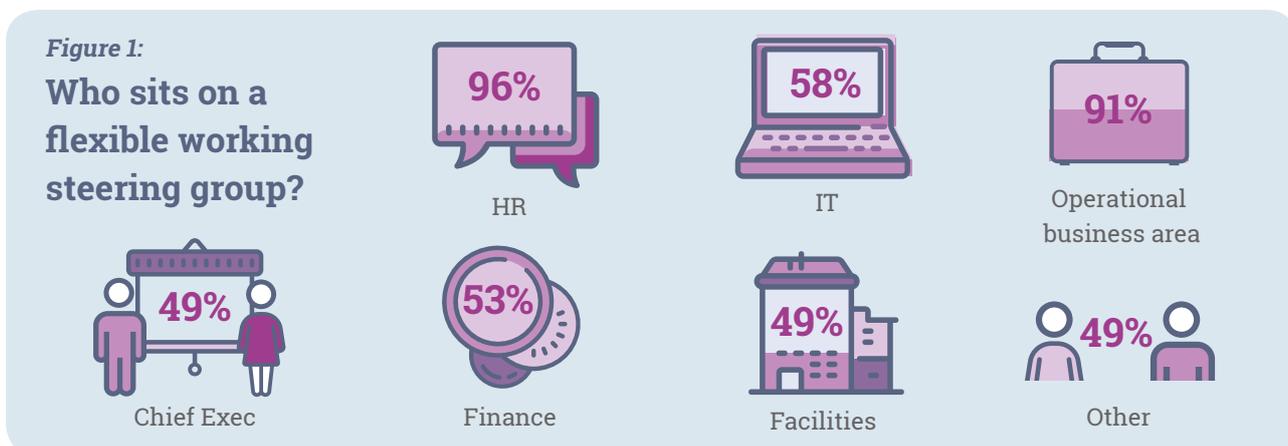
Reporting on leadership and flexibility, the majority of organisations were able to evidence good structural support and oversight. Sponsorship of flexibility came from the main board (83 per cent), and almost all said that this was proactive. Steering groups are also widely used (*Figure 1*), with membership drawn from across the organisation and led by HR.

Organisations said that there were largely positive attitudes towards flexible working practices and work life balance. Employees who worked flexibly were viewed as positively as their colleagues, and work life balance was accepted as something that most people would need to explore during their working life. However, there were some signs that an organisational culture of work life balance and flexibility is, in places, less integrated than in others. Almost half (49 per cent) identified work life balance as an individual 'issue' that had to be worked around (rather than being resolved by an embedded flexible culture), and only just over a third (36 per cent) said that flexibility was considered a 'default' way of working. Old attitudes towards presenteeism and longer hours remain persistent:

42 per cent still saw managers who valued starting early or staying late as signs of commitment. This may be linked to the relatively low number of employers (21 per cent) who see flexibility as a way of addressing structural social inequalities around work.

Half of all organisations cited a lack of line management skill and knowledge as their biggest barrier to developing a work life balance culture, an increase on previous years. It is likely that organisations are more aware now of the crucial role of the line manager in developing and embedding a flexible culture, and focussing efforts there. The financial climate was a challenge for a third of organisations, and, with Brexit, this may tighten further over the next years. The critical role of IT in developing flexibility was demonstrated by the 64 per cent of organisations who saw an IT upgrade as an opportunity to push further. Other opportunities were relocating (40 per cent) and a change in leadership (34 per cent).

All benchmarking organisations said that creating a flexible and family friendly workplace featured in their strategic plans, primarily in their health and wellbeing strategy, their employee relations strategy and their IT strategy. Whilst it was also recognised in some financial and marketing strategies, this was at a lower level and more likely to be recognised informally within the strategy or not at all. This suggests that flexibility and family friendly working still has some ground to gain in being part of the wider business strategy, and points to a gap between the benefits that organisations say that flexibility brings, and the application of flexibility as a business tool across all areas.



# Policy

## There have been new developments in the work life policies of organisations in recent years, stimulated by the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and by the extension of the Right to Request Flexible Working.

Although many organisations had already embraced flexibility for all employees before the extension, it has had a positive effect in shifting the idea of flexibility away from being just for parents of young children.

The majority of organisations (46 per cent) offer between 12 and 20 weeks of maternity leave at full pay; a quarter offer 26 weeks. Eighty three per cent offer full pay for two weeks of Ordinary Paternity Leave, whilst ten per cent went beyond this to offer additional weeks of paid paternity leave.

In terms of Shared Parental Leave (SPL), the majority (83 per cent) have matched SPL to their enhanced maternity provision. This means that 55 per cent are paying at full pay levels for between 13 and 28 weeks of SPL. The configurations<sup>1</sup> of how SPL can be taken are shown in *Figure 2*.

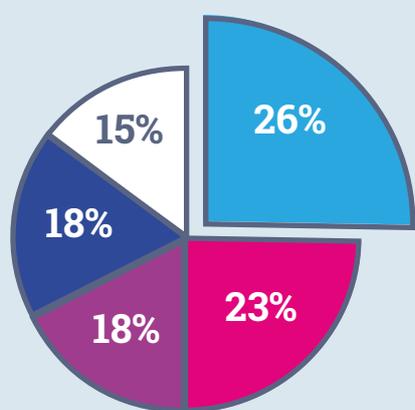
Organisations report that SPL take-up is running according to expectation (46 per cent), or beyond expectation (31 per cent). Sixty two per cent of organisations reported mothers taking up SPL within the last year, and 85 per cent said that they had had father take-up. The difference between mother and father take-up reflects the demand amongst some fathers for paid time off for childcare, and the opportunity this relatively new policy affords. Whilst mothers may use maternity

leave or (if eligible) SPL to secure time off, fathers have had little meaningful opportunity before SPL. However, there are wide differences in numbers taking up SPL.

In 52 per cent of organisations they had seen ten or fewer fathers take SPL in the last year, and 15 per cent had no take-up at all. At the other end of the scale, 12 per cent of organisations reported an average of 96 fathers taking up SPL (a mean take-up rate of seven per cent based on estimated eligible population<sup>2</sup>). The majority (81 per cent) also said that they had not found that SPL was leading to women returning to work sooner after childbirth.

Policies around time off work were comprehensive, with many organisations both allowing paid time off for emergencies and dependent care, and also drawing boundaries around who dependents are quite widely. However, some organisations are still leaving decisions on length of time off and pay to managerial discretion rather than policy, heightening the risk of inconsistent or patchy practice.

Flexible working practices themselves were generally available and in all but a few instances of working time specific practices (like shift swapping or self rostering) they were unrestricted and open to all staff in more than 50 per cent of organisations.



**Figure 2:**  
**SPL configuration**

- Individually matched and floating
- Individually matched and tied
- Family shared and floating
- Family shared and tied
- Other matching

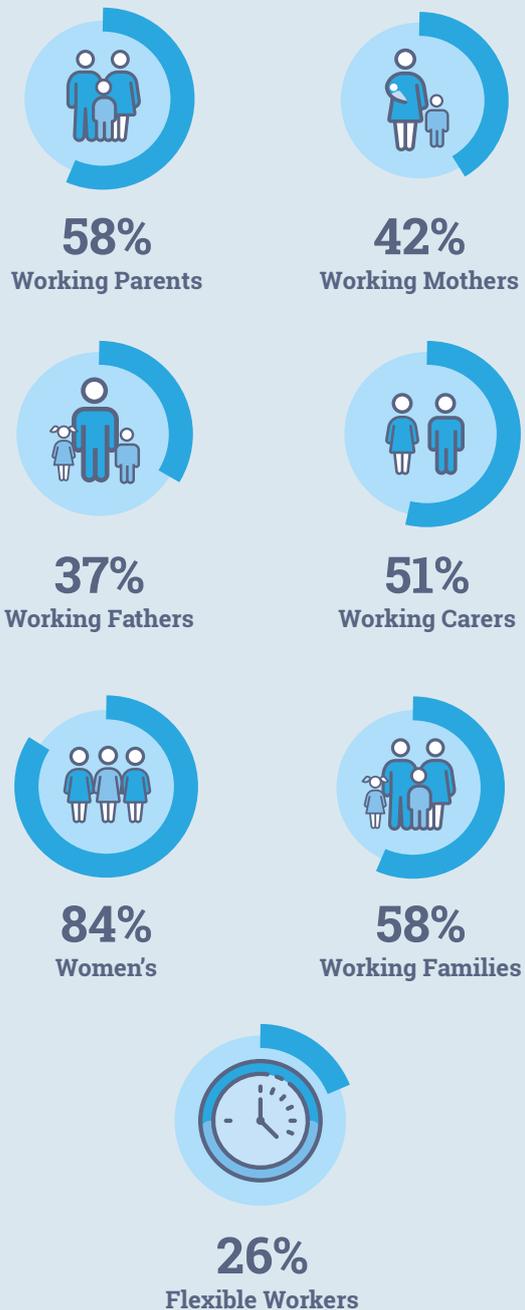
Policy provision to support parents and carers was good, although mothers enjoyed the highest levels of support particularly in mentoring, buddying and coaching. Support was also good for line managers, with 75 per cent of employers saying that they provided support for line managers of staff who were transitioning to a caring responsibility. Again, the focus on mothers rather than other employees was slightly greater here but the gap was small, especially between mothers and fathers.

Employee networks are increasingly popular and many employers are running a number of employer-funded networks. The Top Employers for Working Families Awards case studies<sup>3</sup> demonstrate how vital these networks have become: they gather employees together who have similar interests and work life challenges; they promote exclusivity and organisational commitment; they offer an opportunity for support and networking; they provide a useful sounding board for policy, and can also help with policy formulation; and they offer a way of gaining insights that may otherwise remain elusive. The main networks employers are supporting are shown in *Figure 3*.

Recruitment policy is developing, with flexibility being explicitly on the table from the beginning in many organisations.

- Half of all benchmarking organisations are now routinely evaluating all jobs for their flexible potential prior to advertising them, with a further 42 per cent doing this for at least some jobs.
- More than a third now require hiring managers to justify a full-time pattern, whilst more than three quarters don't require any justification for hiring with a flexible working pattern.
- Internal and external job adverts always carry information on the flexibility available in the role in a third of employers.
- 71 per cent of employers ensure new starts have information on flexibility and work life opportunities.
- However, in only a third of organisations did new recruits have a scheduled work life discussion at the end of the probationary period or at their first review.

**Figure 3:**  
**Percentage of networks**



<sup>1</sup> For the different configurations of Shared Parental Leave please see [www.workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/the-top-employers-for-working-families-benchmark-report-2015/](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/the-top-employers-for-working-families-benchmark-report-2015/)

<sup>2</sup> [dera.ioe.ac.uk/15985/2/12-1268-modern-workplaces-response-flexible-parental-leave-impact.pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15985/2/12-1268-modern-workplaces-response-flexible-parental-leave-impact.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.workingfamilies.org.uk/employers/case-studies/](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/employers/case-studies/)

# Ensuring Consistent Practice

Flexible and family friendly working needs a supportive environment to ensure that employees and organisations can get the full benefits.

Consistent practice is vital: this is not simply ensuring employees have the same access and experience of flexibility, but that the use and support of it is consistent: values need to be matched with behaviours and investment needs to match commitments.

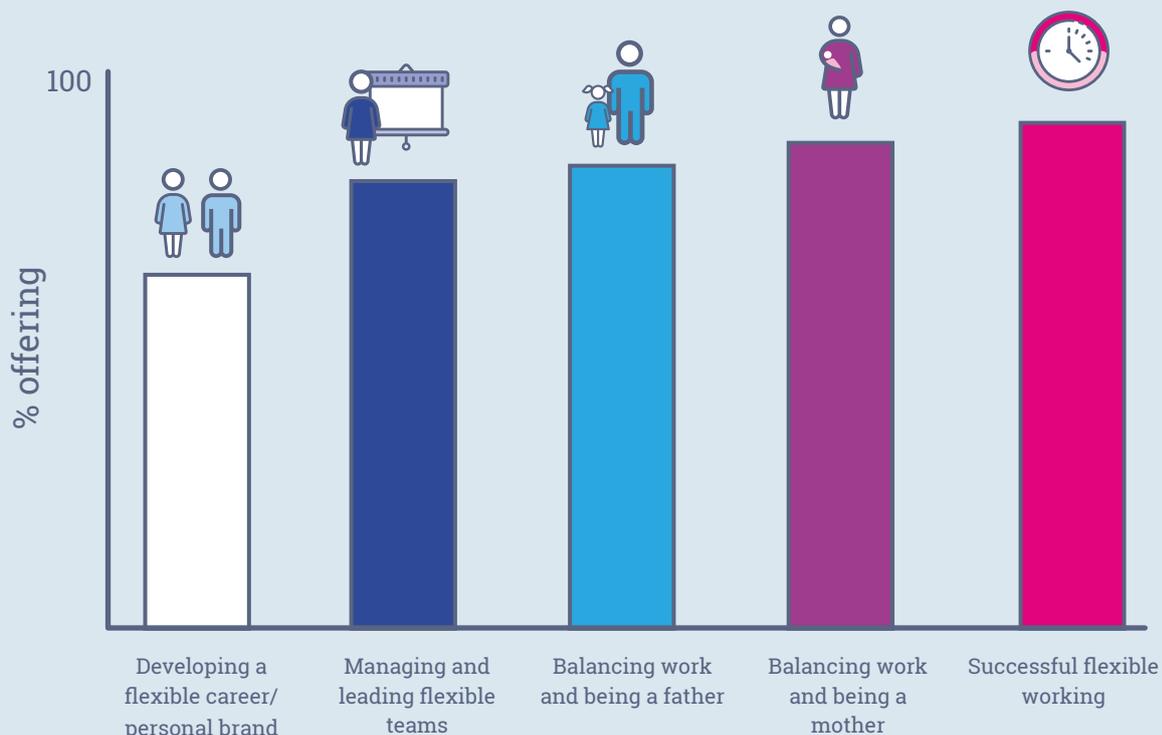
Organisations were using a number of channels to promote flexibility, and these include communications from senior managers on a semi-regular basis to signal commitment from the highest levels of the organisation. There is perhaps more scope here, with many organisations using their senior leaders only a couple of times a year.

Webinars, lunch and learn sessions and seminars were all popular options to promote flexibility. The most popular subject areas covered can be seen in *Figure 4*.

Organisations are good at ensuring that criteria for making and assessing flexible working requests are easily accessible and available to all employees. They are also (in 90 per cent of instances) using criteria consistently to assess requests. However, requests and approvals for flexibility are not, in the majority of organisations, monitored by grade, gender, division or approver. In larger organisations especially, detailed monitoring is important in ensuring consistent practice that is aligned with other organisational objectives, such as developing talent pipelines.

As well as understanding the requirements for approving formal requests to work flexibly (which can also be a useful framework for evaluating requests to work flexibly *informally*), understanding the business case for flexible working is a vital skill set enhancement

**Figure 4: Five most popular training sessions delivered on flexibility and work life balance**

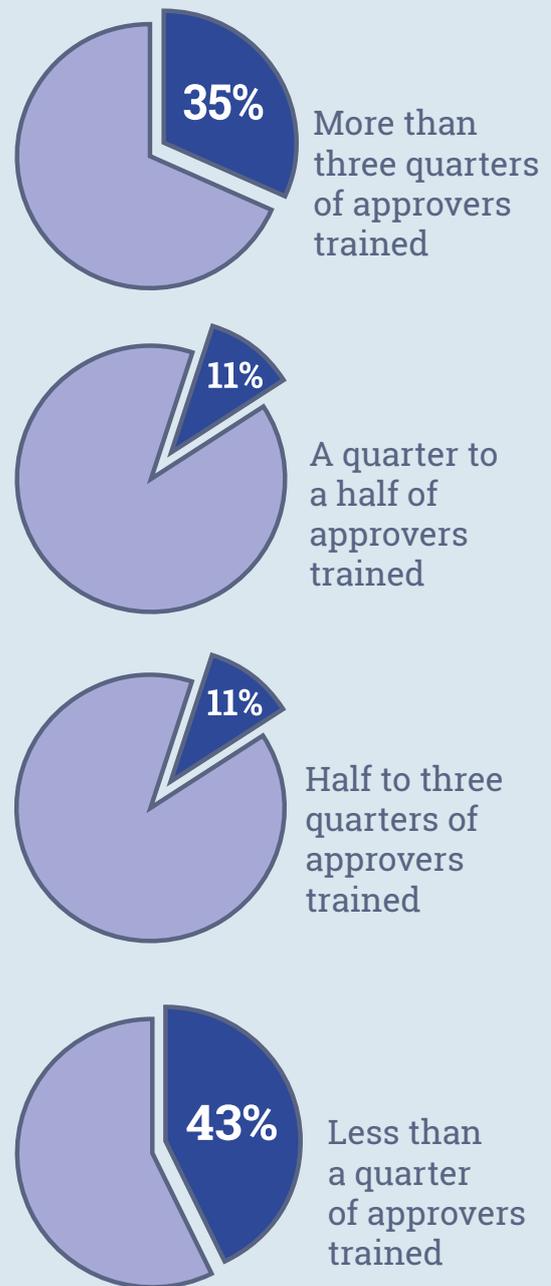


for approvers and managers. However, as *Figure 5* shows, many approvers of flexible working requests remain untrained.

A quarter of organisations have trained more than three quarters of their managers in managing flexible working and flexible workers, but more than this (27 per cent) have trained fewer than a quarter of their managers and 17 per cent do not provide such training. Effective management of flexibility is crucial to maximise the individual and organisational benefits and with expectations of flexible working firmly established, managers need the tools to help them manage the many different forms flexible working arrangements can take. A first step is assessing the skills required and here 56 per cent of organisations were able to report that they had done this.

**“With expectations of flexible working firmly established, managers need the tools to help them manage the many different forms flexible working arrangements can take.”**

**Figure 5:**  
**How many approvers have organisations trained in the business case for flexible working?**



# Evidence and Statistics

Understanding the role and influence of flexible working and employee work life balance in the whole organisation can be complex. It is not just about measuring different working arrangements, although this is vital.

It's also about understanding the effects, both direct and indirect, on a range of measurements that encompass performance and wellbeing. As business areas vary, so will deciding what is appropriate and meaningful to measure.

This section of the benchmark asks employers about both the flexible working that they know about, and also how they understand what is happening in terms of informal arrangements. As flexibility has become successfully established and developed organically as the 'best way to work', the issue of capturing and measuring informal flexibility has arisen. Such arrangements can be widespread and may vary significantly over time, making them difficult to accurately record, but some organisations fear that scrutinising individual informal arrangements may well also send the wrong signal about organisational support for them. On the other hand understanding the effects of informal flexibility is essential when practitioners are asked to provide evidence of the business benefits to the organisation. Looking at informal flexibility is also a good way of locating problem hotspots and practices that are undermining the development of a work life approach.

There was widespread use of flexible working in 2017, and employers were able to provide evidence of the numbers they recorded doing so, although there were other employees also working in similar ways informally who are not recorded. The benchmark mean for recorded flexible workers is shown in *Figure 6*. Although these numbers may appear low they only record actual flexible workers who work flexibly contractually.

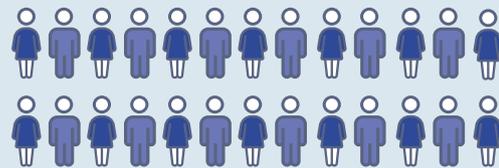
Women were more likely than men to work flexibly, in particular part-time work, where twice as many women as men were recorded, reflecting the higher number of women who work reduced hours.

Despite the noted difficulties with measuring informal flexibility, organisations have explored other ways of taking the temperature of the flexible culture. These included activities such as analysing staff survey

*Figure 6:*

## Recorded flexible workers: Mean %

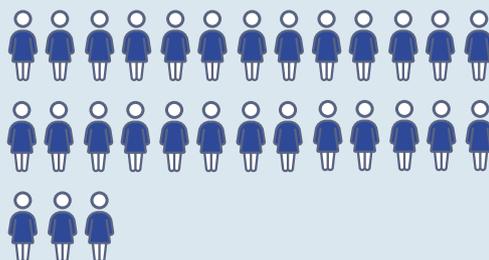
**26% All**



**21% Male**



**28% Female**



“Flexible workers were viewed as equally committed and effective as their colleagues”

responses, using exit interviews, analysing 360° feedback, feedback from HR partners and talking to recognised trade unions.

But it is still the case that fewer than half of benchmarking organisations said that they could quantify the effect flexibility and flexible working had had on their organisation (45 per cent). A third (30 per cent) had been able to calculate the financial benefits, whilst 45 per cent had been able to calculate the real estate benefits.

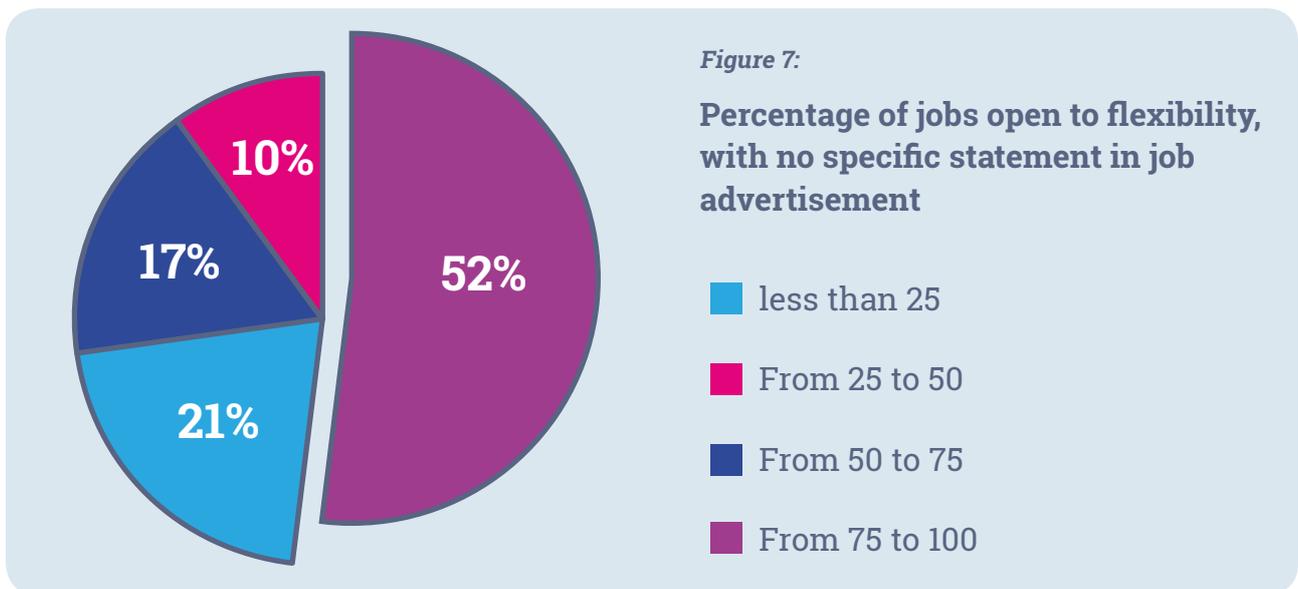
Employers are increasingly reporting on metrics around their recruitment advertising, in particular the number of jobs they are advertising with a specific statement about the flexibility on offer in that particular post. Sixty one per cent of internal vacancies carried specific information about flexibility, and 63 per cent of external vacancies did. Strikingly, flexibility appeared to be on the table even when not explicitly mentioned in the majority of organisations (*Figure 7*).

Given the mismatch in supply and demand for flexible jobs, employers are missing out by not making the flexibility on offer explicit. This is a missed opportunity, as it would not be a significant step to advertise these

roles flexibly, using the Happy to Talk Flexible Working strapline, for example. Managers have evidently already thought about whether the job might be done flexibly, but not advertised it as such.

Flexible workers were viewed as equally committed and effective as their colleagues, but it is important that these beliefs are backed up by evidence-based practice. Where organisations had recorded data about flexibility and performance, the evidence showed that fewer flexible workers received the highest performance ratings than the overall mean. However, this does not include those unrecorded informal flexible workers who may have received the highest rating.

Nonetheless, it highlights the necessity of recording metrics like performance rating and career progression by working arrangement as well as other diversity characteristics in order to reveal the possible impact of unconscious bias in the treatment of flexible workers. Research carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies<sup>4</sup> revealed a similar mismatch between the opinions of managers and performance gradings, and disappointingly this has continued to be a trend noted in this benchmark.



<sup>4</sup> ‘Flexible working for parents returning to work: maintaining career development’. ACAS Research Paper 2017

“Demands for a business case for flexibility remain a feature of the discourse within organisations around work life balance and flexible working practices”.

## Summary

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The benchmark provides a comprehensive insight into the way that work life balance and flexibility has established itself within the mainstream of organisational practice. Policies are comprehensive and, in the case of Shared Parental Leave, meeting an evident demand for family friendly working practices from employees.

However, the role of pay supporting take-up of leave is clear, and organisations who are working on their SPL offering must recognise the key role it plays. Policies are also targeting and reaching more employees, and the focus of flexible working and work life is moving away from its original target of mothers with young children.

There is an increasing awareness of the importance of the line manager in delivering flexibility; the next stage for many organisations is to work with managers to close the gap between policy and practice. This means understanding unconscious bias, thinking about flexibility

and job design during recruitment, and equipping managers with the skills to manage their flexible workers and teams. In tandem with this, organisations still need to work on their own business case. Although this may seem an issue that is less prominent in recent years, demands for a business case for flexibility remain a feature of the discourse within organisations around work life balance and flexible working practices. Understanding, in full, what flexibility is doing (and might deliver) is a worthwhile investment to organisations who want to move their work life practice forward.

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## A Note On The Benchmark

This report summarises the main points of the 2017 Top Employers for Working Families member benchmark. Individual participants receive detailed feedback and guidance on their entry. Benchmarking provides a unique opportunity to both measure progress and to understand what best practice looks like.

This benchmark was originally devised in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies.

**Working Families would like to thank all those organisations who participated in this year's benchmark.**

Please get in touch to find out how we can support you.

## Support for Employers

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Working Families is the UK's work life balance organisation. We've spent the last forty years helping organisations develop an agile, flexible and family friendly approach to work that maximises engagement, wellbeing and on-going high performance – the key to business success.

Through employer membership, benchmarking, training and consultancy, we help employers develop an inclusive high performing workforce, fit for the future.

We've developed the Happy to Talk Flexible Working strapline for employers to show the flexibility on offer in their vacancies, opening up the application process to more people with the right skills and talents. Crucially, the strapline encourages managers to think through the best way to get the job done.

*"From support in embedding our flexible working policies, to showcasing us as a Shared Parental Leave Pioneer, we have valued the advice and expertise provided by the organisation."*

- KPMG

*"Working Families' thought leadership has been critical to the evolution of both our practice and our strategy and they understand the commercial world and the challenges and opportunities it can bring in achieving these goals."*

- American Express

*"Membership of Working Families has proven to be one of the best diversity budget spends to date. Not only do they provide a wealth of experience and solid evidence based support for our internal diversity programmes of work, Working Families also provides our employees with expert advice on all aspects of being a working parent and carer."*

- E.ON UK

**To find out how we can support you, please contact:**

**Kirstie Axtens**

Head of Employer Services and Working Families Consulting

kirstie.axtens@workingfamilies.org.uk

**Stella Sutcliffe**

Relationship Manager

stella.sutcliffe@workingfamilies.org.uk

**Jo Waterworth**

Relationship Manager

joanne.waterworth@workingfamilies.org.uk

## Get in touch



@workingfamUK



company/working-families

[workingfamilies.org.uk/employers](http://workingfamilies.org.uk/employers)

Cambridge House  
1 Addington Square,  
London, SE5 0HF

**Tel:** 020 7253 7243

**Email:** [employers@workingfamilies.org.uk](mailto:employers@workingfamilies.org.uk)

[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)