

# Parental Leave and Family Support Benchmark UK

## 2023

- Over 500 companies and organisations in the UK and Ireland responded to this year's Parental Leave & Family Support Benchmark Survey, sharing insights into their current offerings and their plans for the future. This is the UK report.
- Respondents came from all sizes of employer and all sectors, particularly Banking, Financial Services & Insurance, Manufacturing, Consumer Product and FMCG, Charity & Third Sector, Consultancy, Tech & Fintech, Biotech and Pharmaceuticals, Arts, Culture, Design, Entertainment, Media & Publishing, Education including Higher Education, Law, Construction, Engineering & Infrastructure, among others.

# Executive Summary

Our benchmark has always been highly popular with our client partners – who number over 400 in the UK and Ireland - and with the wider HR community. One of the questions HR professionals ask us is: 'What does good look like?' This year we've developed a way of showing that in a more at-a-glance format. You'll find here a model of the infrastructure that supports employee and employer success through the parent transition.

Just over 500 organisations took part in our 2023 Parental Leave and Family Support Benchmark.

## Key Findings:

- There is a growth in the provision of inclusive family leave not tied to gender or role in parenting. 56% of our sample reported some level of role-inclusive leave.
- The most frequently offered inclusive leave is 6 weeks

and the average length of inclusive leave is 14 weeks. So, inclusive leave offerings are clustered around 6 weeks, while some much fuller offers push up the overall average.

- For maternity/adoption, 26 weeks of fully-paid leave is becoming firmly established as the benchmark in several sectors.
- There has been a small drop in the overall proportion of employers reporting enhanced maternity/adoption, paternity or shared parental leave above statutory pay. Our interactive league table offers you an opportunity to benchmark your policy, though we recommend reading the rest of this report first.
- There is a consistent pattern of practical supports provided by employers, alongside paid leave, suggesting that

their budget is being shared between other offerings - such as coaching, care, phased returns - and the leave itself. We provide at-a-glance models in this report of what popular provisions now cover.

This year, we took a further look at ongoing family support (beyond the parent transition) and found employers are paying positive attention across all family life stages. The report shows typical and growing types of support for career and life at each of three distinct stages: expectant and new parents, ongoing parents and carers of adults.

We also explore what's coming in the future and what you, as employers, should do next.



# Employers

## Where do you sit?

<15% of employers are offering these policies, practices and benefits i.e. fewer than 3 in 20 employers

15% to 29% of employers are offering these policies, practices and benefits i.e. 3 in 20, to 3 in 10 employers

30% to 60% of employers are offering these policies, practices and benefits i.e. 3 in 10 to 3 in 5 employers

>60% of employers are offering these policies, practices and benefits i.e. more than 3 in 5 employers



# Your infrastructure for the Parent Transition

- Helpline (14%)
- Back-Up Care (12%)
- Buddy scheme (12%)
- Online manager training (9%)
- Part-time, full pay (9%)
- Advice on finding care (8%)
- Role models (6%)
- Childcare facility (5%)
- Returner Bonus (3%)
- Concierge (2%)

- 26+ weeks full pay (29%)
- Medical support (27%)
- Group Coaching (20%)
- 121 HR support (19%)
- 121 Coaching (18%)
- Parents Network (18%)
- Real time manager training (17%)
- Gifts (17%)
- Online advice (16%)
- Wellbeing services (15%)

- Equal leave (56%)
- Enhanced SPL (43%)
- Culture encourages flexibility (31%)
- Manager is flexible (36%)
- Phased Return (holidays) (41%)
- Phased Return (KIT days) (36%)

- Enhanced maternity (72%)
- Visible policies (67%)
- Enhanced paternity (64%)

## Competitive Edge

- Access to an 'ask an expert' helpline is a promising area.
- Several other offerings remain stable among competitive edge provisions:**
- App-based guidance for managers.
  - Buddy/mentor schemes.
  - Advice on finding childcare.
  - Back-up care (or care gap cover) provision as well as onsite or near-site childcare support, both of which are growing and mark out the employer as leading edge.

## Leading

### Growth areas marking out the employer committed to a successful transition:

- Leading provision now includes at least 26 weeks' fully-paid leave.
- App-based advice is increasingly coupled with access to a coach or guide in order to keep up with growth areas.
- Access to medical advice.
- Group or one-to-one coaching through the parent transition.
- Training for managers.

## Core

Many employers now also provide gender-inclusive, family-role-inclusive leave, and support for phased returns, particularly using accrued holidays. There is a widespread culture of flexibility, supported by managers, though this has shrunk since 2021, suggesting a competitive edge can be found in offering more flexibility.

## Basic

The basics for successful parental leave transitions include enhancing maternity and paternity leave above statutory and ensuring your policies are visible to new hires.

### On the decline since 2021:

- Formal schemes for working part-time hours for full-time pay on return, due to global changes in working expectations.
- Declining slightly since 2021, though still offering a competitive advantage are a dedicated contact in HR, parents' networks, gifts and wellbeing services.

# Your infrastructure for Ongoing Parents (It doesn't stop at returning from new parent leave!)

- Near-site childcare facility (9%)
- Online advice (9%)
- Coaching (8%)
- Buddy Scheme (8%)
- Advice on finding care (8%)
- Online manager training (8%)
- Real-time manager training (5%)
- Paid ongoing parent leave (8%)
- Onsite childcare facility (7%)
- Help accessing higher education (5%)
- Role models (5%)
- Children's tutoring (4%)
- Help accessing Schools (4%)

- Discount schemes (28%)
- Helpline (18%)
- Paid emergency time off (25%)
- Parents Network (16%)
- Savings on ongoing care (24%)

- Unpaid emergency time off (36%)
- Back-Up Care (30%)
- Culture encourages flexibility (32%)

- Flexible working (67%)
- Unpaid parental leave (60%)

## Competitive Edge

The top of the pyramid for ongoing parents sees offerings including employer-supported near-site or onsite childcare, online and app-based advice for parents and their managers, coaching on combining work and family, buddy schemes and advice on finding childcare.

There is also a growing number of employers investing in advice on finding or accessing schools, universities or apprenticeships and the provision of tutoring for children and young people.

## Leading

More leading provision for ongoing parents includes discount schemes, paid emergency time off, and employer-sponsored childcare savings. There is also a competitive advantage in offering helplines or ask an expert services as well as parents' networks.

## Core

Many employers also promote the statutory right to unpaid time off for dependants, closely followed by providing back-up care for care provision gaps; which can be filled by a nanny, childminder, holiday club or a day at a nursery.

## Basic

The basics for the ongoing parent journey include flexible working and access to unpaid statutory parental leave.



# Your infrastructure for Carers

- Carers Network (13%)
- Coaching (12%)
- Unpaid leave (9%)
- Online advice (8%)
- Paid carers leave (7%)
- Role models (7%)
- Manager training (6%)
- Buddy Scheme (3%)
- Concierge (2%)

- Advice on finding care (18%)
- Paid emergency time off (25%)
- Helpline (22%)
- Savings on ongoing care (19%)
- Back-Up Care (22%)

- Culture encourages flexibility (30%)
- Unpaid emergency time off (47%)

- Flexible working (76%)

## Competitive Edge

The competitive edge of provision includes dedicated carers networks, one-to-one coaching and access to online or app-based advice.

Paid leave and training for managers are also in use among employers looking for a competitive edge. There is also some use of realistic 'role model' stories and buddy schemes as well as concierge services to provide practical support with life admin needs.

## Leading

More leading provision for carers moves into the territory of paid-for time off, access to helplines / ask an expert and provision of back-up care for when usual care breaks down or when new needs arise.

Leading employers also provide access to savings on ongoing adult/elder care as well as advice and support in finding care.

## Core

Core support for those who care for other adults or elders includes flexible working along with the right to unpaid time off for dependants.

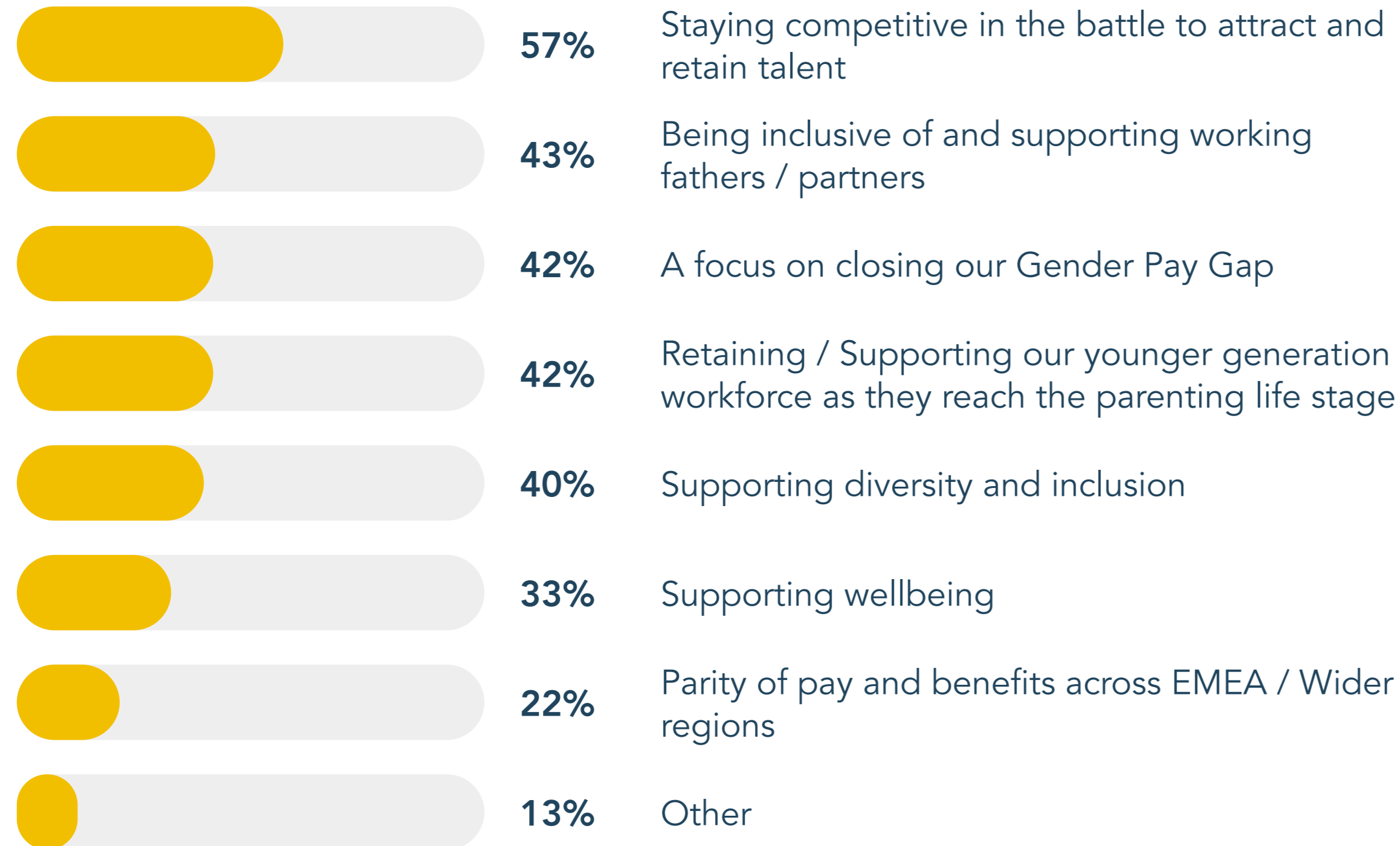
## Basic

Flexible working is the bedrock for carers.



# Wellbeing and Competition for Talent drive decisions

## What drives parental leave policies?



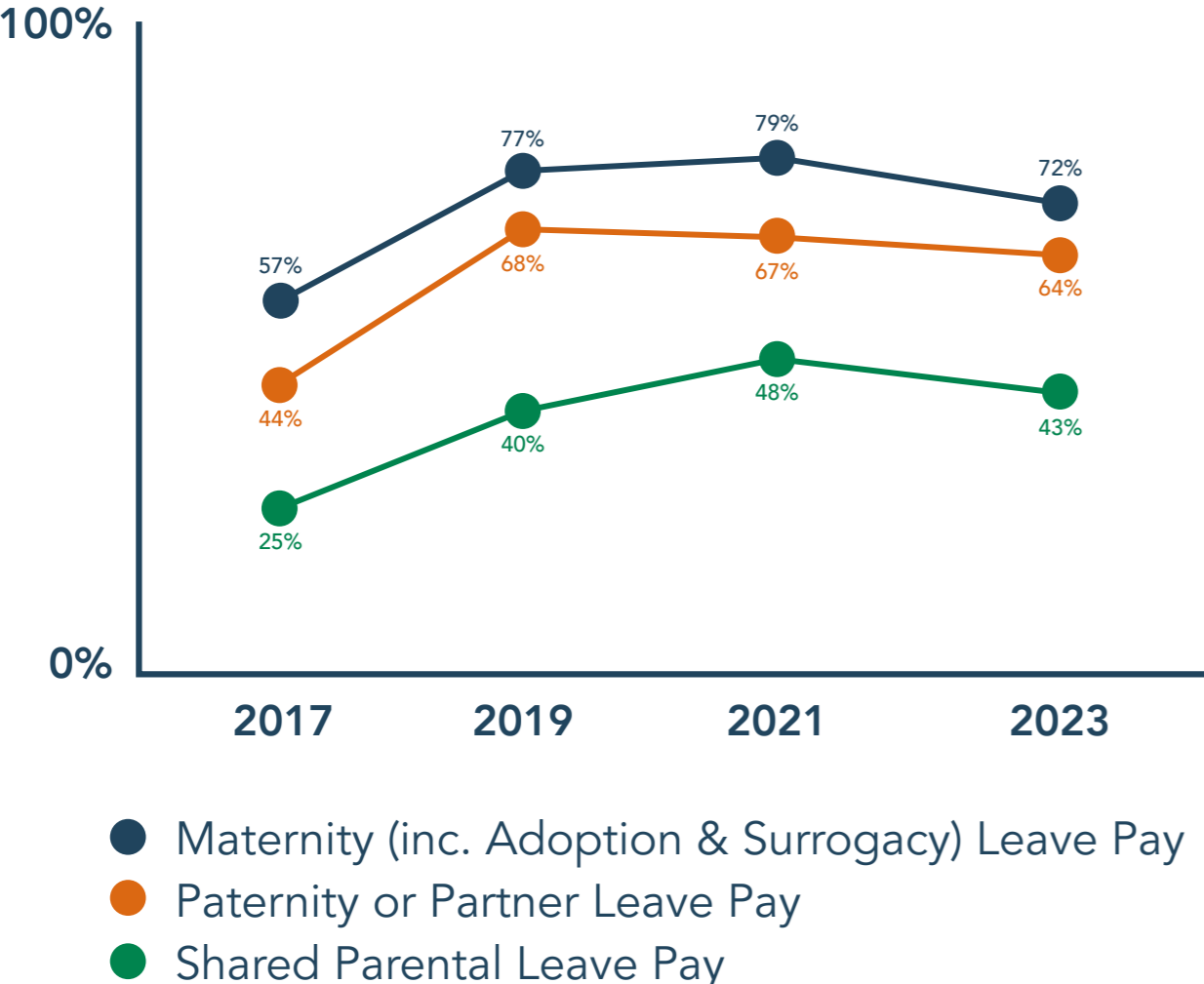
This year, the need to compete in attracting and retaining talented people stands out as the primary driver for decisions about parental leave policies (57%), some way ahead of other aims. Not surprisingly, in light of the move to more inclusive leave policies across genders and family roles, supporting working fathers is next (43%), closely followed by the aim to close the gender pay gap and supporting the younger generation, both at 42%. Diversity and inclusion are favoured as a reason by 4 in 10. Those who selected 'Other' gave reasons such as having signed an industry body pledge.

In 2021, the top three drivers were similar (talent retention, working fathers, younger generation). In 2023, the Gender Pay Gap has, interestingly, risen to level pegging with the younger generation.

When asked what employers will do next (see pg11), many are focusing on provisions that equalise leave which addresses the gender pay gap by levelling the playing field, enabling fathers to focus on caring and mothers potentially to return sooner, if they choose to, when leave is shared.

# Four Key Trends in the provision of paid leave

## Employers enhancing leave



## What is happening in levels of paid leave overall?

1. This chart tracks employers reporting paid leave above statutory in our benchmark since 2017. The overall proportion of employers enhancing statutory pay appears to have fallen, following a high point in 2021. The question is why? Has attention shifted from enhancing maternity pay towards providing for a fuller, inclusive leave, directed at all genders and roles in parenting? Or is this reduction in enhanced statutory pay a negative trend in its own right?
2. There are some sectors (such as Banking, Law, Biotech) in which enhanced pay is a clear expectation and without it, talented employees would simply choose other employers offering a better level of enhancement. The data here also reveal a rise in employers providing 26 weeks or more of enhanced leave. So, while slightly fewer are enhancing paid leave overall, for those who are enhancing, the most popular policy is 26 weeks. Therefore, in sectors where enhanced paid leave is a core part of the competitive edge, the starting point would be half a year plus.
3. In some other sectors, the growth in employers enhancing paid leave appears to have flattened. In Education including Higher Education, only 40% enhance paid leave; just 46% do so in Charity / Third Sector organisations; and 57% in Construction, Engineering and Infrastructure.
4. At the same time, employers are increasing some of the wider supports provided, such as medical care or coaching, phased returns, childcare, back-up care and manager training. This appears to be a time when employers are thinking more broadly about what true support for career and family looks like.

To benchmark your own provision, review our interactive league table of leave policies.

Take a look 



# Actions for Employers - Use this benchmark to generate positive impact for your people and business

## 1. Start with the end in mind

Consider your goals:

- Decide whether your corporate aspiration is simply to cover the basic requirements, be a leading employer or at the growing edge, driving best practice.
- What all-round gains can you achieve with a well-managed parent transition and with supports for ongoing parents and carers?
- Identify what will be better in your organisation when parents and carers are more fully supported.

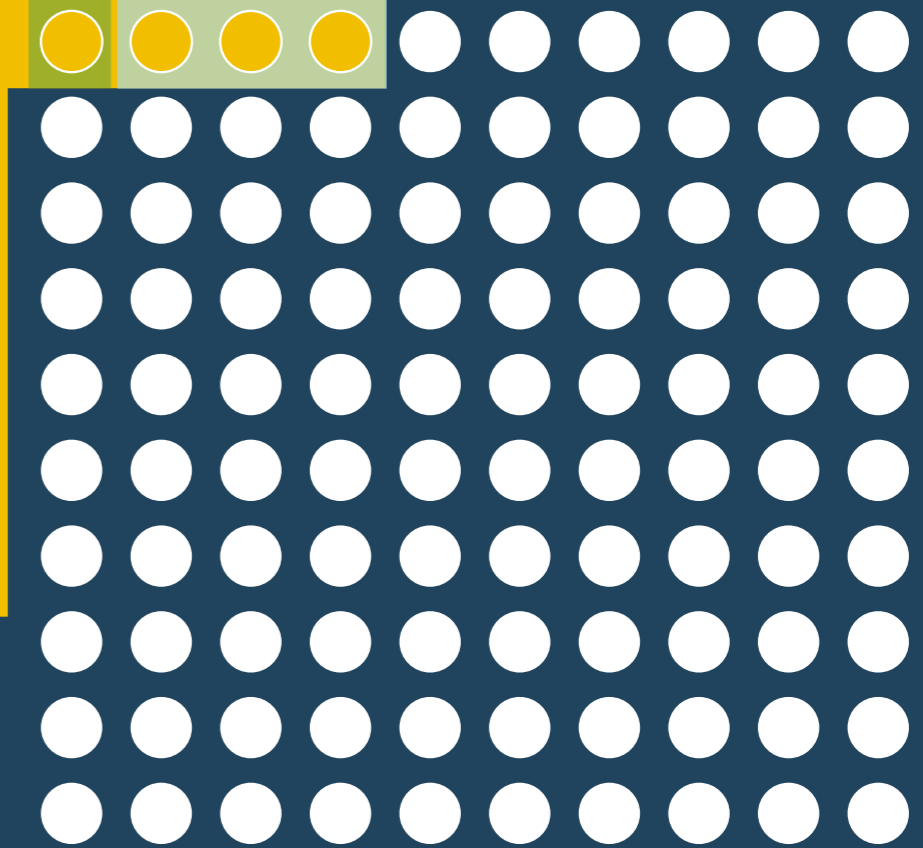
## 2. Build your business case

- Having clarified your purpose and aim, measure the expected impact of your actions in order to secure funding.
- To help with this, we have two handy infographics. One is based on knowing that organisations we partner with have seen their maternity / parental leave return rates climb 12 to 14 percentage points. This can save upwards of £150,000 per year in recruitment costs alone, based on a modest calculation.

It costs upwards of £30K to replace a non-returned,

77% return on average.  
So around 30 out of 40 people will return.

In an organisation of 1,000 employees, typically around 4% will take maternity leave in a year. That's 40 people.

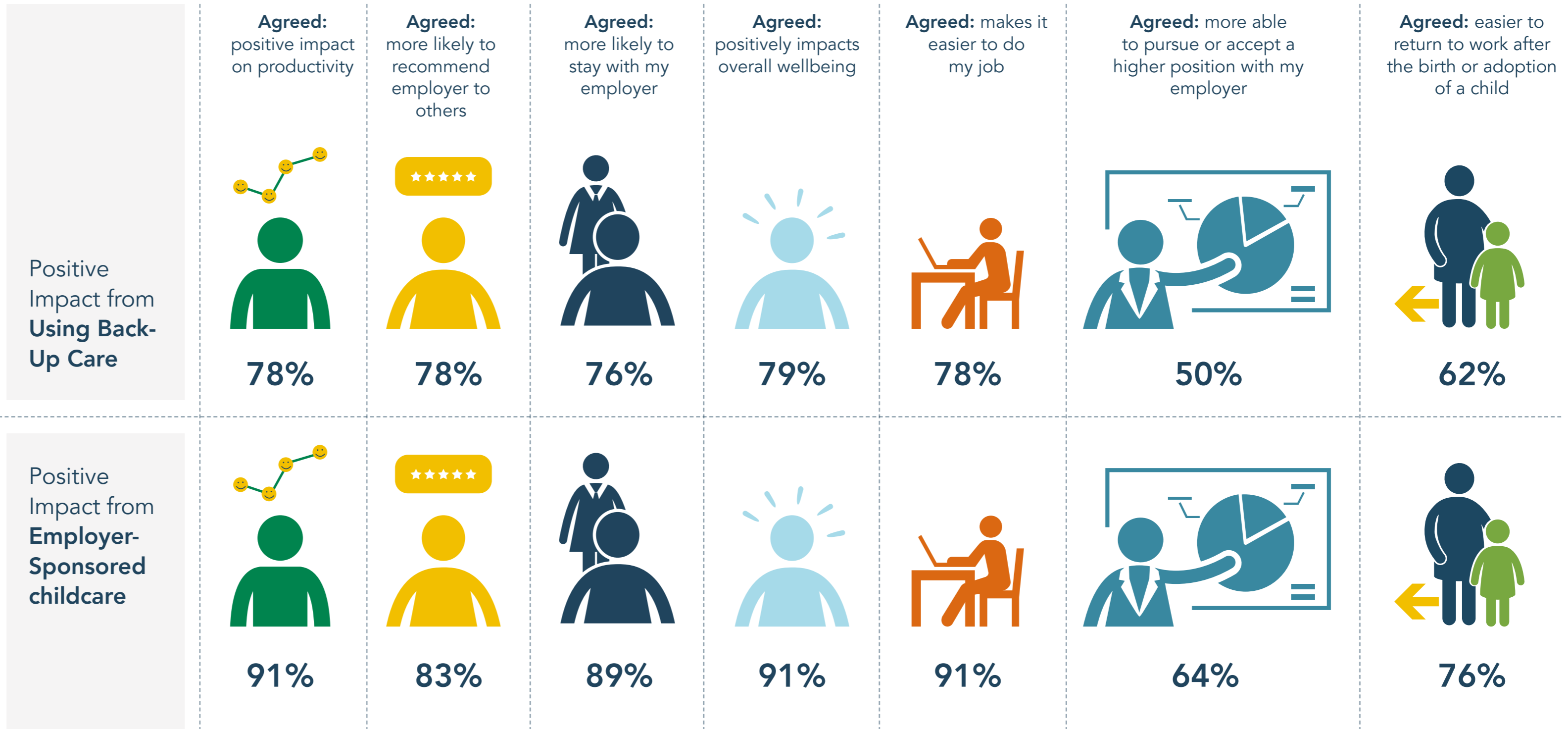


Our online and offline coaching programmes typically see employers' return rates rise by 12-14 percentage points. If you increase the average return rate from 77% to 90%, 5 or 6 more people will return.

**'This could save you well over £150K in recruitment costs per annum.'**

# Actions for Employers - Measure your savings and impact

- In addition to calculating your likely savings, explore other gains in terms of your people culture and value proposition.
- The other infographic for your business case (right) is from our 2023 UK Work+Family Snapshot: our annual survey of our clients' employees. This shows the positive impact of two types of family support: employer-sponsored childcare and back-up care. There are strong, measurable impacts in wellbeing, productivity, engagement, loyalty and more.



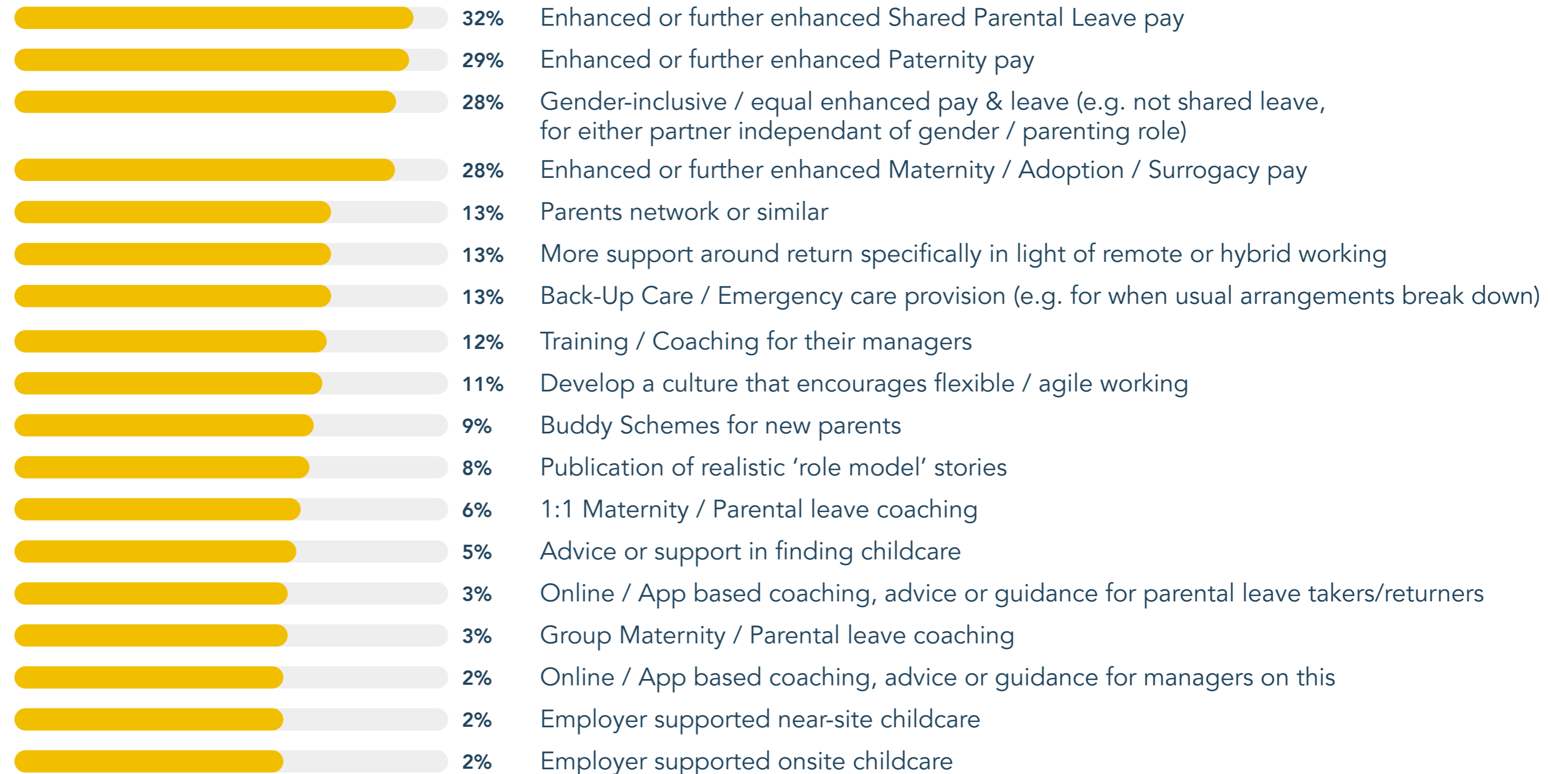
# Actions for Employers - Implement your strategy

## 3. Plan your supports

Consider your goals:

- Note which supports from the models on pages 4, 5 and 6 you already have in place and highlight those you would like to introduce.
- Note the proportion of employers in our survey who already do those things: add this to your business case internally.
- Cross check against the chart below on what other employers are planning to implement in the next 12 months: in which areas do you need to get ahead?
- Now implement, using your business case to gain support; and ensure you measure success.

## What are employers considering next?



# Next Steps...

## How can Bright Horizons help you to implement your strategy?

- Working with over 400 of the UK's leading organisations, we offer a diverse range of supports for employers of working families, enabling everyone to be their best at work while supporting organisations to achieve their strategic goals.
- Our continually evolving solutions enable our clients to be at the growing edge of employee supports. They include those listed below.



Want to find out where you stand in your sector?

Ask us for our employer solutions benchmarking service today: [employerenquiry@brighthorizons.com](mailto:employerenquiry@brighthorizons.com)

Click **on the button** to read our interactive version of this report and see how parental transition trends have changed.

Online Guide →



## Our family of services includes:



Our award-winning **Back-Up Care** network, which saves our clients over 100,000 days in productivity each year



One to one **Virtual Tutoring** in Maths and English for children (ages 4-16 years) accessible through the Back-Up Care benefit



**Work+Family Space**, an easily searchable hub of information, resources and advice on a wide range of work and family topics



**Coaching & Development** Solutions to help businesses retain and develop employees through life's big transitions, including the parent transition and becoming a carer - supporting your people to thrive at work and at home



**Parental Leave Toolkit**, our unique digital coaching solution for new parents and the managers who support them



**Nursery Partnerships**, which can save employees 30% on nursery fees at no cost to their employer



**Workplace Nurseries**, providing parents with reassuringly high-quality and convenient care at or near their workplace

# About Bright Horizons

## What we do

We help to increase our clients' employee wellbeing, engagement and productivity, supporting career progression and improving recruitment and retention of talented and diverse workforces.

## How we do it

We provide holistic solutions to the challenges facing parents and carers in the workplace today. These include comprehensive care services, coaching and development provision, digital resources, family network events, and manager/ organisational guidance. They address the practical, emotional and cultural needs of organisations and individuals. What we offer is good for employers and good for employees. **Everybody wins.**

## Our History

For over 30 years, Bright Horizons has been supporting the evolving needs of working families. Through bespoke family care solutions, we are helping employers to anticipate the challenges facing their employees and equip them with the tools they need to thrive.

From workplace nurseries and hybrid worker solutions to back-up care when your employees need it most, our work and family solutions enhance your ability to attract and retain key talent, giving your teams the peace of mind and confidence to do their best work.

At Bright Horizons, we are always looking forward, creating and developing solutions to help businesses succeed and create a happier, more efficient and profitable workforce.

With operations in the US, UK, India, Australia and the Netherlands, we've a wealth of experience in supporting multi-national clients.

## A partner, provider and employer of choice

We look forward to always delivering the best for our clients, families and our own employees.

- We monitor and evaluate our service provision through ongoing employee and client feedback to ensure its quality and positive impact. We provide our clients with access to live usage and engagement analytics.
- We have been consistently recognised as a UK Best Workplace by the Great Place to Work Institute every year since 2006.
- We have a strong commitment to corporate sustainability and, through our registered charity the Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, we work to transform the lives of children and families in crisis.

Get in touch to discover how we can help your business and your employees:

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