



Parental Leave and Family Support UK Benchmark 2025

HR professionals often ask us how to stay competitive. Key questions include 'What does 'good' look like?', 'What is everybody else doing?' and 'How can we keep a competitive edge to attract and retain talent?'

This year's report reveals the different levels of support from over 300 organisations in the UK and Ireland: how they are shaping their parental and family support policies to navigate the transition into parenthood all the way to supporting carers of adults. The findings highlight the diverse approaches that balance employee wellbeing with business success.

Respondents came from all sizes of employer and all sectors, including:

- Banking & Financial Services
- Legal & Professional Services
- Technology, Software & Fintech
- Energy & Utilities
- Higher Education
- Manufacturing
- Consumer Product & FMCG
- Biotech, Pharmaceuticals, Life Sciences & Scientific Research
- Construction, Engineering & Infrastructure
- Marketing / Advertising / PR / Market research
- NHS / Healthcare



Bright Horizons®

Key Findings:

HR professionals often ask us: 'What does 'good' look like?', 'What is everybody else doing?' and 'How can we keep a competitive edge to attract and retain talent'.

The findings of this report show differing levels of policy and practice that support employee and employer success, from navigating the parent transition, to ongoing parenthood, and extending to those caring for adults.

Enhanced Leave:

There is an upswing in enhanced maternity/adoption and paternity/partner pay and leave. Two-thirds (66%) of participants now offer at least 12 weeks' fully-paid maternity/adoption leave, and a fifth (21%) have set their policy to at least 26 weeks.

Equal Leave:

A quarter of employers surveyed also provide equal leave, whatever the employee's gender or role in parenting a new arrival.

Practical Support:

While enhanced leave enables the family to take valued time out, the many different offerings in the infrastructure models show truly forward-thinking employers recognise that ongoing support on return is equally important in building sustainable careers and wider business success. Leading and competitive edge provisions include options such as phased returns, parents' networks, manager training, online advice, coaching, and care solutions.

Focus on Talent:

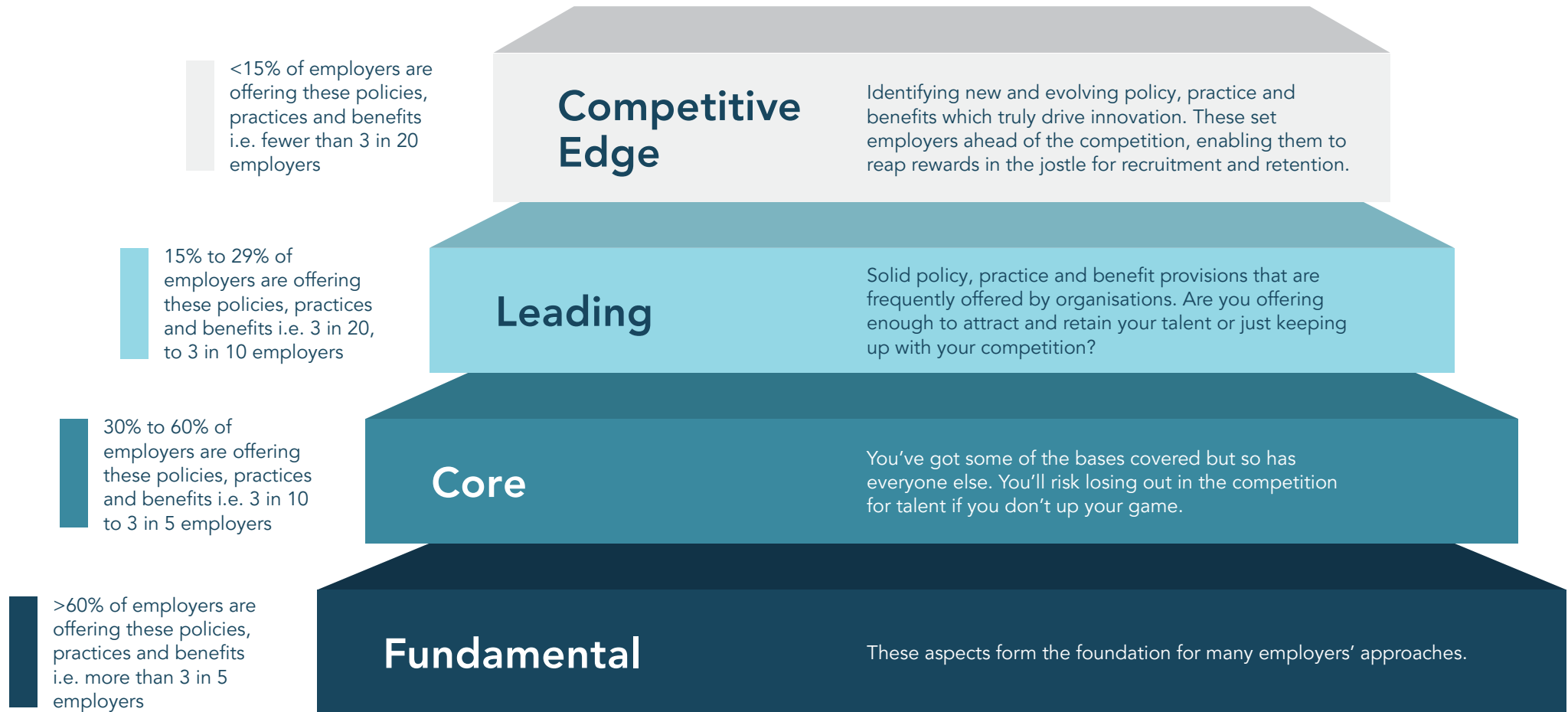
With competition for talent continuing to drive policy, we highlight what's coming in the future: fathers are a key focus, along with further enhanced leave across the board where budgets permit, as well as practical supports.

The report concludes with step-by-step guidance on what you, as employers, should do next.

In addition, our interactive [league table](#) offers you an opportunity to benchmark your leave policies, though we recommend reading the valuable insights in the rest of this report first. You'll find a link to the league table at the end.



Employers - Where do you sit?



Your infrastructure for the Parent Transition

Competitive Edge

Programmes at the competitive edge include:

- 39+ weeks of fully-paid maternity leave **(1%)**
- equipping managers through training or coaching **(13%)**
- app-based manager advice **(8%)**

Some employers also offer:

- a period of part-time work on full pay following return **(12%)**
- App-based coaching or advice **(11%)**
- a phased return using additional holiday purchase **(9%)**
- secondments or lateral moves during the transition **(2%)**

Also at the competitive edge are:

- advice on finding care **(9%)**
- employer-sponsored childcare **(7%)**

A handful of employers offer:

- reduced targets or billable hours for a period on return **(4%)**
- a returner bonus **(5%)**
- shared stories of relatable internal role models **(6%)**

Leading

Leading practice includes:

- 26+ weeks of fully-paid maternity leave **(21%)**
- a quarter of employers provide equal leave regardless of gender or family role **(25%)**

Leading practical supports include:

- 121 HR support **(28%)**
- gifts **(26%)**
- helplines **(26%)**
- wellbeing services **(24%)**
- family-forming/ fertility support **(21%)**
- parenting advice **(16%)**
- buddy/mentor schemes **(16%)**
- coaching for the parent transition **(16%)**
- and of course Back-Up Care for those make-or-break moments in a successful return when care arrangements fall through **(15%)**

Core

Core provisions now include:

- 18+ weeks of fully paid maternity leave **(38%)**
- some level of enhanced Shared Parental Leave **(45%)**
- Medical support **(39%)**

51% have flexible managers and a culture that encourages flexibility. This is now a core expectation, alongside facilitating a phased return using either:

- Keeping in Touch days to build up to return **(57%)**
- grouping unused holidays to build up to return **(51%)**

Parents' networks have grown: now present in over a third of participating organisations.

Core provisions this year also focus on several types of enhanced leave:

- 3 in 10 **(30%)** enhance the newly introduced neonatal leave
- **35%** pay for time off for dependants

In the sad event of loss:

- **35%** offer paid pregnancy loss leave
- **55%** point to their offering of enhanced parental bereavement leave

Fundamental

Strikingly this year, our Fundamentals section (i.e. reported by at least 60% of respondents) includes:

- offering at least 12 weeks' fully paid maternity leave **(66%)**
- while over 8 in 10 **(86%)** now enhance maternity leave in some way
- and **78%** enhance paternity leave.

Over 7 in 10 (71%) make sure that family policies are visible to job seekers.

Flexible working is fast becoming an expectation with 76% offering this. Organisations are also offering:

- Time off for dependants - statutory only **(65%)**
- Neonatal - statutory only **(70%)**

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

Competitive Edge

The top of the pyramid sees employers supporting family life with advisory services:

- parenting advice (13%)
- advice on finding childcare (13%)

Then, in smaller numbers:

- help accessing schools (1%) and higher education (2%)

There is competitive advantage in offering:

- tutoring for children and young people which can be part of a back-up care programme (6%)
- employer-sponsored childcare facility (8%)

Managers are equipped at this level with:

- training/coaching (8%) or app-based manager advice (10%)

1 in 10 employers encourage ongoing parents through buddy/mentor schemes while 7% highlight relatable role models.

Just 10% of employers enhance ongoing parental leave above statutory.

Leading

Leading provision for ongoing parents includes help with childcare:

- savings on childcare, via a salary sacrifice scheme or tuition subsidy (26%)
- back-up care via a nanny, childminder, last-minute nursery place or school holiday club to ease stress and enable continuity when usual care arrangements cannot cover gaps (15%)

Employers in the leading minority are also ensuring working parents can grow the skills and assurance needed to combine work and family through:

- coaching (15%)
- online advice (15%)

Core

Core provisions are expanding, including compassion in a time of loss:

- enhanced parental bereavement leave (59%), while 39% offer only statutory parental bereavement leave
- paid emergency time off (37%)

There is growth in:

- culture that encourages flexibility (51%)
- helplines / 'ask an expert' services (34%)
- parents' networks, showing strong growth now at 39%

Providing access to discount schemes has also risen (47%).

Fundamental

There are few noteworthy provisions in place at this 60%+ level, underlining that employers invest more in new parents than in the ongoing journey.

The fundamentals cover:

- flexibility (76%)

and the UK statutory provisions of:

- unpaid emergency time off (60%)
- and unpaid parental leave (90%)

Your infrastructure for Carers

Competitive Edge

At the competitive edge, we find practical support in:

- a carer's passport scheme **(11%)** and training for managers **(7%)**

Carers are empowered through:

- relatable role models **(10%)**
- buddy/mentor schemes **(4%)**
- coaching **(2%)**

1 in 10 (10%) employers provide access to savings on ongoing care.

Leading

Leading provision includes both practical support and paid time off:

- **18%** make advice available online
- **18%** ensure that carers have access to back-up care to cover gaps in care arrangements
- **29%** offer paid Carer's Leave

Core

Core provisions include rising practical supports:

- helplines or 'ask an expert' services growing in prominence **(43%)**
- advice on finding care **(32%)**

Carers' networks are also becoming firmly established at 40%.

3 in 10 (30%) employers offer some paid emergency time off.

And as caring can include the passing of a loved one:

- some level of paid bereavement leave at 3-5 days **(56%)** or more **(36%)**

Fundamental

Flexible working is a fundamental need for carers:

- over three-quarters **(76%)** reference flexible working, while **62%** say their culture encourages flexibility

Over two-thirds of employers do not enhance statutory unpaid emergency time off for carers (68%), nor the recently introduced statutory unpaid carer's leave (71%).

What Drives Parental Leave Policies?

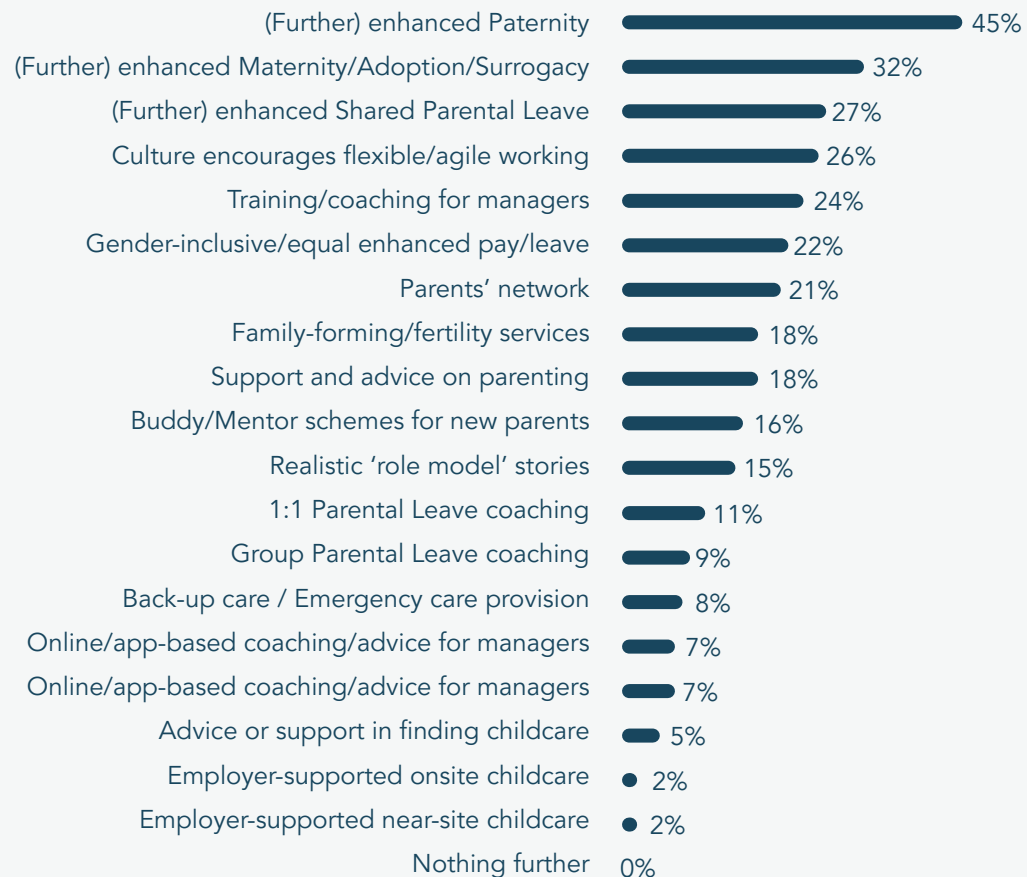
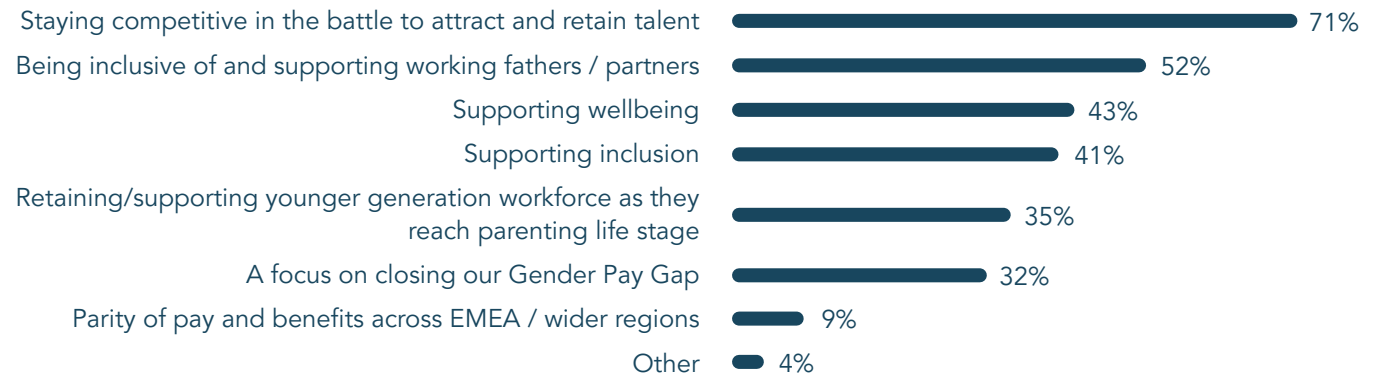
Current drivers:

- Competition to attract and retain talented people continues to be the key driver for decisions around parental leave policies (71%)
- Support for fathers remains in second place (52%)
- Wellbeing jumped to third place this year at 43% (from 33% in 2023) pushing 'inclusion' (41%) to fourth, 'supporting the younger generation' (35%) to fifth and 'closing the gender pay gap' to 6th place

Future intentions:

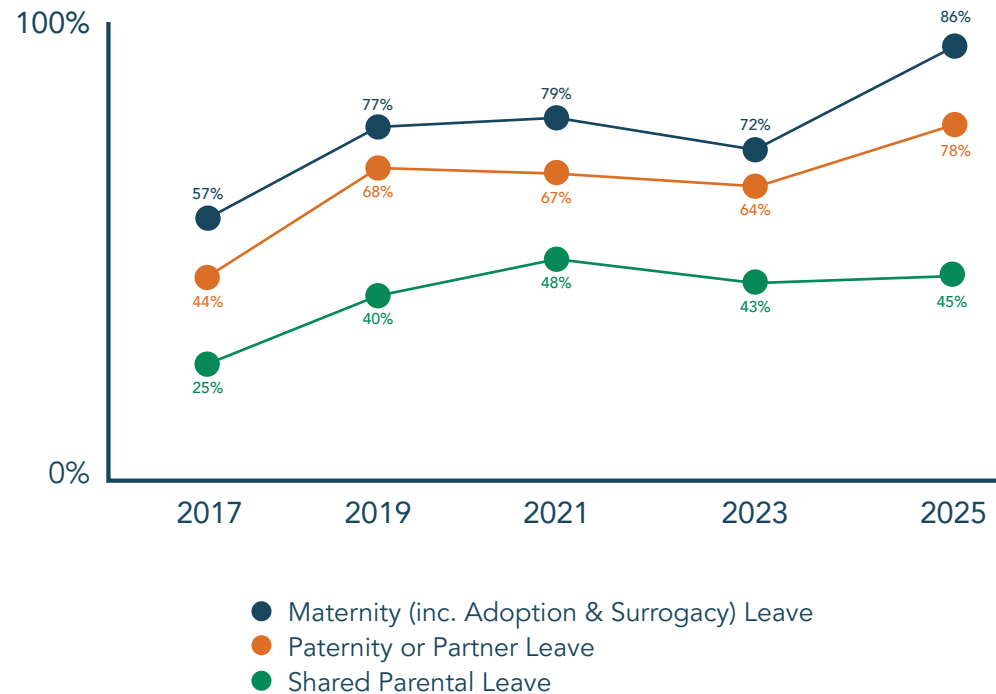
When asked what employers will do next, three key areas emerged:

- Longer paternity leave remains a high priority, along with enhancing other types of leave.
- Ensuring managers are equipped to support returners.
- Providing practical supports for parents.



Trends in the Provision of Paid Leave

Employers enhancing parent transition leave



This chart tracks employers reporting enhanced paid leave above statutory in our biennial benchmark since 2017.

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

- Overall, while Shared Parental Leave struggles to gain traction, there has been a resurgence in enhanced leave policies for both maternity/adoption and paternity/partner leave.
- A surprising finding (p4), is that two thirds (66%) of employers surveyed now enhance at least 12 weeks of maternity/adoption leave with full pay, and just over a fifth (21%) offer full pay for at least 26 weeks.
- A quarter also offer enhanced leave that is equal across genders and regardless of role in parenting.
- At the same time, employers continue to offer wider supports, such as medical care, phased returns, coaching, childcare, back-up care and manager training.
- As statutory leave types continue to expand - such as carer's leave, neonatal leave, and bereavement leave - internal advocates are increasingly challenged to justify the budget required to support them all. Cost remains a key factor influencing policy decisions, with many expressing a desire to offer more than current resources allow.



Actions for Employers

Step 1: 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 fundamental requirements, be a leading employer or drive best practice at the competitive edge.
- 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 an infographic on the impact of a well-managed coaching programme (on this page) and evidence of the impact of Back-Up Care on the following page.
- With a coaching programme, 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, as the infographic here shows.



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

Step 2: Measure your savings and impact

- In addition to calculating your likely savings, explore other gains in terms of your people culture and value proposition. With the top driver of policies being competition for talent, the costs saved on attrition through better retention are only the starting point. You might also calculate what you stand to gain from better innovation through attracting new talent to the organisation with competitive policies and practice.
- The other vital data for your business case (above) is from our 2025 UK Work+Family Snapshot: our annual survey of our clients' employees. This shows the positive impact of Back-Up Care – in the Leading category for each of the life stages here. There are strong, measurable impacts in wellbeing, productivity, engagement, loyalty and more: data like this helps build the business case for providing tangible support.
- **90% of users say Back-Up Care makes them feel their employer is supportive of family life: 22 percentage points above the UK average.**
- **91% say Back-Up Care means care breakdowns are less likely to impact their ability to work.**
- **95% say emergency childcare is important to facilitate return to office, and 85% of these said it was 'very or extremely important'.**
- **91% of Back-Up Care users say it reduces their stress.**
- **88% of parents accessing Virtual Tutoring through Back-Up Care say it enhances their own wellbeing.**

Work+Family Snapshot
2025 (Bright Horizons
Client Employee survey)

Take a look 



Actions for Employers

Step 3: Implement your strategy

Plan your supports

Based on the information above, you will now know: 1. Your Goals and 2. Your Business Case.

Next, plan how you will further build out your supports to achieve those goals, evidencing the need using your business case.

- Which of the supports from the models on pages 4, 5 and 6 do you already have in place? Which could you introduce to achieve your goals? The percentage of employers already offering these gets added to your business case too.
- Cross check against the chart on p7 showing what other employers are planning to implement in the next 12 months: in which areas do you need to get ahead?
 - » Paternity Leave is a strong focus, timed to fit with the Government review of parental leave and campaigning around longer / better paid paternity or partner leave.
 - » There is also a focus on ensuring managers are equipped to support and that parents have networks and allies as well as practical support with care.
 - » Those selecting 'Other' referenced phased returns, benchmarking policies ahead of any changes and nursery salary sacrifice schemes.
- Now implement, using your business case to gain support; and ensure you measure success.

Get started...

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, 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 forefront of employee supports. They include those listed below.



Bright Horizons
Work + Family Solutions

About Bright Horizons

What we do

For more than 35 years, Bright Horizons has been supporting the evolving needs of working families and their employers. We create, develop, and deliver solutions that remove barriers to performance, talent and diversity in our clients' businesses and help them succeed in their goals.

We address the wide range of challenges facing parents and carers in the workplace today, enhancing our clients' ability to attract and retain key talent, giving their teams the peace of mind and confidence to do their best work.

How we do it

Bright Horizons' services include workplace and partnership nurseries, coaching and development provision, digital resources, and manager guidance, plus Back-Up Care for adults, children of all ages - and even pets.

We provide our clients with access to live usage and engagement analytics on their programmes, and also keep them updated with ongoing research findings and benchmarking data.

Who we are

- We have operations in the UK, US, India, Australia, and the Netherlands. 1,300 clients globally, over 400 in the UK.
- We have been recognised as a UK Best Workplace by the Great Place to Work Institute every year since 2006, and are actively committed to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, and to Mindful Business practices.
- We strive to minimise negative environmental impact guided by our Future Earth green agenda and, through our registered charity the Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families in crisis.

Our family of services includes:



Reliable, flexible **Back-Up Care** options for children of all ages, adults and elders - **and even pets** - when usual arrangements break down or schedules change. Back-Up Care is a trusted Plan B that protects productivity and supports wellbeing.



One to one **Virtual Tutoring** in Maths and English for children (ages 4-16 years) and also school entrance exam preparation. Tailored tutoring helps confidence and achievement, while easing parents' concerns about their child's education and mental health.



Work+Family Space, an easily searchable and personalised hub for all matters work and family, and a vital resource for busy workers. Filled with a world of information, tips, webinars and expert advice, there's something for everyone - whatever their life stage or personal situation.



Our innovative **Parental Leave Toolkit** is a digitised coaching solution delivering timely checklists and advice to the individual and their manager at every point in the journey, making a significant difference to return rates.

Beyond the parent transition, we've developed tailored coaching programmes for our clients on many major life events.



Workplace Nurseries and Nursery Partnerships provide parents with reassuringly high-quality and convenient care at, or near, their workplace.

The ultimate "sticky benefit" and a real game-changer for retention.

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



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