



INCLUSIVE WAYS TO
RETAIN & SUPPORT
WORKING PARENTS
IN 2021



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We help employers to attract, retain and develop gender-balanced teams by providing cost-effective services to employers.

We're passionate about developing more women leaders and seeing the closing of the gender pay gap.

We believe supporting working parents is THE key piece in the jigsaw of moving towards gender equality.

We have backgrounds in HR & Recruitment and all our consultants are trained coaches, trainers and facilitators.

We also run a social enterprise, Career-Mums, which we set up 5 years ago to support people like us, who'd taken a career break whilst our children were young, to get back into the workplace – this experience of the struggle many women face to get their careers on track feeds into the services we provide through CM Talent.



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FURTHER READING

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

<https://maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/mhpanic/>

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/workingparents>

<https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/the-covid-crisis-effect-on-working-mums/>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/women-and-girls/gendered-pandemic-women-left-behind/>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/women/women-work-career-promotion-childbirth-new-mothers-fathers-a9165926.html>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gender-equality-at-work-research-on-the-barriers-to-womens-progression>

<https://30percentclub.org/press-releases/view/sponsorship-and-mentoring-crucial-to-increasing-gender-diversity-at-executi>

<https://www.fertifa.com/success-rates-continue-to-improve-while-nhs-funding-falls-dramatically-what-does-this-mean-for-employers/>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/01/14/uk-population-biggest-fall-since-second-world-war/>



2020 was a tough year due to the pandemic but there are many challenges we have to face in the year ahead in our desire for normal life to resume.

Working parents are being severely impacted by the pandemic situation.

Working from home is ideal for some people, but by no means everyone, and not possible for all. We're all relying on many front-line staff & key workers to keep basic services going. There are very limited alternative childcare available – support bubble restrictions & nursery/wrap-around school provision is limited. **Key workers** have had requests for in-school provision turned down as demand has risen and places limited.

School closures and home schooling arrangements – access to technology, access to teaching – varies throughout the country – yet the government have set expectations of 3 to 6 hours education per day. The ability to fit this in around work priorities varies from family to family – as will the amount of support their children will need to have from full-on undivided attention and care especially for children of primary school age, larger families, children with additional needs, inability to access remote schooling and struggling with their mental health.

Co-parenting and sharing the load varies from family to family and there are many solo parent households.

Family priorities for many are focused on survival, providing the basics for their family, supporting their local community and extended family members.

Expectant and new parents are finding it particularly challenging and whilst most NHS Trusts are finally allowing partners to be present for the birth, it is time limited. Medical appointments are still limited to mum-to-be only and many new parents are reporting feeling isolated and angry that they've been robbed of their partner's support and their precious leave time. They're not having the opportunity to build the local support networks that parents so often rely on for many years to come. People undergoing fertility treatment are experiencing at least a year's delay in their treatment, potentially denying them the opportunity to become a parent.



Studies have shown that the burden of the pandemic and restrictions to control the spread are falling more on mums than dads.

In the first lockdown women took on 2/3rds of **additional childcare duties**, according to ONS figures (similar to rates across Europe & North America.)

According to the TUC, 70% mums requesting furlough due to childcare reasons had their request rejected during the first week of January as it has been set up as at the discretion of employers rather than a given by need. This is despite most mums not being aware that furlough is available for childcare.

Not only are mums taking the lion's share of additional childcare responsibilities but also women are more likely to be carers for elderly relatives and other dependents. Not surprisingly 90% mums say their mental health has been impacted negatively by increased levels of stress and anxiety – far greater than dads.

A survey conducted by campaigners Pregnant Then Screwed showed 90% of mums of primary school-aged children are struggling with home schooling with 83% saying it was more challenging than the first lockdown.

Job losses and earnings cut: more than 1 in 4 women have or are contemplating downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce as a result of the impact of Covid. Employees are searching for answers on Google such as '*how can parents work with schools closed?*' in the absence of sufficient support from their employers. TUC report that 25% mums are worried about losing their job due to being singled out for redundancy, sacked or denied hours.

1 in 4 have been using annual leave to cover childcare during school closures with 18% mums reducing their working hours and around 7% taking unpaid leave and receiving no income.

1 in 5 women work in sectors that have seen major job losses & earnings cuts such as retail and hospitality compared to 13% of men. Mums took the brunt of redundancies made during the summer of 2020 despite furlough arrangements being introduced to protect jobs.

Mothers are 47% more likely than fathers to have lost or quit their job since lockdown began last year.

It can be argued that the reliance of many employers on using part-time “mummy” shifts to supplement fulltime core staffing has impacted their operational effectiveness significantly at this time.

1 in 4 new or **soon-to-be mothers** claim they faced discrimination at work during last year’s lockdown, such as being singled out for redundancy – the percentage is higher for pregnant women from BAME backgrounds.

Women make up the majority of **front-line workers** due to the historic gender imbalance of women in low paid roles – of the 11m essential frontline workers, women make up 77% healthcare workers, 83% social care, 92% childcare and 58% in retail including supermarkets demonstrating the disproportionate direct Covid risks that women are facing.

Increase in **pregnancy rate** – there has been an increase in the pregnancy rate in the UK mirrored around the globe – a pandemic babyboom with the UN predicting around 7 million unintended pregnancies over the last year.

Almost every country including the UK has seen an increase in **domestic violence** against women and girls.

There are three ways we could have prevented this additional burden on working mums:

- 1) With greater involvement of fathers in actively sharing childcare and home schooling starting with much greater take up rates of shared parental leave
- 2) Organisations having improved gender balance across functions and organisational levels
- 3) Actively supporting mums in their careers to overcome the prevailing maternity penalty. These measures all support improved gender equality.

As Christine Lagarde (currently President of the European Central Bank) puts so simply when she worked at the International Monetary Fund:

“When women work, economies work.”

LONG TERM IMPACT FOR EMPLOYERS

1. **Slow down/reverse closing of the gender pay gap and improving gender equality**
2. **Loss of experienced talent**
3. **Wellbeing crisis**
4. **Reduction in the consumer market**
5. **Organisational resilience to survive the pandemic**



Looking further ahead to focus on the longer term impact for employers. Unless employers put the necessary support in place to retain and support their working parents the likely impact is:

Slowing down and likely reversing of the efforts made to close the **gender pay gap** and improve **gender equality**.

Whilst having a baby can be the happiest time of a person's life it is also a time known to be the most risky time for a woman's career. We know that the transition to becoming a parent, or second time-parent and beyond, can often require a huge adjustment, both personally and professionally, often accompanied by a level of uncertainty and lack of confidence on return to work. If women are not supported back to the workplace or equally they face unnecessary barriers as working parents then we know that gender parity will be an issue at all levels and particularly noticeable at senior levels.

The McKinsey 2020 Report: *Diversity Wins* states that companies with diversity in leadership are more likely to experience above average profitability compared to their counterparts:

- Gender diversity resulted in 25% profitability outperformance
- Ethnic and cultural diversity resulted in 36% profitability outperformance
- Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to have above average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile.

There will be a **loss of experienced talent** if women are not supported back into the workplace after having children and insufficient support for parents in the workplace - there will simply not be enough women in the talent pipeline for senior positions. The Government Equality Office found in their 2019 *Equality At Work* report that working mums are half as likely to be promoted as working dads. We know there is an impact on productivity when women don't return to the work place after having children, equally when they do return they often feel disconnected and unsupported.

As HR professionals we know the cost of replacing staff is a costly and time consuming exercise. If parents feel there are too many challenges and barriers and they are unable to work to their full potential they are more likely to be less productive, choose to not return or leave their jobs.

Last year the Government's Equality office found that women frustrated in their professional life after becoming mothers leave their organisations to go to a competitor. This seems to be the trend for women - to get promoted after having children, they need to leave their current employer otherwise their career is more likely to stall. They are taking all their skills and expertise with them for career progression.

Attracting the best talent to your organisation is a worthy ambition, we all want the best people. The best graduates are likely to look at info such as an organisation's gender pay gap, and see if there are any limitations for women to develop their careers after having children as well as other diversity measures. This in depth research is reported to happen in most sectors and then used by job searchers to make a career choice. Organisations who are tapping into the emotional and progressive needs of their potential hires are a step ahead of the game.

All this comes at a time when the UK population has reduced by 1.3m from people leaving the country in the last year in the wake of Brexit and the pandemic - the biggest population drop since World War II.

Wellbeing crisis As was demonstrated earlier, the last year has been a challenging time for everyone and especially expectant and working mums. There has been a significant rise in people saying they are feeling anxious every day, rather than only occasionally.

Research from the London School of Economics found that Covid has greatly increased the burden of caring and that only one fifth of households were sharing childcare equally. There has never been a more important time to help individuals feel more connected and cared for rather than overwhelmed and isolated.

Whilst there has been an increase in wellbeing resources and support offered to employees, we are noticing an increase specifically for wellbeing support for parents and carers, acknowledging the additional challenges they are facing at this time.

Keeping women economically active has a direct relation to the economy as women predominantly have control of **consumer spending**. Younger generations of women living with their partners still *hold the purse strings* according to research conducted last year by YouGov on behalf of Royal London. Younger women's confidence in their money management skills is higher than that of their mothers or grandmothers. Whilst the economy has shrunk during the pandemic, spending has been focused on essentials. Women's economic power will directly impact the nation's ability to recover from the pandemic.

Organisations need to be **resilient** to survive and get through the pandemic. Innovation and transformation require diverse talent. People are an organisation's most important asset - having engaged and committed teams that are flexible and resilient to get through the pandemic produces in a strong position to contribute to our overall economic recovery and of course general well being. We consider compassionate leadership to be a key skill to create organisational resilience at this time, taking an empathetic, consultative and engaging approach to team engagement and commitment.

BEST IN CLASS PROVISION FOR WORKING PARENTS DURING LOCKDOWN

Access to furlough / paid leave when required

Flexible working arrangements

Flexible communication channels

Compassionate managers and leaders

Access to counselling support & wellbeing resources

Trust & commitment

Priority on inclusion



Here is our round up of the best in class provision and support for working parents during lockdown:

Furlough is now available on a flexible basis to some, not all, employers and may be the saving grace for a lot of parents at this time. This is creating pressure on parents to work when maybe they are simply not able to due to family pressures. Some employers have introduced **paid lockdown leave** & others have said to work when you can. Reviewing arrangements on a person by person basis is important so that job and personal situations can be taken into account. It has never been so critical for managers to speak to, get to know and do the best for each team member without making assumptions. We recommend monitoring the take up of this leave and ensure it is communicated and promoted positively to fathers as well as mothers.

Where possible **flexible working** arrangements should be focused on doing business critical activities and fitted in when they can. We may finally be getting to a point where presenteeism is a thing of the past. However a lot of people are reporting they're working longer hours now than ever before.

Creating an appropriate culture in the organization focused on wellbeing, teamwork and being empathetic to individual situations is critical – leaders leading from the top by walking their talk with expectations of, and permission to, work flexibly made explicit. For parents there is a significant difference between '*do the work when you can*' to '*do what you can in the time you have*'. Many mums are doing their paid work before 8am and after 8pm according to the recent TUC research – a seemingly impossible task of balancing paid work and childcare/schooling – which will undoubtedly take a toll on physical and mental health. Attention should be given to making flexible working work for each individual and ensuring its available for new recruits from day one.

Making use of **flexible communication channels** where employees are not expected to be on Teams meetings all day long ... that they can collaborate with others electronically at a time to suit themselves rather than reliance on everything being live and in real time. Introducing limits on length of video meetings for example all help a working parent at home.

Compassionate leaders and managers trained in a consultative approach to supporting their people gives managers the tools to have the more difficult conversations and support different and changing personal circumstances .

We're continuing to provide sessions on managing homeschooling for many employers. Some of the best responses by employers have involved the provision of resources to help share the load of homeschooling such as putting on reading & creative sessions, sharing ideas and suggestions for educational activities and informal sessions for parents to chat about what's going on for them and help them share tips but equally help them to understand they're not alone in the challenges they face. Passing on, or loaning out, old IT equipment for children to use to access homeschooling has been valued by many employees.

Many employers have taken the opportunity to promote the use of their EAP services. Offering **counselling and wellbeing resources** to employees is particularly welcome at this time. We recommend including specialist support for working parents and parents to be to the range of support available by your employees. Is your EAP geared up for doing this?

Trust is key to enabling employees to get the job done in their own way, when they can. Remote working requires a different management and leadership style to gain commitment, engagement and promoting everyone working together. People will remember how they were treated at this time by their employer for a long time to come. Trust is the magic ingredient to productivity for remote working, building commitment and engagement. Teams with a strong level of trust are more likely to be resilient.

Placing a **priority on inclusion** will help people feel they are part of the organisation & can be their full, whole self at work. In the case of working parents this often extends to not only bringing their whole self to work and also their kids, dogs, cats & grandma too as home and work lives have become so closely interweaved. Employers taking a strategic approach to retaining and supporting working parents will help to build a culture of inclusion and belonging.

BEST IN CLASS PROVISION FOR WORKING PARENTS

FERTILITY

SOON-TO-BE PARENTS

NEW PARENTS

PARENTS

CARERS

Policy & protection
Enhanced leave and benefits
Access to resources and information
Internal mentoring and/or buddying
Community of peers
Specialist coaching and counseling support
Awareness education and support for managers
Executive sponsorship

In the spirit of conscious inclusion



We highly recommend *business as usual* provision by employers for their employees who are working parents covers the whole journey through parenthood.

This starts with pre-parenthood. In the UK, 1 in 6 couples experience fertility problems and 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage – these are often taboo subjects in the workplace but clearly have an impact at work for the individuals impacted. And then on to parents-to-be and new parents, not forgetting parents with school-aged and older children. Parents who become carers often find themselves as the sandwich generation – looking after both their younger dependents as well as elderly relatives as well as any dependents with complex or additional needs.

For each of these different stages of parenthood, here are our recommendations of what constitutes best in class provision, helping you to attract, retain and develop employees who may (or may not yet) be working parents. These don't need to be costly, burdening services and can serve small organisations as well as large ones - importantly is the willingness and determination to create a culture that considers working parents as valuable members of their workforce.

Ensuring your organisation has **policies** in place to exceed legal minimum standards and set out expectations about the organisation supports employees in specific circumstances, including along the various stages of the parental journey and not just maternity. Many employers now have policies in place around reproductive health including paid time off for fertility treatment or dealing with miscarriage. Treat parenting and caring as a protected characteristic in your organisation.

Best in class provision will **enhance paid leave and benefits** beyond the legal minimum such as for maternity leave, shared parental leave and care leave. The enhancement can contribute to claiming the status of being a great employer - adding value to your employer brand and employee engagement. Promoting policies and enhancements inclusively to all genders is important in the move towards achieving gender equality.

Giving your employees **access to updated resources and information**, such as through e-books, downloads, videos and support organisations for the various stages of parenthood highlights inclusion. Using industry experts and specialist services help to ensure information is up to date and relevant whilst demonstrating care to your employees.

Internal **mentoring and/or buddying** with a colleague who has experienced a similar life experience can be very welcome support. These can be set up quickly at a low cost, yet have a positive impact. This could involve asking for volunteers and providing some initial high quality training for the volunteer mentors and buddies. We've recently provided training for a buddy scheme for new parents at a large construction company.

Providing a platform for **peers to communicate and connect**, whether that is through yammer, facebook or other internal networks, creating employee networks helps parents and carers to feel there is a community with common interests. Holding regular events as well as communicating across different channels helps to make the community accessible to more employees. Our experience of running internal parents and carers networks tells us that once a community is established, it's a greatly used resource and extremely valued.

Specialist coaching and counselling support from external providers offers specific trained support to address more personal or sensitive topics at the point of need. This is particularly useful for supporting people through fertility treatment, miscarriage and baby loss, pregnancy, extended periods of leave, carers and bereavement.

In an ideal world, all managers will be empathetic, non-judgemental and understanding to all these various stages of parenthood. We know the reality is quite different. **Awareness, education and support for managers** to support parents at work is important. Research shows that often managers are afraid of saying the wrong thing to employees due to the fear of discriminating. Great employers equip their managers to have better conversations with their team members, feel more comfortable regardless of their own experiences and as a result the feel empowered to signpost employees to appropriate support whilst extending their managerial duty of care. After all the saying goes *people work for people, not organisations*.

Executive sponsorship to champion and advocate working parents in an organisation is critical to setting the right inclusive tone. For career progression, executive sponsorship is only received by 3% of female employees according to The 30% Club. They recommend that leaders take more proactive steps to address the gender imbalance in the executive leadership pipeline, following the release of the 2019 Hampton-Alexander Review. Demonstrating senior level commitment to diversity and creating a level playing field for talent.

We know there is no quick fix to improving diversity and inclusion yet in a world that is changing at a faster rate than ever before, diversity and diverse perspectives are critical to future-proof businesses, we believe employers need to go above and beyond to consider the needs of working parents, as well as other intersectionalities, in the spirit of **conscious inclusion**.

ASOS

With a large female workforce and an average employee age of 28 we were asked to provide wrap around support for employees taking maternity, paternity and adoption leave as part of their retention strategy. The average age of having a first child in the UK is between 29 and 32.

Our **Family Care Leave support** is offered as a blended service consisting of employees attending pre-leave and post-leave group webinars held on a monthly basis, as well as having 2 individual coaching sessions to prepare for their return to work during their period of Leave. This approach reduces the overall cost of providing the full individual support whilst creating connections amongst people going on leave at the same time across the organisation.

During the pandemic we've provided various **wellbeing webinars** for ASOS including ones focused on working from home and managing homeschooling.

To support the growing number of parents within the organisation we are currently planning the launch of a **parents network** to create an internal community, aid the inclusion of working parents and give them a voice.

The logo for Archwilio Cymru Audit Wales, featuring a stylized red triangle icon to the left of the text 'Archwilio Cymru' and 'Audit Wales' in a bold, dark teal font.

With a mature workforce consisting of many parents and increasingly more carers, we're supporting this public sector organisation with the following services as part of their strategy to be more inclusive:

Our full **Family Care Leave coaching** is offered for any employees taking maternity, shared parental or adoption leave. This consists of 6 individual coaching sessions, taken before, during and following the period of leave focused on enabling smooth transitions, retention and continued career development.

Family First coaching support for any parents and/or carers to help them to handle anything they are finding challenging in their family or work lives.

Creation of a **Parents & Carers Network** and facilitation of quarterly live network sessions.

Training for managers on supporting employee wellbeing during Covid and developing their compassionate leadership skills.

attract, retain and develop gender-balanced teams

attract

Returner programmes
Supported hiring
Unconscious bias / conscious inclusion training for managers
Smart & flexible working
Recruitment audit

retain

Family Care Leave support
(maternity, paternity, adoption leave)
Working Parents' support
Compassionate leadership training & education for managers
Internal networks and employee resource groups
Wellbeing sessions

develop

Mentoring programmes
Leadership development coaching
Developing women leaders' workshops
Developing gender balance allies
Talent management and career development



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