

# A Strategy Guide for Supporting and Retaining Working Parents

Work, Family & You



# Working Parents: the key to gender diversity



**The rise of the dual-earner household in which both parents work full or part-time is so widespread today that families where only one parent works are now the exception and not the rule.**

According to the Office for National Statistics, around three quarters of parents in dual-parent families are both in work. Offering support for this substantial group of employees as they go through the unique challenges which come with this phase of life is key to attracting and retaining the talented people you need if your organisation is to thrive.

Some organisations understand this well. Initiatives which support diversity and inclusion are led and managed by specialists. A key part of their brief is to put together packages of support for working parents which will keep them ahead of the competition and out in front when it comes to gender diversity.

While any organisation that is serious about providing meaningful support for working parents needs to understand what 'good' – or even 'great' - looks like, we know that not everyone can call on the specialist knowledge or resources which are key to success.

With this in mind, we have created this guide to help organisations formulate their plans, drawing on our team's extensive experience in working with clients in this area.

From the business case for supporting working parents to the different ways you can help; the following pages provide all the resources you need to plan your organisation's journey towards becoming a family-friendly employer.



# 75%

**of parents in  
dual - parent  
families work**

# The business case for action

The number of organisations carving out a position as a leading employer for working parents has increased considerably in recent years. Here are some reasons why employers like Facebook and Allen & Overy have taken action:

## Parent-friendly workplaces are good for everyone

A 2020 study, [“Great Place To Work”](#) found that employers who provided superior support for working parents had employees who were more productive, loyal and positive about their employer brand.

Compared with other workplaces, their people also reported greater satisfaction with pay, benefits, management and opportunity. In other words, supporting working parents is good for everyone.

## Parenthood holds back talented people

According to an international study from [YouGov](#), people in most major economies still see parenthood as a block to career progression. Less than 60% of women across a range of countries including the UK, Sweden, France and Canada say they feel they can't progress to the top of their profession whilst balancing being a good parent. This sentiment is echoed by 30% or more of men in countries ranging from the UK to China, Germany and Spain.



## Women's careers are impacted most by parenthood

Although the majority of children have two working parents, women's careers are disproportionately impacted by parenthood. Faced with the need to support a family, it is women who are more likely to reduce hours, take career breaks or decline promotion, just at the point in their career journey when progression is on offer. They become Boundaried Workers. UK and global research by the Government Equalities Office details the negative impact on women's pay and progression. Those who stay on also have the pressure of doing the "Double Burden" of leading on caring responsibilities after a day at work.

**Without support for working parents, organisations cannot hope to build a talent pipeline which supports gender diversity.**

### A diminished pool of future leaders and managers

When parents get overlooked or vote with their feet and leave, organisations not only waste the investment they have made in these employees, but they leave themselves with a diminished talent pool from which they can select future leaders and managers. Without support for working parents, organisations cannot hope to build a talent pipeline which supports gender diversity.





# Initiatives that promote gender equality and inclusion are key drivers of commercial success.

## Those who lead on gender diversity win commercially

In a landmark study named “When Women Lead, Firms Win”, S&P Global found that firms with women CEOs and CFOs delivered superior commercial performance. It also found that firms with high gender diversity on their board of directors were more profitable and larger than firms with low gender diversity. In other words, initiatives that promote gender equality and inclusion are key drivers of commercial success.

## Held to account on gender diversity and pay

Whether it is through government-mandated reporting or activist campaigns promoting greater representation of women on boards, organisations are increasingly being held to account for the actions they take to support women talent. Their progression is also under intense public scrutiny. In the extensive study by the UK government called “Women progression in the Workplace”, researchers from Kings College London find that **to support gender diversity, parental policies must be combined** with other changes. These include how leaders manage those with different working practices and de-biasing promotion and pay processes.



# Key actions for employers

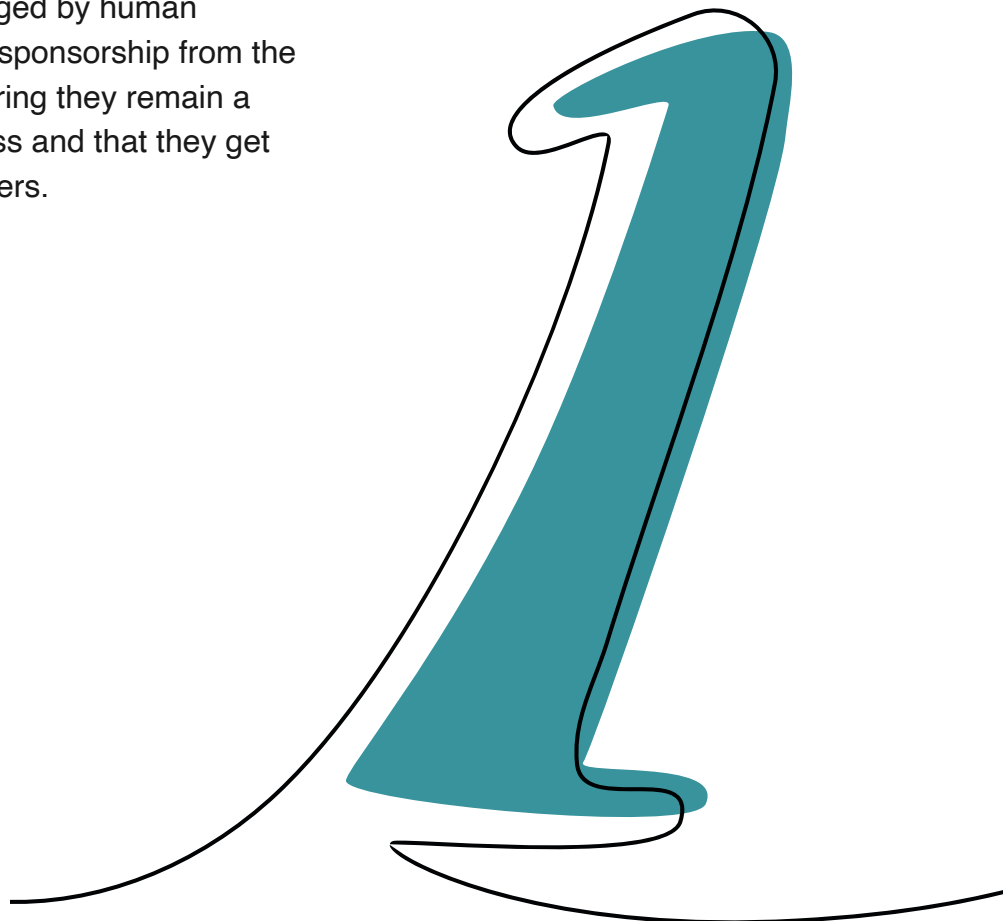


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The sector you operate in, the different roles in your organisation and the locations you are based in, are some of the factors that will influence your approach to supporting working parents. However, in our experience, organisations who put in place successful initiatives follow these five steps.

## 01 Assign a board level sponsor

Making meaningful change to the way organisations support working parents requires commitment and buy-in at board level. Although initiatives will be led and managed by human resources day to day, ongoing sponsorship from the leadership team is key to ensuring they remain a strategic priority for the business and that they get continued support from managers.



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# Assess where your organisation is right now

Any organisation that wants to improve its support for working parents must start by assessing its current performance.

If the ultimate goal is to improve gender diversity through the organisation, then these are the questions you need to consider:

- What percentage of women return to work after their first and/or second child? How many keep the same hours when they return?
- What happens to women's careers when they return to work? Are they returning to the same career path?
- Do we track pay and progress of women overall?
- How does this compare to men?
- What is our take up of shared or extended parental leave? Why is it at this level?
- How many of our roles are designed and advertised as flexible?
- Do men feel comfortable asking for flexible working arrangements to share childcare more equally with their partner?
- What is the breakdown of men/women managers and leaders in our organisation? How does their pay compare?

By posing these questions you'll be able to build a baseline understanding of how well your organisation is doing and set targets for where you want to be. Make sure you consider all family models from same-sex parents to single and adoptive parents.

## Understand what support you provide now and how that needs to change

The next step in your planning is to establish what support you currently provide to working parents and evaluate how well it meets their needs. Start by mapping existing benefits and policies. Look closely at the needs which arise at different stages of the parenting journey.

### These include:

- **Planning for parenthood** – how clearly do you communicate the support you give? Is the information readily available without existing or prospective employees having to ask for it?
- **When you are expecting** – how does the organisation help employees plan for parental leave? How do you support same-sex parents, those who are adopting and parents going through fertility treatment?
- **Returning to work** – what support do you offer when employees return from parental leave?
- **Crunch points** – how do you cater for the changing demands on parents from early years to starting school and then teenage years?
- **Fathers and secondary care-givers** – their role in caregiving helps them thrive personally and professionally and underpins gender diversity – how are you supporting them?

Pulling all of this together will establish the gaps in the current support you provide.

## Build your action plan

Your action plan will outline the new package of support for working parents. It should cover some or all of the following:

- **Enhanced parental leave** – Paid time out to care for their family is the most meaningful support that working parents want. Organisations that go beyond the statutory minimum and offer equal paid leave for men and women have the best chance of standing out as employers of choice for working parents.
- **Flexible working** – The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how flexible hours and remote working play a key role in helping families balance childcare and work. Employers who want to attract the best talent understand that flexibility isn't just about the autonomy to work flexibly. It extends to flexible job design where roles can be shared at all levels of the organisation.
- **Parent-focused benefits** – Organisations with outstanding family-friendly credentials are the ones who help take the pressure out of parenting. Popular options include lactation rooms, breast milk delivery services for nursing mothers away on business, an onsite creche, emergency childcare, health insurance which extends to partners and children, and investments that make a significant difference to family wellbeing.
- **Support networks** – Establishing internal networks for parents contributes to a family-friendly culture and can provide employees with much needed support beyond their manager and their immediate team.
- **Education** – Providing dedicated online resources for parents can help employees and managers understand and navigate the different challenges which come with parenthood.
- **Parental transition coaching** – One-to-one or group support is invaluable for employees as they negotiate the transition into parenthood. This will help them to anticipate the challenges they will face and changes they need to make, in order to accommodate career, family and childcare. Employers who provide coaching for managers put themselves in the best position to help working parents continue their career journeys and reach their potential.

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## Implement your plan and measure its impact

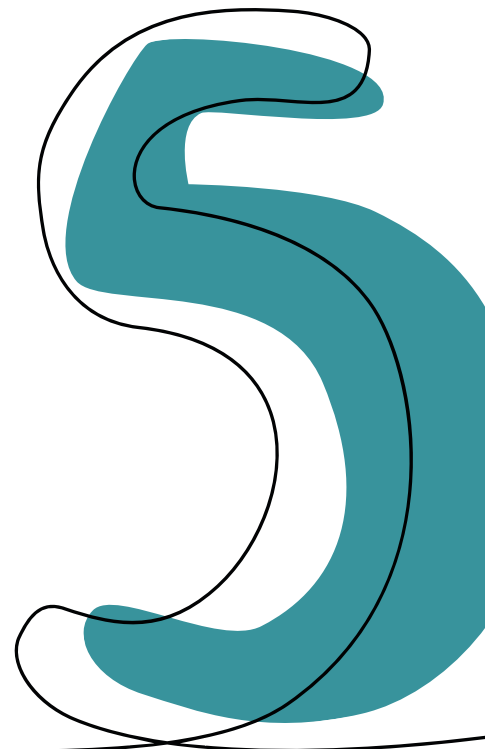
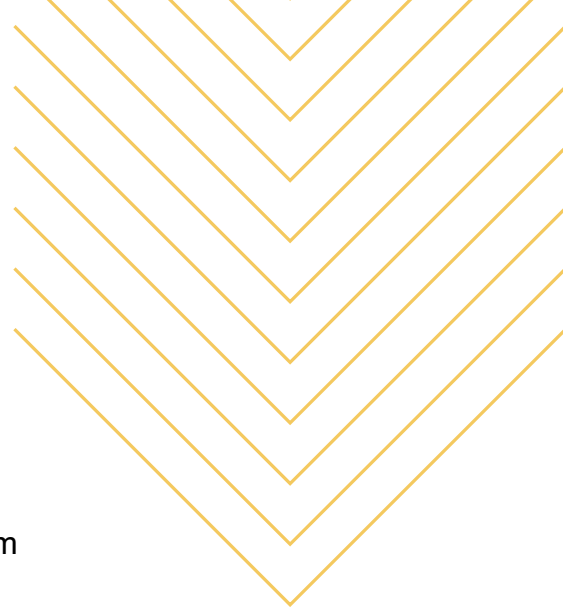
When you have a new package of support which has the buy-in from your leadership team and the seal of approval from your employees, it's time to put your plan into action.

Your first priority will be to communicate the changes you are making and how it will benefit your employees.

As well as signposting what you are doing differently, you'll need to explain what actions employees and managers must take to build a culture which is supportive of working parents.

You'll need to set new expectations around how working parents are accommodated in day-to-day working practices such as setting deadlines and availability for meetings. You may also need to consider manager training, so that staff supervision is consistent and aligned to your new policies. And crucially to a change in accountability in the managers role in supporting the progression of parents.

Last of all you'll need to put in place a framework for monitoring progress; measuring impact, spotting where you are making improvements and where you might be falling short.



# What next?



**Congratulations! If you have read this guide then you've already taken the critical first step towards building a family-friendly workplace.**

Here are some suggestions about what you can do next:

- Share this guide with the relevant senior leaders in your organisation so they can better understand how and why support for working parents is an investment worth making for your organisation.
- Use *Work, Family and You* to understand more about the challenges facing working families and the support they need. Share it within your organisation.
- Once you've implemented your plan get in touch and tell us about it – we'd love to feature your story on "[Work, Family and You](#)".

**And of course, if you want to talk to one of our team about your plans and need some help, we're only too happy to talk. [Chat to us](#)**





## About ECC

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ECC has over 25 years' experience helping employers support working parents as they progress through the different stages of parenthood.

We also help employers remove the barriers that contribute to women's careers flat lining; barriers that are now understood to contribute to the gender pay gap.

We work nationally, internationally and virtually, tailoring content through our understanding of local markets.

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