



Government  
Equalities Office



WARWICK  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

# Family-friendly working practices

Motivations, influences and  
impacts for employers

Workplace and  
Gender Equality  
Research Programme

[gov.uk/geo](https://gov.uk/geo)



# Introduction

The introduction of family-friendly working policies and practices may enable men and women to equally share work and childcare between them and fulfil their career potential.

But what factors influence employers to offer family-friendly policies and practices; how does it benefit them; and what policy interventions might work to encourage employers to offer them?

A review of the literature (summarising 74 academic papers) took place between July 2018 and February 2019 to respond to these research questions and to provide the latest evidence for employers.

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family friendly  
working policies and  
practices may enable  
women to stay in roles  
that reflect their skills  
and experience and  
men to share caring  
responsibilities  
”

**For more information:** please see the full report [click here](#). For further guidance on the evidence-based actions you can take to improve your family-friendly policies offer [click here](#).



# What influences employers to offer family-friendly working policies and practices?

There are three distinct but connected factors that appear to be most important for employers when considering family-friendly working policies and practices:

**Figure 1:** Factors which influence employers to offer family-friendly policies and practices

| Pressures from inside or outside the organisation   | Organisational-specific factors  | To meet and improve organisational goals  |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Level of state support for flexible working.</p> <hr/> <p>Corporate social responsibility/ right thing to do.</p> <hr/> <p>Proportion and influence of women in the workplace.</p> <hr/> <p>Level of unionisation.</p> | <p>Organisational size, sector and industry.</p> <hr/> <p>Job type and scheduling structure.</p> <hr/> <p>Better technology enabling homeworking/teleworking.</p> <hr/> <p>Work culture.</p> | <p>To recruit and retain highly-skilled workers.</p> <hr/> <p>To improve firm productivity.</p> <hr/> <p>To reduce worker absence and turnover intentions.</p> <hr/> <p>To increase staff commitment.</p> |

Employers typically may consider **all of these factors** in their decision-making.



## What influences employers to offer family-friendly working policies and practices?



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Organisations need to adopt family-friendly working policies and practices that work for both employee and employer

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**Corporate social responsibility and being seen to be doing the right thing** are increasingly important considerations for organisations in today's environment.

**Making the case that family-friendly working policies and practices will benefit both an employer and employee** is crucial to getting organisations to accept them. The business case needs to be recognised and accepted by those involved in the decision-making process.

The **advantages to employers when adopting family-friendly working policies and practices goes beyond economic need** – increased loyalty, commitment, performance and productivity, as well as improved recruitment and retention of valued staff, could bring financial benefits for employers in the longer-term.

Organisations need to adopt **family-friendly working policies and practices that work for both employee and employer** – flexibility designed only to benefit the employer (e.g. in stretched economic times) may not necessarily result in positive outcomes for employees.

# What's in it for employers?

The introduction of family-friendly policies and practices is more likely to result in positive outcomes for employers – negative outcomes are unlikely (see Figure 2).

Positive outcomes can be demonstrated via:

**Direct effects** e.g. teleworking or working from home may directly reduce office costs; or

**Indirect effects** e.g. employees who perceive their workplace to be supportive in terms of working flexibility may be more committed and therefore are less likely to leave and more likely to work hard; this therefore translates into increased productivity and lower turnover costs.

**Figure 2:** Positive outcomes for employers

**Better productivity:** More flexibility for employees in the hours they work and better quality work (i.e. satisfaction; fair pay; participation and progression) lead to enhanced job productivity and better economic performance.

**Cost savings/benefits outweigh costs:** Changes in the organisation of work helps reduce overhead costs such as reduced office space.

**Reduced absenteeism:** Employees may be less likely to be absent from work with the introduction of family-friendly working policies and practices and absenteeism would be less likely in the longer term through reduced stress and increased job satisfaction.

**Improved recruitment and retention:** Prospective employees would be more attracted to jobs which offer flexible working opportunities and can also help with staff retention leading to reduced employee turnover costs.

**Positive workplace behaviours:** Employees may demonstrate higher commitment, happiness and satisfaction which brings associated business benefits such as reduced leaving intentions and better performance and work effort.

There are very few examples of negative outcomes from the introduction of family-friendly working policies and practices.

Very recent European research shows that implementing a greater number of family-friendly working policies and practices can have positive effects on **gender equality** and the **gender pay gap**.

Most of the existing research cover a wide range or ‘bundles’ of family-friendly working policies and practices; therefore it is not generally possible to assess the impact of specific policies such as part-time work, maternity leave or teleworking, for example.

## Case Studies

These international case studies are examples of interventions that have been promoted to encourage employers to offer family-friendly working policies and practices.

### Service Organisation (Germany): Flexible pre-arranged working hours

*Kauffeld, Jonas and Frey (2004) examined a new work-time design in two branches of a service organisation in Germany covering 18 employees plus a control group of 15 employees.*

The new work-time design redistributed personnel hours over a period of 12 months.

Employees working with the flexible design reported **increased learning opportunities** and work satisfaction, **better cooperation** with colleagues, **improved supervisory relations** and **increased satisfaction** with company communication.

### US Federal Government: Teleworking

*To help achieve greater flexibility in managing the US Federal Government’s workforce through telework, the Telework Enforcement Act was signed in 2010. This introduced a formalised approach requiring a written agreement between employee and manager to be able to partake in telework supported by mandatory telework training.*

The US Government provided examples of organisational-level interventions to selected agencies to promote efforts to encourage telework participation and provision of technology to support it – they found it supported employee and organisational performance.

### Caregiver-friendly workplace policies

*Ireson et al (2018) found that some workplaces have caregiver-friendly workplace policies embedded within their organisational structure or HR policies.*

Two organisations had implemented a ‘life-cycle’ approach to supporting employees:

- **Varova** (a transportation and logistics company in Finland) allows employees to receive the support needed for their particular life stage.
- **Zorggroep Noordwest-Veluwe** (a residential care services provider in the Netherlands) implemented a “life-stage conscious policy” to address the individual needs of each employee based on their life stage.

# Key recommendations

## Capability

### Know the business case.

Employers need to understand and accept the case for introducing family-friendly working policies and practices. Highlighting good practice examples of employers and employees operating in a similar environment can help achieve this.

**Get the right training.** Senior management and line managers need to know how to manage flexibility and flexible workers. This requires ongoing monitoring and updating as flexible working can affect other team members, as well as managers.

**Check it's working.** Any widespread implementation of flexible working should be evaluated over a reasonable period of time to ensure it's working successfully.

**Ensure it benefits everybody.** Policies and practices benefitting only employers such as enforced teleworking or working from home for example can have an adverse effect and employers need to be aware of the potentially negative effects this may incur over the longer term.





## Key recommendations



“  
**Transparent dialogue  
is important in creating  
a trusting environment**  
”

### Communication

**Being open.** Transparent dialogue is important in creating a trusting environment where flexible workers and their colleagues can voice concerns and discuss positive ways forward.

**Have flexibility ‘champions’ (preferably senior managers).** They can serve to promote the case for flexibility within their own organisation but also in others.

### Changing Perceptions

**Pioneer change.** Being seen as a trailblazer in flexible working and doing the right thing for employees can convey a powerful message to potential and existing employees.

**Create a positive workplace culture.** A climate where management is fully supportive of flexible working and which encourages take-up of flexible working is required so that employees feel able to make use of family-friendly working policies and practices.

**It’s not just a ‘women’s issue’.** Perceptions of flexible working need to be challenged and all employees need to be offered and encouraged to take up family-friendly working policies and practices. Male and female role models working flexibly can act as flexibility champions and demonstrate to others that it can be done successfully.





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