

The Parental Fog Index 2024: Cross-Industry Report

Why equal parenting drives gender equity at work and how leaders can support dads to be equal parents

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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At a time when organisations are making significant investment to retain talented women, increase gender balance on boards, and close the gender pay gap, many employers are frustrated that progress isn't happening as fast as they and their shareholders would like to see.

There is plenty of evidence which shows that eradicating the motherhood penalty is key to accelerating progress. When organisations deliver initiatives to tackle genderbased inequality while mums experience a hit to their career in return for flexibility, the result is like driving a car with the handbrake on.

For mums to have real choice in how they prioritise work and childcare, dads need to equally share parenting. We celebrate the progress many employers are making to support dads. Paid, extended paternity leave, encouraging men to be loud and proud when they step away from work for parenting duties, gender-neutral family-friendly policies, these are just some of the initiatives best-practice employers have introduced in recent years. We wait with baited breath to see how many men take up extended paternity leave and request flexible

working arrangements. We know that culture impacts take-up. In a society that still regards mums as a child's primary carer, dads face an uphill struggle to ask for support to share care responsibilities in a way that mums don't.

Leaders have a critical role to play setting the expectation that parents, irrespective of gender, will be encouraged and supported to manage parenting alongside work. Leaders can model that expectation, talk positively about men that live it, equip managers to support dads, and hold the organisation accountable for monitoring the career progress of parents. Together, these actions will create a culture that supports rather than undermines the organisation's commitment to gender equity.

While shared parenting gains momentum, organisations need to normalise it by doubling down on efforts to promote their familyfriendly credentials across all communication channels. We know that many of our clients provide more support for working parents than appears on their website. For them this report is a call to action on the need to visibly promote equal parenting.



WHY EQUAL PARENTING DETERMINES WORKPLACE GENDER EQUITY

There is consensus among economists, business leaders and politicians that the full economic participation of working parents, mothers in particular, is critical to economic growth. All parties must work together to overcome four barriers that force parents to choose between having a career or a baby.

1 An expectation that mums lead on parenting is killing progress on gender equity

The motherhood penalty – the decrease in pay and career progression mums experience in return for flexibility to manage care with work – has the same impact on work gender equity initiatives as driving a car with the handbrake on. It accounts for 80% of the gender pay gap^[1], which means organisations will struggle to find sustainable ways to close the gender pay gap, or retain a pipeline of women talent, unless they find more effective ways to support employees to have children without damaging their careers.

Historically, policies designed to support working parents have been based on the widely held cultural assumption^[2] that in the family unit, a mum will assume primary care responsibility ^[3]. As a result, these policies such as extended maternity leave, part time and flexible working have done a great job of keeping mums economically active but at a personal cost to their lifetime earnings, pensions, and career prospects.

More recently, organisations are starting to recognise that gendered expectations around parenting also negatively impact men. That a focus on supporting mums to work and care has had the unintended consequence of creating a "fatherhood forfeit" preventing men from playing a more active role in everyday parenting. Recently there have been some excellent examples of employers supporting dads to bond with their newborn. More offer paid, extended paternity leave, and encourage dads to be loud and proud about their parenting responsibilities at work. Yet progress toward equal parenting is still being held back by societal attitudes that assume it's "natural" for mums to lead on parenting.

2 Leaders must set the expectation that dads are equal parents

Cultural expectations still act as a brake on dads asking their employer for the same support as mums for fear the same fate befalls their career, as they've seen happen to mum colleagues^[4].

Organisations that want to encourage more dads to engage with the gender-neutral support they offer first need to appreciate the insidious impact of cultural attitudes on men's willingness to do so.

At every touchpoint on the journey to parenthood and through their child's early years dads are sent a clear message. Their job as a parent is to help out and defer decision making on child raising matters to mums, based on the received wisdom that mums are biologically programmed to know best. From pre- to post-natal healthcare, providers treat dads as a secondary, not equal parent, to mums. Nursery, primary and secondary schools pick up the baton, choosing to call mum over dad, even when the emergency contact form states otherwise. Excluding men from the opportunity to fly solo as a parent denies them the necessary experience to develop confidence and competence in their ability to parent, reinforcing their status as secondary carer.

Organisations need to be aware of biases in widely held cultural attitudes^[5]. However, organisations must demonstrate a counter-expectation to these cultural attitudes, so that dads are equal parents and reflect the expectation dads have the same responsibility for parenting as mums in the way they communicate and promote family-friendly support. Here leaders have a critical role to play setting the expectation that parents, irrespective of gender, will be encouraged and supported to manage parenting alongside work^[6]. Leaders can model that expectation, talk positively about men that live it, equip managers to support dads, and hold the organisation accountable for monitoring the career progress of parents. Together, these actions will create a culture that supports rather than undermines the organisation's commitment to gender equity.

3 Track the progress of flexible workers

Related to this point, as more dads share parenting, leaders need data to track whether the motherhood penalty has been eradicated and not morphed into a genderneutral parenthood penalty, or worse that mums continue to incur a penalty while dads don't.

Not once, in the five years ECC has conducted this research, have we found evidence of a single employer that tracks the pay and progression of flexible workers. Employers should anticipate that dads are unlikely to request extended parental leave or flexible working without assurance that doing so won't negatively impact their pay and promotion prospects^[7].

4 Gender equity drives sustainable workforces

In a challenging economy, creating a sustainable workforce has become a top priority for employers experiencing skills gaps or looking to increase performance and productivity. From a retention perspective ^[8], companies with gender balanced boards are better able to retain senior talented women ^[9], because they are more likely to understand the support parents need and offer flexible working arrangements.

A key lesson for business from the UK Government's Covid-19 inquiry is that when women are absent from decision making the needs of women and parents are overlooked ^[10]. Businesses need gender balanced workforces to create and deliver products and services that meet the needs of women and men.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS

More broadly, across all sectors, the case for a strong gender-balanced talent pool is compelling. Organisations with a gender-balanced c-suite perform better than those in which men dominate. Research^[11] shows that women executives outperform male peers on a number of dimensions. Women CEOS bring value appreciation and improve stock price. Women CFOs better defend profitability moats and deliver excess risk-adjusted returns. Little wonder investors and clients scrutinise board gender balance when deciding whether to invest in or work with an organisation ^[12].

Businesses with women in senior positions have the necessary insight to capitalise on women's growing power as consumers. In two years' time, women will control 60% of Britain's wealth, account for two-thirds of global disposable income, and 80% will become solely responsible for their finances over their lifetime. Businesses that do not replenish and accelerate their talent pool of mid-ranking women now will not have gender balanced decision making in place, in time.

CHILDCARE CRISIS UPDATE: ACCESSING AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE IS STILL A MAJOR ISSUE FOR PARENTS

Research shows that in countries where parents can access affordable, quality childcare, parents share work and care responsibilities more equally ^[13]. With all the publicity around the launch of the new free childcare hours offer, employers could be forgiven for thinking the childcare crisis has been solved.

Not only is the childcare crisis ongoing, but there

is also every indication it will get worse when the offer is extended to 30 free hours in September 2025. Providers of early years childcare have warned 40,000 additional staff will need to be recruited to meet demand. This comes at a time when 37% of their existing workforce is "actively considering leaving" their job ^[14].

The new Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, has promised a "re-energised recruitment campaign" but clearly it will take time for sufficient staff to be recruited and trained before providers have the workforce to be able to provide the number of childcare places to meet demand ^[15]. In the meantime, employers should continue to be mindful of the struggle parents face to access childcare and where possible offer flexibility to accommodate childcare needs.

HOW IS THE PARENTAL FOG INDEX CREATED?

To ensure consistency, we used a researcher with no prior knowledge of what specific firms do to support working parents. We asked them to search each website using the following criteria:

- ✓ Mentions commitment to working parents
- Showcases awards (best / top employer for parents or women)
- Shared Parental Leave policy
- Maternity Leave policy
- ✓ Paternity Leave policy
- ✓ Flexible working options
- Shared Parental Leave policy (with pay and duration)
- Maternity Leave policy (with pay and duration)
- Paternity Leave policy (with pay and duration)
- Flexible working policy
- Showcase support through written content, video or podcasts
- ✓ Testimonials from role models
- References to tracking pay and career progress of flexible workers

Scoring

Each term found scored 1 point. We added up the scores and allocated a visibility rating as follows:

Score Visibility Rating

- 12-13 Beacon
- 8 -11 Fully Visible
- 4-7 Visible
- 1-3 Foggy
- 0 Invisible

WE DEFINE EACH VISIBILITY RATING AS:

Label	Descriptor
Beacon	 Support for working parents runs through this firm's DNA. Evidence - meets Fully Visible criteria plus one of the following: ✓ Website showcases support with case studies that demonstrate policy in action. This may include written, video or podcast content. ✓ Role model testimonies. ✓ Employer tracks pay and career progress of flexible workers
Fully Visible	 This firm publishes full details of policies that support working parents on its website including terms of pay and duration of leave. Evidence – meets Visible criteria plus: ✓ Policies published include details of pay and duration of leave
Visible	 This firm publishes policies that support working parents, but these policies do not include terms of pay or duration. Evidence – meets Foggy criteria plus: Policies published: Shared Parental Leave Maternity Paternity Flexible working
Foggy	This firm supports working parents but provides no detail on how it does this. It references support for working parents e.g., blogs, relevant awards but does not publish policies. Evidence: Refers to commitment to working parents in general terms i.e. 'a generous maternity package', enters best employer awards but does not publish policies on website
Invisible	No reference to support for working parents.



WHICH EMPLOYERS ACTIVELY MARKET THEIR SUPPORT FOR WORKING PARENTS?

About this year's data

In July 2024, we reviewed the websites of organisations on the latest Times Top 100 Graduate Employers list, as these employers are known for marketing their employer brand competitively to prospective employees. While the Times list is updated annually, 85 employers in last year's report appear in this year's list making it possible to identify patterns and trends.

01. Rating Changes across 5 years

Today more employers understand the need to actively promote their family-friendly credentials. In the five years since we launched the first Fog Index the number of organisations in the invisible category has dropped from 31 to one this year.

Rating	2024	2019
Beacon	7	4
Fully Visible	47	14
Visible	34	36
Foggy	11	15
Invisible	1	31

02. Actual YOY change 2023-2024

Summary

There was a pattern among clients that slipped a ranking of no longer including awards for family-friendly initiatives or vlogs, blogs of leaders and staff promoting the organisations support for working parents.

	23-24
Climbed	20
Same	43
Slipped	22
New entry	15

03. Year on year change by employer

Rating 2024	Employer	2023	YOY change
Beacon	Atkins	Fully Visible	+
	Deloitte	Beacon	=
	Grant Thornton	Beacon	=
	NatWest Group	Beacon	=
	Rolls-Royce	Fully Visible	+
	Santander	Beacon	=
	Tesco	Fully Visible	+
Fully Visible	Accenture	Fully Visible	=
	AECOM	-	New
-0-	Aldi	Foggy	++
VIV	Approach Social Work	Fully Visible	=
	Astra Zeneca	Visible	+
	Aviva	-	New
	BAE Systems	Fully Visible	=
	Bain & Company	Fully Visible	=
	Bank of America	Fully Visible	=
	BBC	Fully Visible	=
	BCG	Fully Visible	=
	BP	Visible	+
	British Army	Fully Visible	=
	Cancer Research UK	-	New
	Capgemini	-	New
	Civil Service	Fully Visible	=
	Channel 4	-	New
	Citi	Beacon	-
	CMS	Visible	+
	Deutsche Bank	Beacon	-
	Enterprise Rent-A-Car	Beacon	-
	EY	Fully Visible	=
	Goldman Sachs	Visible	+
	Google	Fully Visible	=
	GSK	Fully Visible	=
	Jacobs	-	New
	Johnson & Johnson	-	New
	JP Morgan	Visible	+

Rating 2024	Employer	2023	YOY change
Fully Visible	KPMG	Visible	+
517	L'Oreal	Fully Visible	=
-0	Latham & Watkins	Fully Visible	=
	Lidl	Visible	+
	Linklaters	Beacon	-
	Lloyds Banking Group	Beacon	-
	Local Government	Fully Visible	=
	M&S	-	New
	Morgan Stanley	Fully Visible	=
	Mott MacDonald	Fully Visible	+
	Newton	Fully Visible	=
	P&G	Fully Visible	=
	Shell	Fully Visible	=
	Siemens	-	New
	Teach First	Foggy	++
	PwC	Fully Visible	=
	UBS	Beacon	-
	Unilever	Fully Visible	=
	Vodafone	Beacon	-

Visible



A&O Shearman	Fully Visible	-
Airbus	Visible	=
Amazon	Visible	=
Apple	Visible	=
Arcadis	Fully Visible	-
Bank of England	Fully Visible	-
BDO	Fully Visible	-
BlackRock	Fully Visible	-
Bloomberg	Fully Visible	-
British Airways	-	New
BT	Foggy	+
Clifford Chance	Foggy	+
Clyde & Co	Visible	=
Forvis Mazars	-	New
Freshfields	Invisible	++
Herbert Smith Freehills	Fully Visible	-
Hogan Lovells	Foggy	+

Rating 2024	Employer	2023	YOY change
Visible	HSBC	Fully Visible	-
	IBM	Foggy	+
-Č	Jane-Street	Visible	=
× 1 ×	JLR	Visible	=
	Kubrick	Visible	=
	Mars	Visible	=
	McKinsey & Company	Visible	=
	Mercedes-Benz	-	New
	MI5	Visible	=
	MI6	-	New
	Microsoft	Visible	=
	Penguin Random House	Invisible	++
	Pfizer	Visible	=
	Royal Navy	Visible	=
	Savills	Visible	=
	Slaughter & May	Foggy	+
	WSP	-	New

Foggy

Visible	-
Foggy	=
Fully Visible	
Visible	-
-	New
Foggy	=
Visible	-
Visible	-
Visible	-
Foggy	=
Foggy	=
	Foggy Fully Visible Visible - Foggy Visible Visible Visible Foggy

Foggy

-

Invisible

Unlocked



04. Climbers to celebrate

This year 20 employers featured in last year's report have moved up at least one rank.

Notable climbers include:

Climbed 2 ranks from:	Foggy to Fully Visible	Aldi, Teach First
	Invisible to Visible	Penguin Random House, Freshfields
Climbed 1 rank from:	Fully Visible to Beacon	Atkins, Rolls-Royce, Tesco
	Visible to Fully Visible	Astra Zeneca, BP, CMS, Goldman Sachs,
		JP Morgan, KPMG, Lidl, Mott McDonald
	Foggy to Visible	BT, Clifford Chance, Hogan Lovells, IBM,
		Slaughter & May

Climbers in alphabetical order

Aldi, Astra Zeneca, Atkins	Hogan Lovells	Mott MacDonald
BP, BT	IBM	Penguin Random House
Clifford Chance, CMS	JP Morgan	Rolls Royce
Freshfields	KPMG	Slaughter & May
Goldman Sachs	Lidl	Teach First, Tesco

05. Publish policy details

Policy	Includes details e.g. pay and duration 2024	Referenced but no detail 2024	Policy not referenced 2024
Shared Parental Leave	36	18	46
Maternity Leave	57	25	18
Paternity Leave	57	23	20
Flexible Work	56	35	9

This year, there has been a notable increase in the number of employers that publish policy details for paternity leave.

06. Active marketing to promote family friendly credentials

The trend for employers to talk about their commitment to working parents continues to rise, reaching a record high of 97%. Similarly, there was an 11% increase in the number of employers showcasing their support for working parents. This year the downward trend continued of fewer employers publishing details of awards won for family-friendly initiatives down 5% on last year and down 17% on 2022's record score.

Approach	2024	2023	2022
Talks commitment	97	94	71
Awards	23	28	40
Show case	60	49	27
Role Models	50	50	37



TEN TOP TIPS TO GET YOUR ORGANISATION TO BEACON STATUS

The following actions communicate a serious intent to support working parents.

Review Beacon websites

Take a look at Beacon sites from previous studies. All talk directly to working parents as a discrete audience, showing they understand and support their need to manage work with care responsibilities.

2 Join up external communications

HR and DEI teams need to have a clear rationale and narrative for supporting working parents which is then clearly communicated via their website. Many firms' websites focus on promoting services and appear not to make the link between supporting working parents and diversity.

3 Communicate your support as part of your employer brand

We would be surprised if many employers that ranked lower on the Fog Index don't have highly competitive propositions for parents. Identify channels and develop a communication plan to promote these to internal and external stakeholders. Above all, take control of the message. Don't leave employees to rely on hearsay.

4 Include details of parental polices on your website

Generic and unspecific statements such as 'generous maternity package' leave applicants none the wiser as to what's on offer. Many 'visible' ranking employers would jump to 'highly visible' simply by including specifics such as pay and duration of ShPL, maternity or paternity leave.

5 Feature employee insight

Your employees are the best advocates of your policies. All Beacon websites include vlogs, blogs or podcasts of working parents sharing how the firm helps them to manage work and care responsibilities. Be sure to show how you support each phase of parenthood, from helping new parents make the transition to working parents to supporting teenagers through exams and every stage in between.

6 Demonstrate a supportive culture

The most generous parental policies will fall flat if parents fear that career or pay will be penalised if they take them up. This is particularly true for men and ShPL. Trail blaze stories of men that have taken ShPL, extended paternity leave, and those in senior positions who work flexibly. Talk openly about the impact on career progress and pay. State that you are happy to discuss flexible working on all recruitment literature.

7 Collaborate within and outside your industry

There are several industryspecific as well as crossindustry campaigns that provide the opportunity for competitor organisations to coalesce around diversity issues, share learning and strengthen the sector's reputation for diversity. Ask customers and clients what their expectations are in terms of your approach to gender diversity at all levels including leadership. Select a campaign or charter that best aligns with your organisation's strategic objectives, including criteria around support for working parents.

8 Get external validation

Enter awards such as the Times top 50 employers for gender equality. The entry process is a great learning exercise to understand how effective your support is and benchmark against other employers. If you make the list, be sure to publicise your success by communicating which initiative(s) won the award and how employees have benefited from them.

9 What do the optics say?

Take a look at the visuals you use on your website. Are working parents visible? Are working mums and dads in senior positions visible?

10 Make sure your data backs up the optics

We could not find a single example of an employer that talks explicitly about tracking the pay and progress of flexible workers. Talented applicants will use employers' published gender pay gap reports to gauge whether the optics reflect reality.



WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO TO STRENGTHEN THEIR SUPPORT FOR WORKING FAMILIES

How effective is the support you currently offer?

USE THE CHECKLIST TO UNDERSTAND YOUR CURRENT POSITION:

Check you have a full understanding of the needs of working parents at each stage of parenthood

Talk to your employees with dependents aged 0-18. Identify the challenges and support a parent might need from early years through to exams.

Review the support you currently offer: what works, what doesn't?

As a starting point, you may find it helpful to ask:

What is our take up of ShPL? Do we know why this is and what do we need to do to increase take up?
What percentage of women return to work after their first/second child?
Do we conduct exit interviews with those women who don't return after maternity leave? Do we keep track of that data?
What happens to women's careers when they return to work especially after the second child? Are they returning to the same career path or stepping off the career track? Are their careers flatlining? Are they moving out of "gateway" roles? Is this being tracked?

Do we track the gender divide of our flexible and hybrid work- ers? Do we track their pay and progress? What does the data tell us about pay and progression? How can we provide flexible working opportunities for all employees?
Do we listen to dads and include them equally in conversations around parenting policy and practice? Do we understand the barriers that prevent them from sharing parental leave or care equally with their partner? What support would help them do so?
Do men feel comfortable asking for flexible/PT working arrange- ments to share childcare more equally with their partner?
Does the support we offer parents mirror their needs in real life? The flexibility that a parent with an infant may need is different to that of an employee with children at secondary school.
Do we provide a supportive culture for working parents from board level to line managers and among co-workers?
Do colleagues consider parents' childcare and school schedule arrangements before organising a meeting or event?
What does our website tell an external applicant about our attitude towards working parents?
Do our external communications feature parents who work flexible hours to convey a family-friendly culture?
Use this data to form a cohesive approach to attract, retain and develop working parents
A Strategy Guide for Supporting and Retaining Working Parents

POLICY, PRACTICE AND COMMUNICATION

Check out the websites of Beacon ranking employers.

Most have a section that speaks directly to working parents.

Review performance related earnings to ensure that parents aren't penalised for taking an extended period of parental leave.

Explore how the following benefits might support your employees:

Shared Parental Leave with enhanced pay for dads

Organisations that increased parental leave to 12 or 16 weeks for the non-primary leaver on full or near full pay have seen increased take-up by men ^[16]. Consider making this your standard offer so that men must make an active choice to turn it down. Behavioural nudges like this help to increase uptake as well as publicising details of your policy with case studies of dads that take it up.

Parental Transition Coaching to help parents

Feature this benefit that helps parents navigate their careers successfully while becoming new parents and to challenge some couples' self-limiting assumptions e.g. the tendency to notionally deduct the cost of childcare from the mother's salary rather than seeing it as a joint family cost. Emphasise that line managers are also offered coaching when their employees are about to become parents. This gets across that your company can see the need for cultural change towards a more flexible workplace and that it is not about 'fixing the women.'

Check out Work, Family & You – an open resource area to help support working parents, carers and managers.

Flexible and hybrid working

Monitor the impact of flex and WFH on pay and promotion - be hypervigilant to promotion decisions that overlook talented parents that work flexibly or from home more of ten than peers that work in the office. And set, communicate and monitor boundaries around downtime – risk of burnout maybe more of a problem for high-salaried professionals that wfh or within a "flex for all" culture.

A career development path that enables potential senior leaders to step on and off the career ladder

Not wanting to 'have it all and at the same time' is a valid choice for some parents. Ensure that your talent management processes reflect the changing shape of careers today and are not still representative of a previous paradigm where men worked, and women stayed at home to look after the children. Ensure due recognition is given to the increasing number of dual career couples and sole and lone parents.

Address structural issues

The result of benchmarking and reflection will be a realisation that some issues are about how people are supported while others are about the way your organisation works.

Scrutinise talent management practices to identify overlooked talent and promotion decisions that promote men and women that demonstrate the same high level of performance at the same rate.

Until organisations become more family-friendly, they will not be able to balance gender balance sustainably. This level of deep, systemic change will take time but new and changed working practices over the pandemic have accelerated thinking about work design and flexibility.

Raise awareness

Build a more inclusive and equitable business for everyone

Promote a shared understanding across your organisation that gender balance is a business-critical issue. For a business to meet client and consumer expectations for gender-balanced teams, retain talented staff and have a credible reputation for gender diversity, it must be family friendly.

Keep up the good work lobbying the government

Quality, affordable childcare is so much more than minding a child to enable its parents to work. The impact of quality care on a child's emotional, social and cognitive development can be tracked all the way through Key Stage 1. Maintain pressure on government to listen to Early Years experts rather than simply thinking about children as numbers on a spreadsheet.

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About ECC

ECC has over 30 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.

Our ECC coaches are equipped with the gender intelligence required to help leaders lead more inclusively.

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

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