



*Championing better
work and working lives*

Women and Work APPG call for evidence on 2020 Programme of Work

Submission to the Women and Work APPG

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

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Background

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 155,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Public policy at the CIPD draws on our extensive research and thought leadership, practical advice and guidance, along with the experience and expertise of our diverse membership, to inform and shape debate, government policy and legislation for the benefit of employees and employers, to improve best practice in the workplace, to promote high standards of work and to represent the interests of our members at the highest level.

Our response

Future of the workplace

Flexible working

With its many benefits, we believe flexible working should be the norm - not the exception - for UK workers, and central to the creation of inclusive and productive workplaces. True flexible working can boost job satisfaction and commitment, support diversity, inclusion and wellbeing and help organisations attract and retain talent. In the context of a global pandemic, inclusive flexible working remains as relevant as ever for both employers and policymakers.

[CIPD survey findings](#) on the impact of the pandemic on flexible working reveal that the number of staff working from home in the future is expected to double in comparison to pre-pandemic levels. More employers, where relevant to their industries and roles, are likely to adopt a hybrid mixture of home & workplace working. However, employers need to avoid creating a two-tiered workforce - those present & visible in the office and those who work at home/ remotely through necessity or choice. And how about those that aren't able to work from home? CIPD research suggests just a third (33%) of employers say they plan to introduce new forms of flexible working or increase existing uptake, once lockdown restrictions end. There is also an inclusion risk as the gap is set to grow between home working and other employees who have to go to the physical workspace and have little flexibility.

For all of these reasons, we are calling on the Government to make the right to request flexible working a day-one right for all employees. And to strengthen the business reasons so it is more difficult to reject requests. Currently, employees must have worked for the same employer for at least 26 weeks to be eligible for flexible

working. Making the right to request flexible working a day 1 right, would support the uptake of a wider range of flexible working options, beyond home working and offer greater choice and fairness for all. We are expecting the Government to consult on making flexible working the default and would urge them to launch this as soon as they can.

Support for working parents and carers

We believe the provision of affordable childcare and the reform of parental leave policies will help support greater gender equality in the workplace.

In the CIPD's [Manifesto for Work 2020](#), we call on the Government to critically review and reform parental leave policies (including paternity and shared parental leave and pay) to deliver more balance and choice over the distribution of caring responsibilities and better reflect the changing nature of modern families.

In our response to the Government's consultation - [Good work plan: proposals to support families – parental leave and pay](#) we suggest, amongst other recommendations, the Government should prioritise reform of paternity leave and pay and the current shared parental leave scheme to maximise father's involvement in childcare, help support the participation rate of women with young children at work, help to reduce the gender pay gap and provide flexibility to working parents.

In [our Manifesto for Work 2020](#), we also call on the Government to provide affordable childcare from the end of maternity leave to enable women to return to work more quickly if they choose to and that working carers should be supported through the provision of one week (five days) statutory paid carers' leave.

As we know women workers are also more likely to have caring responsibilities, a trend also backed up by our findings – for example, 22% of women said their caring responsibilities had changed because of COVID-19 (for example, due to school closures or caring for another dependent) compared with 14% of men. Further, 14% of female survey respondents said they provide help, support or care for an adult relative living outside their household compared with 8% of their male counterparts.

Career progression

There has been a renewed focus on gender diversity over the last few years with the introduction of mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting. Together with [research](#) that shows businesses with gender-diverse boards perform better and those with a lack of gender diversity in senior roles perform worse.

The CIPD report, [Gender diversity in the boardroom: Reach for the top](#), found that the majority of respondents (89%) agreed that gender-diverse boards are more effective. Whilst a large percentage believe gender-diverse boards can improve business performance (68%) and are more innovative and creative (62%).

However, despite the clear benefits of gender diversity in senior roles, our research discovered that the proportion of women decreases with seniority in 67% of organisations surveyed. Worryingly, less than a third (31%) of organisations are doing anything to address the lack of women in senior roles.

The report ranked the approaches taken by organisations to increase gender diversity in order of effectiveness:

1. An open and supportive culture that supports gender diversity.
2. Unbiased recruitment and selection practices to attract diverse talent pools.
3. Good work-life balance policies (for example flexible working) that support female staff with caring responsibilities.
4. Clear career paths and promotional opportunities in middle and senior management roles.
5. Coaching and/or mentoring programmes for women.
6. Female sponsorship/advocacy schemes for women.
7. Women's networks and forums within the organisation.
8. Voluntary targets set by individual organisations.
9. Leadership and other development programmes aimed exclusively at female employees.

Respondents to the survey also mentioned several other measures that have been effective in improving gender diversity:

- Senior leadership commitment to diversity and role-modelling: having a demonstrable commitment to diversity and inclusion and senior role models.
- Training for men and women in gender discrimination and the benefits of inclusion.
- Unbiased HR policies and practices that are monitored and reviewed.

What the research underscores is that any number of approaches to increasing gender diversity can be effective, but there must be a genuine commitment from senior leadership by operating a supportive culture. Building a diverse talent pool and addressing biases is just as important both for meeting the immediate talent needs of organisations and for long-term succession planning. Good work-life balance, clear career paths and promotional opportunities, and coaching and mentoring programmes for women round off the top 5 most effective approaches for improving career progression for women.

Mental health and wellbeing

The COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis is having a disproportionate impact on nations and communities across the globe, and this extends to how the virus is experienced by particular groups, including working women. COVID-19 has intensified both the physical and mental health risks for many people in work. While

the virus has a disproportionate impact according to male sex, [early evidence](#) by Kings College London suggests that women of working age are at greatest risk of developing 'Long COVID'. In general, women were twice as likely to suffer from COVID-19 symptoms that lasted longer than a month, compared with men.

There is also a range of challenges to people's mental health currently such as continuing uncertainty, health anxiety and fear, isolation, loneliness, bereavement, trauma and job insecurity. The CIPD has been regularly surveying employees on their experiences of COVID-19 at work, including how it's affecting aspects of their health and wellbeing as well as their relationship with work.

More women than men say their mental health is worse off as a result of the pandemic – 45% compared with 40%, respectively. A significantly higher proportion of women report feeling anxious about returning to their workplace because of COVID-19 (48%, compared with 38% of male employees).

Research from Warwick Business School and others highlights insightful evidence about the work burden working-class women are carrying due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, more women than men are key workers (June: 54% versus 42%), and female keyworkers are disproportionately working in frontline roles which require face-to-face interaction: in health and social care, this means 40% of women versus 17% of men. In all classes, more women were experiencing psychological distress than were men.

We know from years of research at the CIPD, including our annual [Health and wellbeing survey](#), that good people management plays a fundamental role in supporting people's health and wellbeing. Crucially, managers should be checking in regularly on people's wellbeing, be able to spot any early warning signs of poor mental health and signpost to expert sources of help where needed. Line managers are under considerable pressure in the current climate, and the impact COVID-19 is having on many people means they will be managing a potentially complex mix of personal situations in their teams. This means treating people as individuals and taking into account their personal, as well as work-related, issues. The unequal impact COVID-19 is having on people means managers need to work hard to promote inclusion and support the needs and circumstances of individuals including female employees.

Domestic abuse

One of a number of health and wellbeing concerns relating to the impact of COVID-19 is that incidences of domestic abuse are increasing and that escape routes could be cut off and people may feel isolated from their support network. National Domestic Abuse helpline, run by the charity Refuge, reported a concerning increase in calls and online requests for help since the 2020 lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The continuing restrictions and working from home advice, as well as the economic crisis, will only escalate abuse for many women.

Domestic abuse does not only affect women of course but many more women are affected. All employees who experience abuse should be supported, regardless of sex and the type of abuse. Employers need to think about how support can be maintained as we all work in different ways, and we recently produced [guidance alongside the EHRC](#). An empathetic, non-judgemental approach and flexibility (for example in working hours or concerning work tasks) are two key areas employers should focus on. We welcome the Home Office's domestic abuse campaign, [#YouAreNotAlone](#), but much more needs to be done to raise awareness of domestic abuse and provide effective support in the workplace. Meanwhile, we welcome the Domestic Abuse Bill and wider programme of work, as well as the [review](#) into the employment rights of people experiencing domestic abuse to look at what more can be done to help them in the workplace.

Menstrual wellbeing

In this section of our evidence, we will focus on the CIPD's extensive work on the importance of creating Menopause-friendly workplaces.

Before the pandemic, women over the age of 50 were the fastest-growing segment of the workforce, and most will go through the menopause transition during their working lives. [CIPD research](#) shows that for every ten women experiencing menopausal symptoms, six say it has a negative impact on their work.

With the right support, there's no need for women to press pause on their career during this natural transition. But many women will continue to suffer in silence unless we break the taboo and start talking openly about the menopause at work.

Our recommendations to employers

- **Review existing policies and frameworks** and look for opportunities to specifically highlight menopause issues within these or through a stand-alone policy.
- **Help to break through the silence in your organisation:** if you create a culture where everyone can talk openly about health issues, such as the menopause, women are much more likely to feel confident about asking for the support they need to be effective in their role.
- **Identify reasonable adjustments.** Small adjustments to someone's job or working pattern can help people manage their symptoms and continue to perform well in their role.
- **Enable line managers to support their teams:** Educate managers about the menopause, who it can affect, and how they can support colleagues going through it.

- **Get your senior leadership team on board.** Make support for the menopause a key part of your strategy to attract, retain and develop female talent. Present a persuasive vision for change and a strong case for future-proofing your business.

Our recommendations to policymakers

We launched a [Menopause Manifesto](#), in parliament last year, which is calling on the Government to:

1. Ensure that menopause is referenced as a priority issue in its own public policy agenda on work, diversity and inclusion.
2. Nominate a Menopause Ambassador to represent the interests of women experiencing menopause transition across government departments.
3. Support an employee-led campaign to raise awareness of the menopause as a workplace issue.

Financial wellbeing

Historically, employers have been reticent about discussing money issues with staff in the workplace. However, over the past few years, there has become less stigma associated with the M-word. In part, this has been driven by a realisation that employee financial worries can have a negative impact on their performance. [CIPD research in 2017](#) found 25% of employees reporting that money worries had reduced their ability to do their job.

CIPD research focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace suggests that percentage might have increased, especially for women. Women are more likely to report a fall in financial security than men (38% v 31% respectively). Similarly, those who had seen a change in their caring responsibilities (44%) are more likely to report a fall compared to those reporting no change (32%).

A range of findings show the disproportionate effect the pandemic and accompanying economic crisis is having on many working women. This clearly adversely affects the financial wellbeing of women: for example, 22% of female employees said it was likely they could lose their job over the next 12 months compared with 17% of men, and more women than men say they are receiving lower pay than normal as a result of COVID-19 (22% versus 17%).

The CIPD's 2020 reward management survey report (due out in February 2021) finds COVID-19 has prompted 11%, 11% of employers surveyed to introduce a financial wellbeing policy in response. In addition, 42% had or were planning to explore the impact of the pandemic and economic crisis on their employees' financial situation.

Employers talking to staff about financial issues in a non-judgemental way about their worries and concerns is something the CIPD believes can help. Organisations



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can use the feedback to respond with in-house financial awareness programmes and/or point staff to external sources of information.

In addition, CIPD research finds that two important elements of financial wellbeing are being paid enough and being paid fairly. In theory, paying people should not cost anything. However, many employers are not starting from scratch and will probably have legacy issues to address first, which may have budget implications. However, once these have been addressed, people are more likely to be motivated if they believe that their efforts are being recognised fairly.

Paying a living wage will have a financial impact, but the CIPD's 2020 Reward Management survey finds many advantages reported by accredited Living Wage employers, which should help reduce it. In addition, job, work and organisational redesign give employers the opportunity to improve productivity and so reduce the cost of wage increases.