

# The Motherhood Reward

How to attract and retain working mothers

# EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

November 2024



Based on The Female Lead & Peanut's research:  
FROM LABOUR WARD TO LABOUR FORCE 2024

# Introduction

Supporting mothers as they return to work is not just socially responsible, but also a smart business strategy. Many companies now prioritise gender balance in their hiring practices so supporting returning mothers could potentially affect half of your employees. After 10 to 15 years in the workforce - typically when women are considering starting a family - they become invaluable assets to the business and strong candidates for promotion. Losing and replacing this talent can be costly and time-consuming.

**The Female Lead** presents the case for The Motherhood Reward rather than the 'motherhood penalty' (the name given to the economic disadvantages mothers face in the workforce, including reduced earnings, limited promotion opportunities, and increased discrimination). No one intentionally alienates returning mothers but, as our study reveals, the reality of 'back to work' is often difficult and unsupported, which leads to resignation.

Our toolkit contains information and guidance to ensure returning mothers in your workforce are supported and thus more often retained as loyal, engaged employees.

Included in this toolkit:

- The cost to business when returning mothers are not supported
- The unique skills required for motherhood and how they translate to business needs
- Fresh and groundbreaking data from The Female Lead's research report: From Labour Ward to Labour Force, which focuses on what returning mothers need to stay in work
- Guides for communicating and engaging with mothers in your workforce at key moments
- An actionable timeline for implementing small business changes leading to long-term beneficial results for employer and employee

# The challenge

## The cost to business if returning mothers are not supported

**A staggering 47% of returning mothers who aren't satisfied with the support from their employer will leave their job within a year.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

Imagine you have 100 employees, with 40 women. Of these 40 women, 38 are between the ages of 25 and 44, and 4 out of 5 (or 30 women) will likely have children. If 47% of these women leave your business due to lack of support, that's 15 women lost from your workforce.

Recruitment, onboarding, and training costs in the UK can range from £5,000 to £10,000 per employee, depending on the industry and role [CIPD]. Losing 15 working mothers could cost your business between £75,000 and £150,000. And that's not factoring in the additional costs of business disruption, loss of corporate knowledge, and the shrinking pool of candidates for senior roles, which only increases the overall financial impact.

And the cost increases significantly for mid-senior level executives. By the time a working woman becomes a mother, she has often built a decade of experience and working knowledge. Losing this is devastating for a business both culturally and financially.

For example: a mid-senior level executive has an annual salary of £150,000. She may partially dis-engage from front line duties for 6 months of her pregnancy (especially if she is planning not to return to work). A disengaged employee costs their organisation around a fifth of their annual salary [People Management]. Hiring and onboarding her replacement or maternity cover can cost 20% of her salary (£30,000) and will also take up to 6 months to find their feet and begin working to their full potential. In addition, the head-hunter fee for her replacement is likely to be in the region of £100,000 to £250,000.

## The benefits of winning back an experienced employee

### For the organisation:

- More engaged and motivated worker
- Faster integration back into the business
- Less attrition, longer retention
- More balanced structure between the sexes
- Attracting talent through great role modelling for aspiring women
- Excellent market reputation

### For the employee:

- Increased household income
- Improved standard of living
- Ability to provide for their children
- Regain pride & confidence through financial independence
- Stronger sense of identity and value
- Positive role model for children

### For the economy:

- Boosted economic output
- Enhanced tax revenue
- Reduced public expenditure
- Mitigation of skills shortages
- Improved gender equality in the workforce
- Enhanced consumer spending

# Unlock new skills for your workforce

Becoming a mother often enhances a woman's skill set in ways that extend far beyond parenting. These newly developed abilities can bring immense value to your business.

## The unique skills required for motherhood

### Adaptability and multitasking

Managing family life, especially with young children, requires excellent time management, multitasking, and problem-solving skills. Mothers returning to work often bring a level of resilience and adaptability that can be valuable in a professional setting.

### Enhanced empathy and communication

Parenting can improve emotional intelligence, patience, and empathy - skills that are highly transferable to roles requiring teamwork, customer service, or leadership. Mothers often return with heightened listening skills and a greater ability to understand different perspectives, fostering a collaborative and inclusive work environment.

### Organisational and planning skills

Running a household while raising children often involves complex scheduling, prioritising, and resource management. These skills translate well to project management, operations, and roles requiring strong organisational abilities.

### Motivated and committed

Many mothers returning to the workforce are eager to re-establish their professional identities and may bring a renewed sense of purpose and dedication. They often feel more focused and committed to contributing meaningfully to the workplace, which can enhance team morale and productivity.

### Fresh perspective and creativity

Time away from a particular role or industry can provide new insights and a fresh perspective. Mothers returning to work often approach challenges differently, offering creative solutions and innovative ideas that can benefit teams and organisations.

### Life experience and maturity

Balancing family responsibilities brings maturity and a level of experience that can strengthen leadership qualities. Mothers are often more grounded and dependable, and these traits can inspire others and add stability to the team.

### Loyalty and retention

When employers support mothers transitioning back to work, it fosters loyalty. Employees who feel valued are more likely to stay with the company long-term, helping to reduce turnover costs and retain institutional knowledge.

### Networking and community connections

During their time away, many mothers build extensive networks within their communities. This can be an asset for roles involving community relations, outreach, or networking, bringing new contacts and potential clients to the organisation.

## **By celebrating the skills acquired during motherhood, your business can:**

- Unlock hidden talents
- Attract and retain top talent
- Enhance employee loyalty
- Drive productivity, boost morale, and promote a positive company culture
- Demonstrate the company's commitment to diversity, work-life balance, and employee development

# Integrating flexibility into your culture is the number one thing you can do to retain working mothers

**The number one reason women changed employers was for more flexibility with a new employer (24%).**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

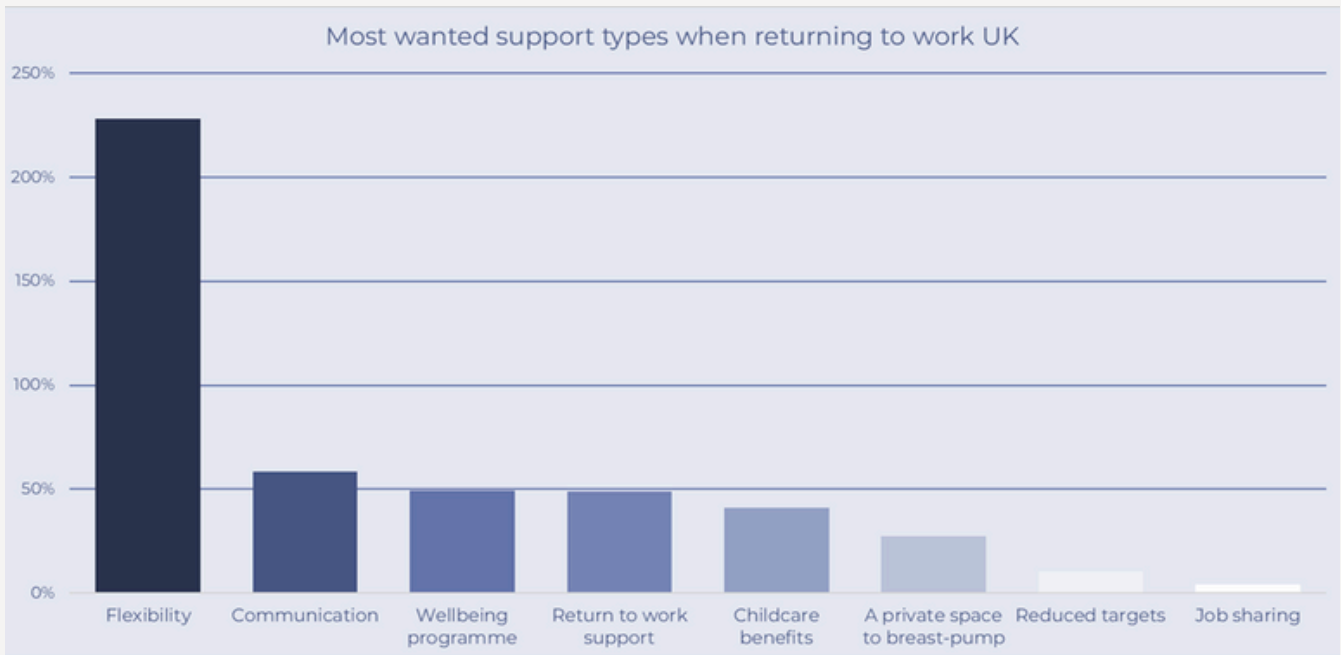
Flexibility is essential for mothers and families, as it allows them to manage the demands of nursery and school schedules, including varying drop-off and pick-up times. Nursery places are in demand and the parents/mother often has few options on available caring time. Hence, the parents/mother needs some flexibility when returning to work. Since COVID, hybrid working has been promoted as a solution for working parents, but with many businesses now mandating specific office hours and days, flexible working has become more rigid and less adaptable.

For returning mothers and their families, true flexibility is critical to accommodate unexpected events like illness or changes in daycare. These challenges are often unpredictable, requiring an adaptable approach that enables parents to respond as needs arise.

**When asked to choose one benefit their employer could offer over all others, one third of mothers chose: make flexible working standard practice.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

We asked our UK panel of working mothers what they wanted most from their employer when returning to work after having a child and the number one request was for more flexibility. This included flexibility around caring responsibilities, flexible hours, hybrid working and part-time working.



The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

**Parents who are unable to manage the increased complexities of parenting and working at their organisation will leave. History dictates that the long-term impact on women will be most significant, with nearly 30% of mothers reducing their working hours in the UK due to childcare, compared with less than 5% of men.**

Mercer



## How to make flexible working 'work'

- 1** Assess business needs and job roles  
Evaluate tasks and roles to determine suitability for flexibility.  
Involve team leaders and employees to understand any role-specific requirements and agree on flexibility parameters that ensure continuity of service.
- 2** Define flexible work options  
Offer a range of flexibility models, such as remote work, flexible start and end times, compressed work weeks, core hours and part-time arrangements. Each employee's needs will be different and so a one-size-fits all approach doesn't always work. Make these easily accessible and ensure employees have understood the options available to them before going on maternity leave.
- 3** Develop a clear policy  
Create a flexible working policy that outlines eligibility, options, expectations, and the approval process. Be transparent about how flexibility aligns with business objectives and employee well-being. For an example policy template for flexible working see ACAS.
- 4** Reinforce a results-oriented culture  
Shift focus to output and achievements rather than hours worked. Encourage teams to set clear goals and priorities, emphasising accountability over time adherence. Recognise and reward productivity and contributions, regardless of where and when work is completed.
- 5** Train managers on flexible work management  
Equip managers with training on managing remote or flexible teams, focusing on performance-based assessments, trust-building, and maintaining team cohesion. Encourage open communication about challenges and successes to address issues early and maintain flexibility without reducing output.

**Only 33% of organisations train managers to support employees through parental leave and a flexible return-to-work.**

- 6** Measure and adjust  
Gather employee feedback and adapt policies as needed to address changing needs or challenges that arise.
- 7** Maintain flexibility as an ongoing policy  
Keep flexible working arrangements under ongoing review to ensure alignment with evolving business and employee needs. Adjust policies as necessary, ensuring flexibility remains a tool that benefits both the business and employees.

**Employers who offer their teams flexible working could see a gain for their business worth up to 20% of their annual payroll costs.**

The Prince's Responsible Business Network

## **Flexible working for returning mothers on an individual basis**

Addressing the need for flexible work arrangements should be done through an informal meeting before an employee goes off on maternity leave, even if the employee isn't yet sure what they will need. This will begin to pave the way for efficiency later on. Providing a template of a flexible work request can also ease returning mothers' anxieties when it comes to asking for what they need.

### **Positive question examples to ask about flexible working\***

(from Jessica Chivers: The Talent Keeper Specialists)\*

"Have you thought much about any flexible working requests you might like to make?"

"What are your thoughts about coming back to the same hours or different ones?"

"What flexibility is there around you being involved in work activities outside agreed hours?"

"How much notice would I need to give you for you to be able to be involved?"

# Communication is key (and free)

Our evidence shows that communication, which is free and relatively easy to offer, applied in the right way, is more important to returning mothers than childcare provision, which is comparatively costly and often difficult to implement.

**When asked what returning mothers wanted most from their employer, 46% simply wanted to be asked what support they needed**

**vs 41% of women who wanted childcare provision.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

Most employers understand the vital importance of communicating with employees throughout the maternity process, but sometimes struggle with broaching these conversations.

## Key communication moments and how to handle them\*

Key moment	Positive action	Examples of what to ask / say
Handover / preparation for leave	Have a wrap-up conversation over lunch or coffee to establish communication preferences.	<i>How would you prefer me to stay in touch (phone, e-mail, text message) and how much contact?</i>  <i>What, if anything, would you like to be kept up to date on whilst you're away?</i>
	Encourage contact with recent maternity returners who may have hints and tips for your maternity leaver and be another source of support to ease the transition when she returns.	<i>Would you like me to put you in touch with someone who has recently returned from maternity leave? They may have some helpful advice.</i>

Key moment	Positive action	Examples of what to ask / say
During maternity leave	Send any updates on company changes as per the agreed method of communication if this is something the maternity leaver has requested to be kept up to date on. Underline that it's acceptable not to respond to your contact.	<i>I wanted to let you know in advance about a recent change to the company so that you're informed and prepared when you return.</i>
	Send invitations as per the agreed method of communication, only if your employee has said she's interested in them i.e. away days, team lunches. Again, underline that you know her head may well be in another space entirely and it's acceptable not to respond to your contact.	<i>Make invitations as per agreed method of communication (phone, e-mail, text) and position as: It would be great to see you and have you involved even if for just part of it.</i>
	Share praise or recognition whilst she is away for things she has contributed to – client feedback, internal stakeholder comments, a successful launch of a process/initiative she was involved in etc.	<i>Give feedback via the agreed method of communication and tie-in with conversations inviting her to participate in team events.</i>
	Highlight KIT days as a way to help ease her transition back into the workplace and make suggestions on what could happen on those occasions.	<i>Have you considered Keeping in Touch (KIT) days?  Other maternity leavers say KIT days helped them in their transition back.</i>

## **The benefits of peer support and mentorship - a missed opportunity for connection**

Support in the form of communication doesn't have to fall solely onto the employer - peers and colleagues can also support returning mothers if they are sufficiently enabled.

**30% of our UK panel said that having connections to a community of other parents was important to them feeling supported in their return to work.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

### **Positive actions to take to facilitate peer support**

Create a buddy program by assigning mentors or peer buddies (who have experienced returning to work as a mother) to guide and support their transition back to work.

Create or encourage participation in mothers group where experiences can be shared and discussed without fear of offending others who have elected to be or found themselves, childfree/childless.

**28% of returning mothers felt most supported by their colleagues compared to their employer (14%)**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

# Innovate your parental leave policies

One fifth (21%) of our panel said encouraging men to take more parental leave was the most impactful thing employers can do for mothers at work.

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

## Positive actions to innovate parental leave policies\*

### Paternity / parental leave

Women are often seen as the primary caregivers, especially in the early years of a child's life, but balancing work and family life is a challenge that affects the entire household, regardless of its structure. Encouraging an equal balance between the sexes through parental leave is the most practical way to stop the woman bearing all the pressure and for fathers to share caregiving responsibilities.

Rob Barlow is a Director in the London Health Team at Edelman and shares how Edelman's progressive parental leave policy allowed him to bond with his child and support his partner:



I was lucky enough to benefit from Edelman's more progressive view on parenthood (I'm also the second new father in my team to take parental leave in 2022). By making their parental leave policies gender-agnostic several years ago, it enables all employees to take up to five months of parental leave on full pay, subject to the necessary legal eligibility criteria.

In the end I chose 12 weeks, which was the right length of time for our family. While sadly neither the children's book I was planning to write nor the garden shed I was hoping to build came to fruition, it did allow me to bond with my daughter, and support my wife, in a way that would have been impossible otherwise.



Paternity leave reduces the gender wage gap within households by increasing mothers' wages in the short term and helping to increase total household financial well-being in the long term [McKinsey].

### Extended maternity leave

Allow flexibility for mothers to extend their leave as needed beyond the mandated period. These can be classified as career breaks. However, they are even more likely to require a re-introduction programme to help returners navigate what will inevitably be a very different organisation and team of colleagues.

**77% of returning mothers in the UK took between 6-12 months of maternity leave and 85% returned to work for financial reasons.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024



# Ease the transition

**22% of returning mothers in the UK wanted a phased return from their employer.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

## Positive actions to take to ease the transition

### Phased returns

Offering a phased return-to-work option where mothers can slowly ramp up their hours and responsibilities can be effective. These can be classified as settling in periods. Phased returns help new mothers readjust to working life, rebuild confidence and refresh their skills.

### Re-entry training

Offer refresher courses, mentorship, or retraining programs to help mothers regain their confidence and skills after a career break.

### Leadership development

Support their career growth by offering leadership programs or workshops aimed at re-entering the workforce.

## How to communicate to ease the transition\*

Key moment	Positive action	Examples of what to ask / say
Before maternity leave	Suggest a phased return to ease the transition before an employee leaves for her maternity leave. For example, if she is returning full-time, suggest a three-day week for the first fortnight and a four-day week for the second fortnight (Accrued holiday entitlement may make this simple to do in terms of salary admin).	<p><i>What do you think about a phased return?</i></p> <p><i>What sort of working pattern in the first few weeks would help you make the smoothest transition?</i></p>



Key moment	Positive action	Examples of what to ask / say
During maternity leave or during KIT days if applicable	Arrange a 1–2-week handover period from the maternity cover to ensure your maternity returner is fully briefed on what's happened in her absence, the current agenda and what's coming next.	<i>I thought it would be useful for your cover to stay on for a week's handover period to help you feel comfortable about what's happened in your role and what's coming.</i>
On return or during KIT days if applicable	Talk about this being a period of transition. Be explicit about how your expectations differ at this time from the quality and quantity of output she delivered before she went on maternity leave.	<i>Here are my thoughts on what a successful first month would look like – how does that tally with what you were thinking?</i>
On return	Watch out for exhaustion and encourage her to leave early in the first few weeks by acknowledging the mental demands of effectively being a new starter on top of coping with broken nights' sleep.	<i>Transitions can be exhausting – why not leave at 4pm this week and have a bit of extra time at home with (name of child)?</i>
	Ask about life at home and show interest in her child(ren) particularly in the first month when she's experiencing a huge psychological transition. First thing in the morning and before she leaves are good times to turn the conversation to life outside work.	<i>What had (name of child) been up to yesterday?</i>  <i>Good night's sleep for all of you last night?</i>  <i>What are you doing this evening?</i>



**I tried to quit but they actually asked what was going on, so I told them the truth, and amazingly they did everything they could to help me come back to the workforce. I had a very specific slow, phased return to work with the help of my employer.**

Helen, mother in the UK, from The Female Lead's:  
Labour Ward to Labour Force report



# Adjust performance and feedback measures



**My job says they are good with being flexible around childcare needs (illnesses, daycare off days), but then upper management uses it as a way to give me negative marks in performance reviews.**

Amber, mother in the UK, from The Female Lead's:  
Labour Ward to Labour Force report



It can be helpful for both you and your returning team member to think of her in many ways as a new starter. Even women who have occupied very senior roles talk about losing the language of business and feeling 'clunky' or awkward to begin with. One of the most helpful things you can do as a line manager is give your returner space just to 'absorb' the environment (by listening and being present in meetings for example without an expectation she will contribute). You may think you are signalling belief in her capability by thrusting a large project her way as soon as she returns, however this is likely to feel overwhelming as well as stall her progress.\*

## Positive actions to take around performance and feedback

Ensure performance reviews are non-punitive

Avoid penalising mothers for taking maternity leave or needing flexible schedules, ensuring their performance reviews reflect their contributions fairly.

**Many managers will currently score an absent mother returning to work as an 'underperformer' in a career review (simply because she has been away on maternity leave).**

This will lead the employee to disengage and feel demotivated during the return to work, especially if they have always been rated as a 'good' or 'outstanding' employee.



**I want my employer to recognise the rapid transitions around hormonal changes, sleep pattern variations and that return to ‘usual’ performance might take a while!**

Alexandra, mother in the UK



### Create a 90 day return plan

During a Keeping-in-Touch Day (KIT Day) or within a few days of returning, jointly conceiving a 90 day plan should be a priority. A plan that is broken down into appropriate milestones and includes scope for some early quick wins does three important things:

- 1) Helps you as a line manager make implicit expectations explicit.
- 2) Gives your returner’s confidence a massive boost.
- 3) Allows ongoing gauging of her own performance.

## How to communicate around performance and feedback\*

Key moment	Positive action	Examples of what to ask / say
In the first meeting you have to discuss her return (this may be a KIT Day)	Remind your employee of professional successes, evidence of her strengths in action and positive feedback on her performance and approach at work.	<p><i>Before you went on maternity leave you did a great piece of work...</i></p> <p><i>The key strengths I've seen you demonstrate are... therefore one of the first things I would like you to work on when you return is...</i></p>
On return	Set up weekly 1:1s – which may be more than either of you are used to. It’s likely this will be helpful in the beginning. Let her be the one to reduce the amount of contact you have. Ideally each 1:1 will be a short meeting (around 45 minutes) focused on progress against a 90-day plan as well as touching on life outside work.	<p><i>I've seen frequent 1:1s make a significant difference to how well a person settles back into their role after a break. Let's put one in for the next four weeks to catch up on how you're doing – after that you can let me know what would work for you.</i></p>

# Promote career progression

**Companies with more gender diversity in executive teams were 25% more likely to be profitable.**

McKinsey

In the early days of her return a woman is likely to be focused on getting back to feeling competent in the role she’s in, rather than focusing on what her next career step might be. However, this can change very quickly and when your team member talks about feeling comfortable, she may appreciate you talking about next challenges or stretch assignments.

## Positive actions to take around promoting career progression\*

Key moment	Positive action	Examples of what to ask / say
3-9 months after return	Ask your returner exactly what they want to achieve, don’t assume you know. Try to help them balance their personal aspirations with the business’s needs.	<i>Now that you’re feeling more settled in your role, would you like to share your aspirations and goals?</i>  <i>How can I help you get there?</i>
	Regularly remind her of her strengths – provide examples of times you’ve seen them in action; suggest new ways she could use them to give her stretch and get closer to the aspirations she has shared.	<i>I noticed you are a natural at X and I wonder what you think about using that skill...</i>
	Keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities that link to your team member’s progression plans and actively encourage her to put herself forward.	<i>There’s going to be a project on X – I think you could provide useful input. Let me introduce you to X who is responsible for setting the team up.</i>
	Be an advocate for your team member – let others know what and how she is delivering for the business and make introductions where it would be useful.	<i>In my team X has proved she’s really strong on... you should talk to her about being involved in...</i>

# Adapt the office environment to suit new mothers

**15% of returning mothers in the UK wanted a private space to breast pump at their place of work.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

In 2024, women shouldn't have to breast pump in the bathroom or in their car. One simple thing an employer can do is create a private space for new mothers to breast pump and allow mothers to use it when needed. A small but inviting room (i.e., not a storage cupboard) with a fridge to store milk would be a much-welcomed addition for returning mothers, which is often easily implemented yet overlooked.

## Consider childcare benefits

**17% of returning mothers in the UK wanted employers to offer on-site childcare or financial support towards childcare.**

The Female Lead: From Labour Ward To Labour Force Report 2024

### The benefits of offering childcare provisions

- Some childcare schemes are cost-neutral for the employer, with savings of around 1.38% of the salary sacrifice amount.
- Employers and employees don't pay tax or national insurance on childcare vouchers.
- Offering childcare can help employers retain and attract new and otherwise unreachable talent.
- Improves employees' work-life balance.
- Reducing financial stress can improve employee performance and productivity.

**Over a third of parents in the UK have had to reduce their working hours or take time off work to take care of their children due to the high costs of childcare.**

Finder

## **Positive actions to take towards offering childcare support**

### On-site childcare

If feasible, provide access to on-site childcare to help mothers stay close to their children during the day.

### Childcare subsidies or discounts

Offer financial support for nurseries or daycare, either through subsidies or discounts with partner childcare providers.

### Backup childcare services

Provide access to emergency childcare services when regular arrangements fall through.

### Help to identify resources/options for affordable local childcare

Collect information from previous employees who have been through the journey through surveys or discussions. This information could also be shared in network/ peer support groups.

# Employer checklist for returning mothers\*

Key moment	Action	✓
Before M/L	Establish communication preferences (phone, email etc.) and the level of contact she would like whilst on maternity leave and adhere to this. Including what she wants to be kept up to date with (i.e., company changes)	
	Highlight Keep in Touch (KIT) days and discuss uses for these	
	Raise flexible working requests – thoughts at this stage? Understand this might change during maternity or even after returning to work	
	Discuss return to work and a phased approach - agree in advance if appropriate but stay flexible.	
Ongoing	Communications around company changes - if they have requested to be kept up to date about this.	
	Invitations to team events with zero pressure to respond or attend	
Circa 3 months before return	Discuss dates for KIT days and share any positive feedback	
KIT Days	Talk about flexible working requests and make official, if applicable	
	Discuss phased return options and make it official, if applicable	
	Explore and prepare with them what their first day / week will involve with	
KIT Day or first day back	Create a 90-day plan with them	
2 weeks before returning	Arrange for technology (laptop, email account, PC etc.) to be up and running and desk space for both your returner and her cover	
First day back	Create a positive start to your returning mother's first day back – be there to welcome her	
	Discuss and define what a 'successful' first week and month looks like (based on the 90-day plan). Remind her of successes and personal accomplishments.	
	Schedule weekly 45-60 minute 1:1s for the month ahead	
Ongoing	Review flexible work arrangements to see if any changes need to be made	
3-9 months after return	Have a career progression conversation when your returning mother is indicating she's feeling competent in role and looking for stretch	

# Achieve best practice

## A 12 month timeline

Time	Milestone & goal	Actions
Months 1-3	Foundation & policy development  Establish supportive policies, secure leadership commitment, and assess employee needs	Leadership buy-in: Share the From Labour Ward to Labour Force research, emphasising the business case for supporting returning mothers, including potential cost savings from reduced turnover.
		Initial needs assessment: Survey working mothers to understand initial needs for flexibility, mentorship, and support. Use this data to tailor support programs and set benchmarks for success.
		Develop parental policies: Update and develop policies to support extended leave options, shared parental leave and phased returns as suggested in the toolkit. Highlight these changes to all employees to foster awareness and inclusivity.
		Scope out flexibility options: Such as part-time, hybrid, and flexible hours. Provide managers with a toolkit and examples for managing flexible work effectively.
		Provide guidance on KIT days: Develop and provide guidance to leadership on how KIT days can be utilised to ease transition back.
Months 4-6	Initial implementation & staff training  Implement initial policies, train managers, and establish support systems	Launch the return-to-work program: Begin phased return options where mothers can ramp up hours gradually. Include options such as a 3-day week for the first few weeks, as suggested in the toolkit.
		Manager training on flexibility & support: Provide training on empathetic management, performance evaluation adjustments, and maintaining open communication with returning mothers.
		Establish mentorship/buddy program: Pair returning mothers with mentors who have experience balancing work and family life. This fosters peer support and reduces isolation.
		Provide mental health resources: Promote available mental health resources and set up regular check-ins with managers to address wellbeing, as noted in the toolkit's emphasis on empathy and open dialogue



Time	Milestone & goal	Actions
Months 4-6	Initial implementation & staff training	Collect initial feedback: Gather feedback from early participants on the return-to-work program. Use this information to make adjustments, ensuring that returning mothers feel supported.
	Implement initial policies, train managers, and establish support systems	Promote success stories: Share positive testimonials from returning mothers, emphasising their re-entry experience and flexibility options. This builds a positive culture and helps normalise flexible working.
Months 7-9	Enhancement & community building	Launch a peer support group: Establish a group for returning mothers to share experiences and support each other, as recommended in the toolkit. Hold monthly meetings, either in person or virtual, for mothers to connect and discuss challenges.
		Formalise phased return as policy: Make phased returns a standard offering for returning mothers. Document the process in a policy guide and share it company-wide.
	Strengthen the support network, establish career development pathways, and celebrate unique skills of returning mothers.	Implement flexible work reviews: Check in quarterly with returning mothers to assess how their flexible schedules are working. Adjust as necessary to balance business needs and personal preferences.
		Celebrate the unique skills of returning mothers: Host a workshop that highlights the skills mothers bring, such as empathy and multitasking, and how these contribute to team success.
		Measure impact: Analyse data on retention, engagement, and feedback from participants. Use these metrics to refine programs and demonstrate the impact to stakeholders.
Months 10-12	Positioning as a market leader	Gather comprehensive data: Review program metrics, including retention rates, employee satisfaction, and manager feedback. Compare these to industry averages to gauge success.
		Adjust based on feedback: Use data and feedback to refine policies on flexible working, phased returns, and peer support.
	Showcase achievements, adapt based on feedback, and publicly commit to supporting returning mothers.	Publicly highlight the motherhood reward: Publish a case study or blog post showcasing your company's commitment to returning mothers. Share testimonials that emphasise flexibility, support, and career development.
		Conduct a year-end program review: Hold a final review meeting with managers and stakeholders to discuss successes and plan for next year's improvements.
		Set next year's goals: Based on outcomes, set ambitious goals for expanding flexibility options, increasing career progression pathways, and enhancing wellbeing support.

# Conclusion

Supporting returning mothers is more than a positive step towards gender equality - it's a strategic business decision that strengthens companies, boosts employee loyalty, and sets the standard for modern, inclusive workplaces.

Mothers re-enter the workforce with invaluable skills sharpened through parenthood: adaptability, resilience, empathy, and unparalleled time-management abilities. These qualities drive innovation, enhance team dynamics, and bring fresh perspectives to leadership. However, without adequate support, companies risk losing these highly skilled employees, which leads to costly recruitment processes and lost institutional knowledge.

The toolkit outlined here provides UK employers with actionable, effective steps to retain and empower returning mothers. From flexible working policies and communication guidelines to mentorship programs and phased return options, these initiatives are designed to create an environment where mothers feel valued, supported, and able to thrive. In an era where flexibility and work-life balance are increasingly prioritised, UK companies that implement these strategies set themselves apart, attracting and retaining top talent while bolstering their reputation as forward-thinking and inclusive employers.

By creating pathways for mothers to thrive in the workplace, we help close the gender pay gap, ensure diverse representation in leadership, and contribute to a more inclusive economy. In doing so, UK companies also support the broader economy, as engaged and empowered working mothers contribute to increased productivity, consumer spending, and tax revenue.

With these measures, your company not only commits to supporting mothers as they return to work but also builds a legacy of equality, empathy, and leadership that will shape the future of work in the UK.

# Let's talk about **The Motherhood Reward** rather than the **'motherhood penalty'.**

Work with The Female Lead to create an event or a programme to engage and inspire your working mothers.



## **With special thanks to:**

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