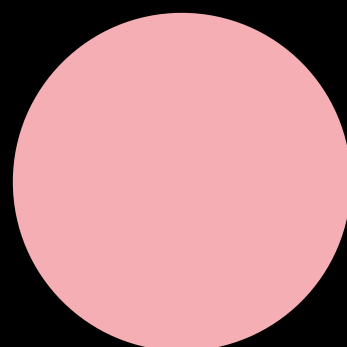
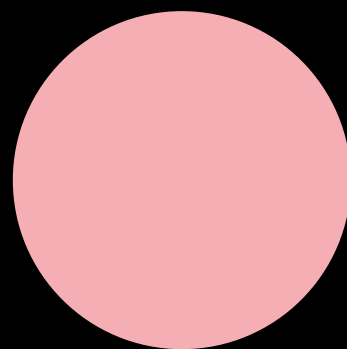


19 December 2023

WWU Employer of Choice Secondary Research



Classified: Private

Findings report by Savanta

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Methodology.....	3
Executive summary	5
Chapter 1: Belonging, meaning and values	7
Chapter 2: Work-life balance and flexibility.....	14
Chapter 3: Development and progression in role	23
Chapter 4: Technology at work.....	28
Chapter 5: The impact of the rising cost of living on employee expectations	33
Appendix: Sources reviewed.....	36

Introduction

Employee expectations across all sectors of the economy have shifted markedly in the last few years. It is not news that the pandemic has significantly and irreversibly changed how people work, and how they expect to work. Gen Z entering the workforce and the rising cost of living have also brought changes in what employees expect from their jobs and from their employers. In short, what people want from their jobs is not the same as it was several years ago.

This new context demands a refresh of employee value propositions, to ensure they are aligned to what current and prospective employees now want and expect. As competition for talent – especially in the utilities sector – gets ever-fiercer, developing and maintaining an up-to-date and compelling offering is key to be an employer of choice.

But this is perhaps understating the challenge. In the utilities sector specifically, another factor is at play. The talent that is needed to progress the sector is younger and has more technical skillsets than previously. Improvements in sensor and communication technologies offer new opportunities for the industry to improve service and responsiveness to service disruption through building Internet of Things (IoT) capabilities, but seizing these opportunities requires having the technical skills within organisations to do so. Additionally, as cyber threats become more sophisticated, so too do the skillsets needed by providers of critical national infrastructure such as WWU to protect systems, services and data.¹

As a result of these new skillsets being needed, organisations such as WWU are not merely competing for talent within its own sector – they are competing *across* sectors, with technology companies and others – for younger, more technical talent that has skillsets which are in high-demand. Given that only 6% of utilities leaders think that they are performing excellently at recruiting for these new skills,² the importance of telling a compelling story to these prospective employees about what WWU can offer them cannot be understated.

Therefore, the need to refresh employee value propositions in the utilities sector is driven by two main categories of change:

1. **Changes in typical employee expectations driven by external events** – such as the pandemic, the rising cost of living, Gen Z entering the workforce in much greater numbers and thereby changing the demographic profile of the labour market.
2. **Changes in the profile of employees that the utilities sector needs**, who have different expectations of their employer.

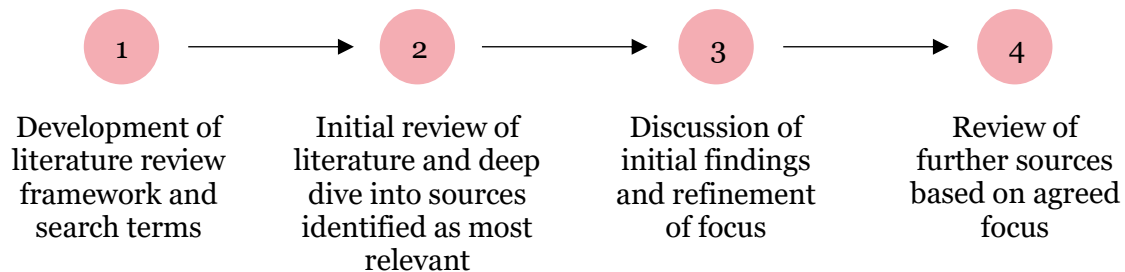
This research forms a key part of WWU’s work to refine its employee value proposition. It explores the present state of employee expectations in a number of different areas, how and why they have shifted in recent years, and makes recommendations on how Wales & West Utilities can effectively respond to these changes to retain and attract talent.

¹ This point is acknowledged in WWU’s own Digitalisation Strategy.

² West Monroe. 2019. *How Utilities Can Win the War for Talent*. Retrieved from <https://www.westmonroe.com/perspectives/signature-research/how-utilities-can-win-the-war-for-talent>

Methodology

The study is grounded in a review of relevant literature, with a four-stage research process followed, as shown by the diagram below.



At **Stage 1**, Savanta developed a framework to catalogue and assess the relevance of literature found, alongside a set of search terms in order to find said literature. This ensured that individual sources consulted were sufficiently recent and relevant to WWU’s specific context,³ and that across the evidence body as a whole, coverage of topic areas and different demographic groups was comprehensive. This framework has been included alongside this report.

The topic areas of focus were shaped in collaboration with WWU, and the main body of this report is organised according to these areas:

1. **Belonging, meaning and values** – including both DEI and ESG expectations, and the extent to which employees expect their organisation to be aligned with their personal values.
2. **Work-life balance and flexibility** – including both expectations around work-life balance and around working environment.⁴
3. **Professional development and role progression** – covering skills and training, clarity of *employer* expectations, and management needs.
4. **Technology in the workplace** – hybrid working has ushered in a greater emphasis on technology at work, and the need to ensure employees are comfortable with this transition brings a new set of considerations for employers.
5. **The rising cost of living and how it has shifted expectations** – this cuts across the other topic areas. Many of the major trends discussed in literature focus on the impact of demographic shifts in the labour market and the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst these are of course key, relatively little has been written about the extent to which the rising cost of living has shifted employee expectations again from the immediate post-pandemic picture. Savanta therefore felt that it was important to

³ The threshold for this relevance-to-context naturally varies by topic area – some findings are specific to the WWU’s industry context, and some are global cross-industry trends. Whether or not a source’s scope is appropriate therefore depends on exactly what it is arguing. Savanta took into account the specific contents of the sources when making these judgements rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

⁴ In the initial findings presented to WWU, these were two separate topics. However, in order to best unpack the extension interrelation between these two topics areas, Savanta has included findings in these areas in one combined section.

consult sources on the rising cost of living to evaluate this, to prevent oversimplification. As Chapter 5 discusses, our view is that the rising cost of living has given rise to a host of new considerations for employees, but there is no evidence to suggest that it has caused a deprioritisation in or departure from any of the priorities discussed in Chapters 1-4. Further primary research would be needed to fully settle this question, however.

Following the development of this framework and topic areas, Savanta commenced with **Stage 2** of the research, which involved using the framework and search terms to compile sources meeting the aforementioned criteria. 31 sources were then shortlisted for an initial literature review.

Savanta presented initial findings to WWU (**Stage 3**), in order to hear initial views and to understand the areas in which further research would be most useful for WWU's specific aims and focusses. It was agreed that Savanta would then conduct a further deep-dive into Topics 1, 2 and 3 – with a further 21 sources reviewed as part of this further work (**Stage 4**). This report summarises the findings of both the initial review and this additional deep dive. 52 sources were reviewed in total, with the full list of sources consulted listed as an appendix.

Executive summary

Belonging, meaning and values

Feelings of ‘belonging’ drive employee satisfaction, and are important for both attracting and retaining talent. Belonging involves three elements:

1. Feeling safe and supported in being who you are (which is closely linked to DEI)
2. Sharing your organisation’s values; and
3. Finding meaning in work and being valued for your contribution.

For Generation Z, employers being properly committed to DEI initiatives contributes to belonging in two ways: feeling safe and supported but also alignment on values. DEI is also non-negotiable for Gen Z, to a much greater extent than for other generations.

Gen Z also expect their employers to have demonstrable commitment to the environment and sustainability, and mental health initiatives. Some sources suggest that younger workers’ strong concern for the environment might be leveraged by utilities organisations to position working in the industry as aligning with their values in a way that competing companies in the ‘tech’ space cannot.

Work-life balance and flexibility

A clear commitment to employee well-being is a crucial factor for being an employer of choice, with a 2023 Benefex study suggesting it is the single biggest factor in assessing a prospective employer for employees worldwide. And this is clearly linked to working conditions – a study from the International SOS Foundation demonstrates the impact of working hours and pressure on employee well-being. In this context, work-life balance is key in both talent attraction and retention.

The pandemic has led to an increased focus work-life balance, but it has also seen a divergence in the way people think about work-life balance. For some, it continues to mean a clear boundary being maintained between work and life. For others, this is no longer preferable in a post-pandemic context – work-life integration has become more important. For WWU to ensure its offering remains compelling, it will have to give employees autonomy in choosing the model that works best for them.

It is also important to recognise the priorities of different groups are not the same. Non-office workers prioritise flexibility in terms of working hours, since their roles do not often allow for flexibility of location. Disabled workers and workers who are caregivers also have different preferences from other groups, and attending to these is important for ensuring an inclusive workplace, as well as one promoting a health work-life balance.

Development and progression in role

In line with the importance of feeling valued at work, employees demand that their long-term development goals are taken into account and are supported by employees in realising their career ambitions – not merely developed to perform well in the specific role they are currently in.

Again, autonomy is a major theme, with literature identifying this as a change from previous attitudes to job roles and upskilling. To cater for these expectations, it is essential to equip line managers to meet these needs, and to show empathy and receptivity to employees’ individual priorities.

Technology at work

The pandemic has led to increased focus on technology in the workplace. The rise of hybrid work models has heightened expectations of the technology that enables them. Increasingly, employees expect workplace technology to be of a quality at least high as the technology they use in their personal lives, with this especially true for Generation Z. Much like sustainability, an emphasis on cutting-edge technology presents an opportunity for the utilities industry to differentiate itself and to attract high-skilled talent, particularly among younger generations.

Upskilling in technology benefits both younger and older employees, contributing to job retention and skill development. However, challenges like the 'always-on' mindset and feedback disparities necessitate strategic communication and a supportive environment. In essence, technology emerges as a dual force—integral to employee satisfaction and a compelling narrative for talent recruitment.

The impact of the rising cost of living on employee expectations

Concerns relating to the rising cost of living are escalating. UK employees note a substantial decline in their ability to comfortably cover expenses, even since last year. However, despite this challenge, there's no evidence of employee expectations shifting away from factors discussed in previous chapters. Autonomy, flexibility, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) remain key priorities. Just 9% believe employers bear primary responsibility for managing living costs.

That said, there is an opportunity for WWU to stand out by addressing financial challenges. WWU can make a positive impact by recognising the exceptional circumstances, taking steps to destigmatise financial discussions, and exploring tangible actions to alleviate financial pressure while emphasising their connection to overall employee wellbeing.

Chapter 1: Belonging, meaning and values

The concept of ‘belonging’ has seen increased attention from employers alike in recent years. As the organisation behind the Great Place to Work certification puts it, “belonging is one of the biggest buzzwords in business today – and it’s about time”.⁵ But it’s not only a focus amongst business leaders – analysis of a large sample of *employee* comments across industries by Workday shows that belonging has become a much more frequent theme in the last few years.⁶

However, it is not merely that belonging is being discussed more often. Research from Deloitte shows that feelings of belonging significantly improve job performance, and employee retention and satisfaction.⁷ Clearly then, belonging is something that WWU will want to drive within the organisation in order to attract and retain talent.

Before discussing how exactly WWU can do this, it is worth unpacking exactly what belonging *means*. Belonging, in a workplace context, is an employee’s sense that they are accepted and valued by their colleagues and organisation. This includes being valued for one’s work, but is broader and deeper than this – it is also about identity and values.

Definitions vary across the literature, but three key facets of belonging recur across these:⁸



This chapter discusses each of these three facets in turn, detailing how and why employee expectations have changed in each area. Examples are given from the literature of how to meet expectations in each area.

Feeling safe and supported being who you are: diversity, equity and inclusion

⁵ Great Place to Work. 2022. *Belonging in the Workplace: What Does It Mean and Why Does It Matter?* Retrieved from <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/belonging-in-the-workplace-what-does-it-mean-and-why-does-it-matter>

⁶ Workday. 2022. *Employee Expectations 2022*. Retrieved from https://forms.workday.com/en-us/reports/employee-expectations-employee-voice/form.html?step=step1_default

⁷ Deloitte. 2021. *Elevating the Workforce Experience: The Belonging Relationship*. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/blog/human-capital-blog/2021/what-is-belonging-in-the-workplace.html>

⁸ This model is Savanta’s, based on the definitions in the literature – it is not taken from one particular source, but a thematic organisation of the definitions found. Many focus on the first part, and accordingly focus on DEI. Others focus on sustainability. But many definitions go well beyond either. For example, Great Place to Work lists 7 features of belonging, all of which fit into these three buckets; and Deloitte defines it as Comfort, Connection and Contribution – which approximately map onto these.

Belonging is not the same as diversity, equity and inclusion – but these are all prerequisites for creating a workplace that all employees can feel a sense of belonging to. Again, it is helpful to start with some definitions:

- **Diversity** refers to who is represented in the workforce. Some examples include gender diversity, age diversity, ethnic diversity and neurodiversity.
- **Equity** refers to fair treatment for all – equitable workplace policies and norms are ones which ensure identity is not related to opportunities or outcomes.
- **Inclusion** refers to the extent to which all employees are embraced by their employer and enabled to make meaningful contributions and have their voices heard. Diversity contributes to this, as underrepresented groups might feel less heard and able to give their views.

For minority groups – whether that is a gender minority, ethnic minority, or any other – feeling safe and supported in being who you are is dependent in part on these concepts. Or as the aforementioned Great Place to Work article puts it:

“Employees who feel treated as an “insider” feel a high level of belonging. This means valuing the various components of an employee’s identity, such as being a parent, being of a particular race or being of a particular sexual orientation. In this sense, belonging is a close cousin to diversity and inclusion.

Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance and belonging is dancing like nobody’s watching, because that’s how free you feel to be yourself.”

Source: Great Place to Work. *Belonging in the Workplace: What Does It Mean and Why Does It Matter?*. Retrieved from <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/belonging-in-the-workplace-what-does-it-mean-and-why-does-it-matter>

So, whilst DEI and belonging are not quite the same, ensuring that DEI-related employee expectations are met is essential for driving this sense of belonging that is so important in attracting and retaining talent.

It is therefore important to understand how employee expectations around DEI have changed in recent years to ensure that WWU is continuing to meet them.

Longitudinal studies from Workday⁹ and Gartner¹⁰ find that employee focus on DEI accelerated in 2020, and argue that the Black Lives Matter and movement of that year catalysed conversation in this area, alongside other movements such as the Me Too movement.

High-profile social movements are not the only factor that has driven an increase in employee focus on DEI. It is also widely argued across the literature that another major driving factor in the increased focus on DEI here is Gen Z becoming a much larger part of the workforce.

⁹ Workday. 2022. *Employee Expectations 2022*. Retrieved from https://forms.workday.com/en-us/reports/employee-expectations-employee-voice/form.html?step=step1_default

¹⁰ Gartner. 2021. *How 2020 Accelerated Conversations on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/how-2020-accelerated-conversations-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

Research from Gallup into the workplace preferences of different generations finds that Gen Z and young millennials are more likely than other generations to identify organisational diversity and inclusivity as priorities in an employer.¹¹ It is not merely that this generation talk about DEI more; they are also more likely to consider it non-negotiable, even if they are not themselves part of minority groups. Or, as the Gallup study puts it:

“Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is not a "nice to have" for this generation; it's an imperative that is core to their personal identities [...] DEI is not just a question of corporate policy. It affects how employees accomplish their daily work. Disrespect breeds distrust, which destroys collaboration and honest communication.”

Source: Gallup. *Things Gen Z and Millennials Expect From Their Workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/336275/things-gen-millennials-expect-workplace.aspx>

There is some nuance to this point. For Gen Z, it is not only that DEI is important for promoting belonging in that it allows minority groups to feeling safe and supported in who they are. For this generation, much more so than others, DEI is *also* important because it is a widely held value – irrespective of personal identity – and a value which Gen Z expect their organisation to share. Returning to the earlier model of belonging, we might therefore say that, for Gen Z, employers being properly committed to DEI initiatives contributes to belonging in *two* ways:



The other main difference between Gen Z and previous generations when it comes to DEI is that they are less likely to be impressed by good intentions. Gartner notes that workers of this generation expect clear and tangible action, and will be vocal if they don't see it:

“Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is not a "nice to have" for this generation; it's an imperative that is core to their personal identities [...] DEI is not just a question of corporate policy. It affects how employees accomplish their daily work. Disrespect breeds distrust, which destroys collaboration and honest communication.”

Source: Gartner. *How 2020 Accelerated Conversations on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/how-2020-accelerated-conversations-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

So, due to social movements and a demographic 'changing of the guard', DEI is increasingly on employees' minds, and there is an increased expectation that employers will account for this. Meeting these expectations is important in and of itself, but also in order to promote a sense of belonging within the organisation. But what does that actually mean in practice for WWU?

¹¹ Gallup. 2021. *Things Gen Z and Millennials Expect From Their Workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/336275/things-gen-millennials-expect-workplace.aspx>

Considerations for WWU

Several suggestions are made across the literature for tangible actions that can be taken to better meet employee expectations in the area of DEI:

- **Prioritise creating a ‘psychologically safe’ environment where employees can share thoughts.** Creating an environment in which employees can give critical feedback and raise sensitive topics such as microaggression without fear of judgement or dismissiveness, is essential for ensuring an inclusive environment. As Workday notes, it is also an effective way of identifying areas where more work is needed – for instance, it might allow an employer to determine whether there are differences in sentiment around career development at the intersection of gender and race.¹²
- **Properly support employee resource groups, recognising their importance with more than words: time, resources, and genuine engagement.** Employees widely recognise the value of ERGs, with a study conducted by Benevity finding that four in five ERG members (78%) think ERGs enable them to connect with colleagues who have similar lived experiences, and that nine in ten (88%) in the workforce more widely think that they contribute to a sense of belonging at work.¹³ However, studies also show that there is a perception that these groups are not always properly resourced, and that middle management regard ERG meetings as not being actual work and rather as a fun activity. *Forbes* emphasises the need for senior leadership to educate middle management on the importance of these groups, and to ensure that they are neither dismissed nor seen as a substitute for an actual DEI plan.¹⁴
- **Make DEI efforts and progress transparent and measurable.** The Global Parity Alliance – a cross-industry group committed to advancing DEI around the world – produced research in 2023 showing that central success factors for DEI initiatives include: setting clear and quantifiable aspirations; rigorously tracking progress towards them with KPIs; and ensuring that accountability is tied to this, rather than to inputs or activities.¹⁵
- **Implement, publicise and explain the justification for policies to address traditionally underserved groups.** Across the literature, menopause policies and more generous support for carers are mentioned as areas that many organisations are still not prioritising enough in 2023. WWU should not only pursue these, but talk about them internally and externally to normalise conversations about them. The aforementioned Global Parity Alliance report also emphasises the importance of making a clear case for change and leadership being transparent about thinking in this area. This is also important in the context of the earlier finding that Gen Z expect clear action in DEI, and value it even if it does not directly impact them – better publicising what WWU is doing is likely to appeal to this group.

¹² Workday. 2022. *Employee Expectations 2022*. Retrieved from https://forms.workday.com/en-us/reports/employee-expectations-employee-voice/form.html?step=step1_default

¹³ Benevity. 2023. *The State of Workplace DEI 2023*. Retrieved from <https://benevity.com/state-of-dei-2023>

¹⁴ Forbes. 2022. *5 DEI Trends to Retire in 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/teresahopke/2022/12/01/5-dei-trends-to-retire-in-2023/>

¹⁵ Global Parity Alliance. 2023. *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2023*. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Parity_Alliance_2023.pdf

- **Continuously expose employees to learning opportunities about DEI – avoid mandatory, one-off DEI sessions.** Staying with the theme of building understanding amongst employees, regular communication about DEI needs to be embedded into workplace culture, and clearly actionable – not discussed as part of one-off sessions. The aforementioned Forbes article names one-off unconscious bias workshops as an example of what *not* to do here: “although unconscious bias training does serve the purpose of raising people’s awareness about the fact that they have unconscious bias, as everyone does, it offers nothing for supporting an individual in knowing what to DO about their bias”.¹⁶ DEI needs to be ongoing and active – with employees being coached on how to create a culture of belonging and avoiding actions that undermine this, such as microaggressions.

Sharing your organisation’s values

Employees feeling that their personal values are aligned to their organisation’s values is another central tenet of workplace belonging.

Again, this is of particular interest to younger generations. Research by Handshake, an organisation best known for its early-careers platform, notes that Gen Z has particularly high standards for social accountability and consistency from its employers, with 94% believing that companies should be helping to address critical issues and 70% saying that it is important for them to work for a company whose values align to their own.¹⁷

There are several values that are important to Gen Z which they also expect to see valued by employers too, including DEI – as already discussed – in addition to sustainability and the environment, and mental health. In fact, according to the most recent instalment of Deloitte’s Gen Z and Millennial survey, climate change and mental health are Gen Z’s top concerns after the cost of living and unemployment.¹⁸ This section discusses each in turn.

Sustainability and the environment

Sustainability is increasingly important to people of all ages, but it is especially important to younger generations. Whilst the environment is important to all age groups, it again appears that younger generations care about it *more* and aren’t content with sentiment or intention alone.¹⁹ Gen Z will put pressure on their company to *act*, and expect them to demonstrate their progress.

Gen Z’s particular focus on the environment could present an opportunity for WWU. The introduction of this report noted that the future talent that is required to progress the utilities is younger, and has more technical skillsets. Organisations such as WWU are not merely competing for talent within its own sector – they are competing *across* sectors, with technology companies and others. As was stated in the introduction, given that only 6% of utilities leaders think that they are performing excellently at recruiting for these new skills,²⁰

¹⁶ Forbes. 2022. *5 DEI Trends to Retire in 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/teresahopke/2022/12/01/5-dei-trends-to-retire-in-2023/>

¹⁷ Handshake. 2023. *With 70% of Gen Z wanting to work for a company whose values align to their own, it’s time to evaluate your employer brand*. Retrieved from <https://www.joinhandshake.co.uk/posts/with-70-of-gen-z-wanting-to-work-for-a-company-whose-values-align-to-their-own-its-time-to-evaluate-your-employer-brand>

¹⁸ Deloitte. 2023. *Gen Z and Millennial Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/content/genzmillennialsurvey.html>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ West Monroe. 2019. *How Utilities Can Win the War for Talent*. Retrieved from <https://www.westmonroe.com/perspectives/signature-research/how-utilities-can-win-the-war-for-talent>

the importance of telling a compelling story to these prospective employees about what WWU can offer them cannot be understated.

Some sources, most notably West Monroe, suggest that younger workers' strong concern for the environment might be leveraged by utilities organisations to tell this story. This would represent an opportunity to position working for WWU to prospective employees as aligning with their values in a way that competing companies in the 'tech' space cannot:

“Younger workers tend to strongly value alignment with the utility’s mission. Nearly one-third of workers with less than one year of utility experience said that a top reason for entering the industry was that they “shared they utility’s values or mission”. Utilities have a strong, positive story to tell in the talent marketplace: that they are immersed in some of the most exciting new technologies, with a mission to serve their communities and the planet.”

Source: West Monroe. *How Utilities Can Win the War for Talent*. Retrieved from <https://www.westmonroe.com/perspectives/signature-research/how-utilities-can-win-the-war-for-talent>

Mental health

Taking measures to promote good mental health in the workplace is essential for employers for a variety of reasons – for instance, avoiding burnout is important in ensuring a good work-life balance and employee retention. But this commitment is also important insofar as it is another area in which younger generations expected alignment with employers. According to Deloitte’s 2023 *Mental health today*, 8 in 10 Gen Z and Millennials regard mental health support and policies as important factors in assessing prospective employers.²¹

Despite employers’ focus on supporting mental health, the research also finds that more resources and initiatives focussed on halting and reversing burnout are needed. WWU might, for instance, incorporate the World Health Organization criteria for burnout into training and awareness campaigns. The research also notes that uptake of available support is fairly limited amongst both Gen Z and Millennials, and so more work is needed to build a culture where people are actively and proactively encouraged to seek support. This is framed explicitly in terms of upskilling managers:

“Employers should build capability and set expectations for managers to not only hold but also initiate open conversations around mental health; spot signs and proactively offer support; and be vocal advocates for the well-being of their colleagues.”

Source: Deloitte. *Mental health today*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/legacy/docs/deloitte-2023-genz-millennial-survey-mental-health.pdf>

Finding meaning in work and being valued for your contribution

This last part of employee belonging overlaps significantly with material discussed elsewhere, so is not covered here.

²¹ Deloitte. 2023. *Mental health today*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/legacy/docs/deloitte-2023-genz-millennial-survey-mental-health.pdf>

An important part of finding meaning in work is what has just been discussed; meaningful work is that which aligns with employees' values and personal ambitions. Employees, especially younger generations, desire a sense of purpose in their work, feeling that their efforts contribute to a greater cause beyond their individual selves. As mentioned, WWU has an opportunity to tell a compelling story on this point, by emphasising its environmental credentials to younger prospective employees. Naturally given Gen Z's demand for tangible action, WWU will have to evidence its commitment with demonstrable action if it is to convincingly tell this story.

Being valued for your contribution at work, on the other hand, is about having one's achievements recognised, as well as a clear path to progression and opportunities to learn. These are themes covered at length in Chapter 3, so will not be covered here.

Chapter 2: Work-life balance and flexibility

According to a 2023 survey by Benefex, the factor that the global workforce is most likely to see as important when choosing a new employer is clear commitment to employee wellbeing. Two thirds of workers rate this as *very* important to them (64%).²² This aligns with the findings of the Gallup study referenced in Chapter 1, which showed that this is one of the leading priorities for employees of all generations, though it is most pronounced amongst Gen Z and Millennials.²³

Demonstrating a clear and genuine focus on wellbeing to employees can take many forms, but perhaps chief amongst them is a commitment to achieving a good work-life balance. The International SOS Foundation – an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health, safety and security of global workforces – and Affinity Health at Work conducted a collaborative study into the relationship between wellbeing and working patterns. This triangulated qualitative research amongst employees and HR professionals, scientific literature and people-management expertise from consultancy partners. The research found working hours and work pressure to be the strongest predictors of poor wellbeing.²⁴

Work-life balance is an essential consideration for *both* attracting and retaining talent. Randstad's 2023 *Workmonitor* survey finds that three fifths of UK workers (60%) across industries would not accept a position if they thought it would negatively affect their work-life balance, up from 58% the year before.²⁵ Further, almost half (46%) would quit a job if it prevented them from enjoying their life.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced more flexibility into working patterns and working environments, and the general expectation now is that work-life balance and flexibility continue to be a priority even as the pandemic ceases to have an impact upon people's lives. This much is well-known, and is not a particularly surprising finding in this literature review.

More instructive for WWU is that it is not *merely* the case that work-life balance has become a more prominent employee priority; there has also been a shift in the common understanding of what 'good' looks like in terms of work-life balance. Though it once referred to a crude split between work and life, the concept has evolved into something broader; a holistic, healthy work environment based on open communication between employers and employees.²⁶ This nuance is something that WWU will need to be attentive to when developing future work-life balance policies, in order to ensure that what is offered aligns with expectations.

Accordingly, this chapter details what this means in practice, discussing the themes from the literature that underpin healthy work-life policies. After a brief discussion of the factors driving increased expectations of work-life balance, the following topics are discussed:

²² Benefex. 2023. *The Evolution Report*. Retrieved from <https://hellobenefex.turtl.co/story/evolution-report-employee-edit/>

²³ Gallup. 2021. *Things Gen Z and Millennials Expect From Their Workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/336275/things-gen-millennials-expect-workplace.aspx>

²⁴ Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. 2023. *Hybrid working and employee wellbeing: International SOS Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/case-studies/international-sos/>

²⁵ Randstad. 2023. *Workmonitor*. Retrieved from <https://workforceinsights.randstad.com/workmonitor-2023>

²⁶ Morgan, K. 2023. *What does work-life balance mean in a changed work world?* Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20230227-what-does-work-life-balance-mean-in-a-changed-work-world>

1. The move toward work-life *integration* rather than merely balance
2. The importance of *autonomy* in flexible working policies
3. How understanding and expectations of flexibility differ between office and non-office workers
4. The specific work-life balance needs of caregivers in a new working context.

It is worth noting that prioritisation of mental health and mental health resources are also important for work-life balance, especially for Gen Z, but since Chapter 1 discusses this topic at length, this theme is not repeated here.

All of these themes should inform WWU’s future policies in this area, and so the chapter concludes with a discussion of how WWU might effectively respond to new expectations here.

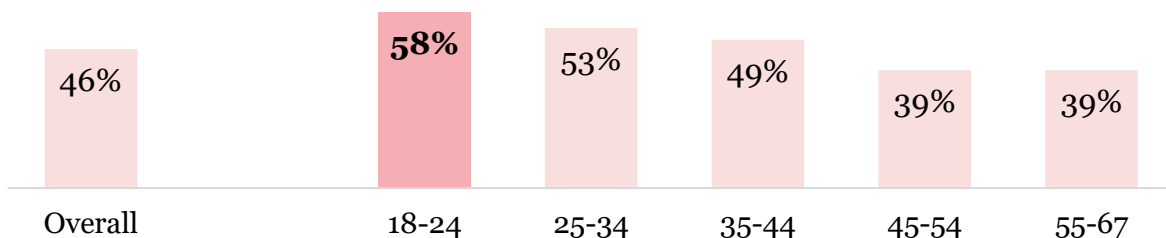
Setting the scene: drivers of increased employee expectations around work-life balance

As mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic was a watershed in the area of work-life balance. The *Workmonitor* survey mentioned above reveals that in 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, 67% of surveyed workers felt more enabled and empowered to make changes to their work-life balance. The consequent increase in hybrid and remote working allowed many workers to experience a working set-up that better enabled them to balance their work with other areas of their life. Employees experiencing this first-hand appears to have brought about a change in expectations, even after the pandemic ended – employees prioritise this balance more than they did previously, *and* expect their employers to support them in achieving it.

This is compounded by the fact that the generations who have most recently entered the workforce are the least prepared to compromise on work-life balance. Data from Deloitte finds that, more than any other trait among their peers, Gen Z and Millennials admire the ability to balance work and life priorities.²⁷

Analogously to Chapter 1’s findings, younger workers are also more likely to be vocal about their expectations in this area, and more likely to take action if they are dissatisfied with their employer’s offering in this area. The below data from Randstad bears this out – three fifths of 18–24-year-olds (58%) say they would quit their job on account of a poor work-life balance, compared to just two fifths of the two oldest age groups tested.

"I would quit a job if it was preventing me from enjoying my life" – agreement by age group

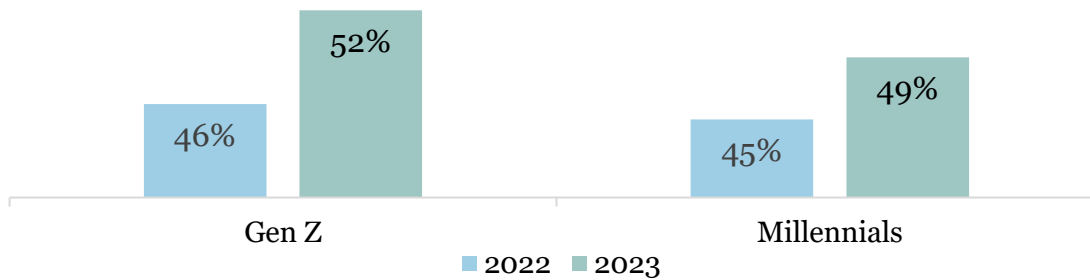


Source: Randstad. 2023. *Workmonitor*. Retrieved from <https://workforceinsights.randstad.com/workmonitor-2023>

²⁷ Deloitte. 2023. *Gen Z and Millennial Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/content/genzmillennialsurvey.html>

As well as being more likely to act *if* they are dissatisfied with their work-life balance, these younger generations are also particularly likely to actually *be* dissatisfied. Deloitte’s *Mental Health today* research finds that levels of stress and anxiety in and outside of work are notably high amongst Gen Z and Millennials, *and* that a prominent driver of this is workload.²⁸ Consequently, work-related burnout is on the rise amongst these groups, even since 2022:

Experienced burnout due to work pressures, by generation



Source: Deloitte. 2023. *Mental health today*.

Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/legacy/docs/deloitte-2023-genz-millennial-survey-mental-health.pdf>

The salience of this cannot be understated: younger generations appear less likely to be satisfied with work-life balance *and* are more likely to avoid jobs which don’t provide this balance. This, along with the pandemic, is a major driver of the increased focus on work-life balance.

Within this context, WWU will need to continue adopting policies and principles to facilitate a healthy work-life balance among its workforce, both to attract and to retain talent. But our findings are also instructive for how exactly WWU should go about this. The literature also reveals that perceptions of exactly what a good work-life balance looks like in practice have also changed markedly in recent years. With this in mind, the remainder of this chapter discusses the themes which WWU’s response should take into account in order to align what workers actually expect.

Work-life balance and work-life integration

Work-life *integration* has emerged as an evolution of traditional conceptions of work-life balance. The pandemic has changed the typical working environment in such a pronounced and irreversible way that neatly separating the day into work and non-work is not realistic for all, nor particularly desirable. Whilst some still prefer rigid and clear boundaries between work and non-work, others want a more fluid arrangement. Meeting employee expectations involves finding a way to cater for both of these groups.

Stuart Friedman, an organisational psychologist writing for the Harvard Business Review, argues that the more traditional conception of work and life as things to be *balanced* implies the idea that ‘work’ competes with ‘life’; that the two are understood as binary.²⁹

²⁸ Deloitte. 2023. *Mental health today*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/legacy/docs/deloitte-2023-genz-millennial-survey-mental-health.pdf>

²⁹ Friedman, S. D. 2014. *What successful work and life integration looks like*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2014/10/what-successful-work-and-life-integration-looks-like>

As a result, traditional concepts of work-life balance are about creating firm boundaries between the two spheres. The ideal, on this conception, might look like the following: a person sets aside a defined block of time – 9am to 5pm, perhaps – to focus wholly and single-mindedly on work. And then, outside of that block of time, they fully disconnect from work and fully engage with their personal life, family, or leisure. This clear separation between work and not-work amounts to balance.

For some, this remains the ideal. However, for others, the pandemic has dented the appeal of this model. Part of what appeals about hybrid working is the idea that employees can organise their day more flexibly and with a less rigid distinction between ‘work time’ and ‘non-work time’. For instance, an employee might return to the office from an in-person meeting, buy dinner from a supermarket on the way home, and then continue with their workday afterwards.

The new model of work-life *integration* that Friedman discusses, acknowledges that this blurring of work-time and ‘life’ or non-work time, is part of the appeal for some. A person who subscribes to the work-life integration model would prefer to tackle their responsibilities – whether professional or personal – at a time that suits them, and without a clear distinction between ‘personal time’ and ‘work time’. They might complete personal tasks during work hours, and vice versa.

The model that will derive the most benefits will vary from person-to-person. Alexis Haselberger, a productivity and time management professional, explains that workers tend to fall into one of two categories, ‘segmentors’ and ‘integrators’:³⁰

Segmentors	Integrators
<p>This group prefer clear boundaries between work and the rest of life, to ensure that one does not dominate the other. These people tend to thrive within a work-life balance model.</p>	<p>This group prefer fluid boundaries between work and the rest of life. They are comfortable in switching back and forth between the two, as their needs dictate. These people tend to thrive within a work-life integration model.</p>

Source: Deanna deBara (quoting Haselberger). 2022. *Work-Life Balance Vs. Work-Life Integration – Which Holds More Benefits?* Retrieved from <https://blog.trello.com/work-life-balance-vs.-work-life-integration>

The point here is not that either model is inherently better than the other, or that WWU should prioritise one over the other. There is currently limited data on which models are preferred by different types of workers,³¹ and there is also no particular reason to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, the learning is that being attentive to the fact that neither of these models is appealing to all is important when developing policies in this area, as what ‘good’ looks like in this area is not the same for every worker.

This is especially important given WWU is an organisation that employs both operational and office-based/hybrid staff, with different work patterns and priorities. It is eminently possible, for instance, that the natural rhythms of operational work make work-life integration more favourable to engineers. If they have multiple jobs in one day, the spaces in between may

³⁰ deBara, D. 2022. *Work-Life Balance Vs. Work-Life Integration – Which Hold More Benefits?* Retrieved from <https://blog.trello.com/work-life-balance-vs.-work-life-integration>

³¹ Though this will vary person-to-person, this may nonetheless be a useful area in which to conduct further primary research. Whether the aim is to understand WWU employees’ preferences or to understand how preferences differ by demographics, this may prove useful in shaping policy here.

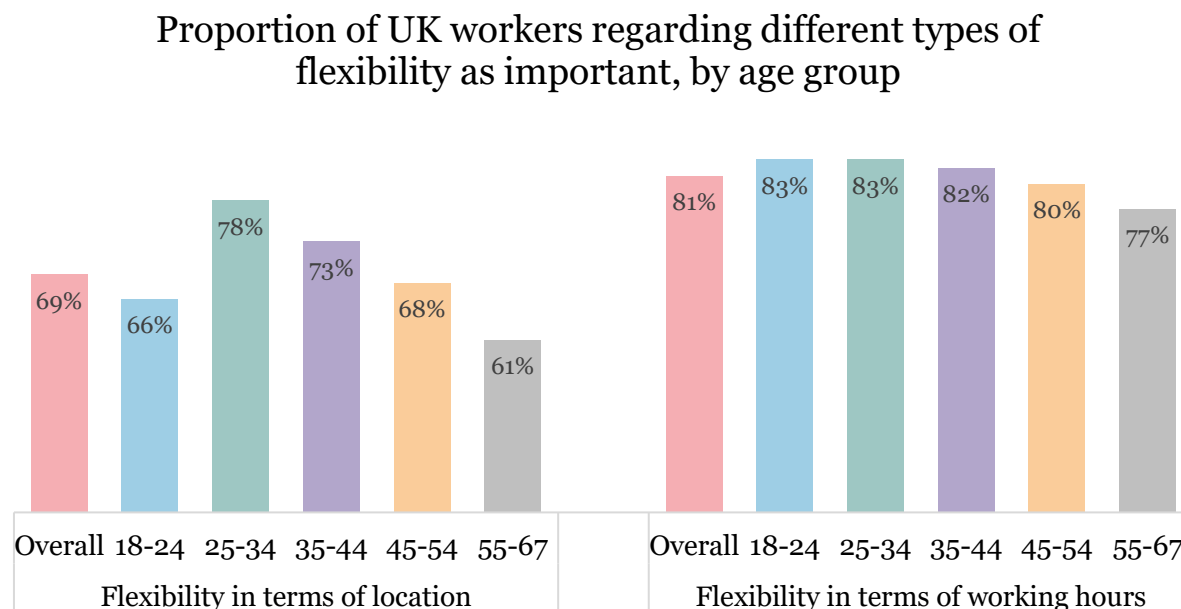
present opportunities to ‘integrate’, whether that takes the form of a quick food shop, a gym session, or something else. More broadly, work-life integration may also prove attractive to caregivers – a large demographic that will be covered in more detail later in this chapter – who could incorporate their caring responsibilities (such as the school run) into the working day.

COVID-19 blurred the lines between home and work, as many employees adopted remote or hybrid working practices. This has irreversibly brought work-life integration – a concept that already existed in workplace psychology – into the mainstream. Meeting expectations in this new context involves catering *both* to those who want clear separation between life and work, and those who want more fluidity.

The importance of flexibility and autonomy

Work-life balance and flexible working are inseparable concepts. Flexible working arrangements play a vital role in the promotion of work-life balance (or integration), by offering employees greater control over where and when they work. It is clear from the literature that flexible working has evolved from a ‘desirable’ to a ‘must-have’ for employee value propositions. Data from Randstad reveals that almost half of UK workers (44%) would not accept a job if it did not provide flexibility around *where* they work. Similar is true for flexibility about *when* people work – 46% would not accept a job if it did not provide flexibility around working hours.³²

Interestingly, despite these two figures being relatively similar, perceptions of the overall importance of flexibility vary considerably depending on whether location or working hours are meant, as the figure below shows.



Source: Randstad. 2023. *Workmonitor*.
Retrieved from <https://workforceinsights.randstad.com/workmonitor-2023>

³² Randstad. 2023. *Workmonitor*. Retrieved from <https://workforceinsights.randstad.com/workmonitor-2023>

This might suggest that these two types of flexibility are regarded as a ‘must have’ for similar numbers of people, but that flexibility around hours is more widely appealing in general – however, further research would be needed on this point, as the data is not conclusive here.

The above data also shows an interesting age trend. For 25–34-year-olds, flexibility in terms of working hours is regarded as important in only slightly higher numbers than flexibility in terms of location. However, for all other age groups – especially 18-24 year olds – the difference is much starker.

Another point to note about younger groups is that it is essential for flexibility to be accompanied by some degree of autonomy in order to meet their expectations. In other words, remote or hybrid working without autonomy over it is not regarded as flexibility. The aforementioned collaborative study between the International SOS Foundation and Affinity Health at Work found that in itself, working location and patterns made no difference in the range of outcomes of interest: burnout, loneliness, stress, performance, engagement, and so on. The key factor was found to be the *autonomy to choose* one’s work location and pattern (or at least have a *degree* of autonomy), both in terms of employee preferences and in terms of wellbeing outcomes.³³

Younger workers in particular want the flexibility to be on their terms, rather than mandated by an employer. Research by Deloitte reveals that Gen Z and Millennials prefer a work pattern in which *they* have full choice over where they work – which could be remote, on-site, or a combination – to a hybrid arrangement in which the employer sets the requirements for how often and/or when they need to be on site.³⁴

Research published in the Harvard Business Review suggests that this applies to at least some extent to all workers, arguing that calls for flexibility are driven in large part by employees wanting to be the primary decision-maker of where and when they do their work. Notably, three fifths (59%) of the workers surveyed as part of this study indicate that flexibility was more important to them than salary.³⁵ Given the widespread perception that autonomy is an important part of flexibility, it is unsurprising that ‘back-to-the-office mandates’ prove so unpopular among workers who have grown used to hybrid and/or remote working.

What flexibility means to non-office workers

For non-office workers, flexibility is also important. A 2023 survey of 7,500 workers in the UK, Australia, US, Germany, and France, reveals that 46% of non-office workers deem flexibility at work to be as important, or more important, than pay. While there is a tendency to equate flexible working with office-based staff working from home, 40% of non-office-based respondents believe flexibility is possible in their line of work.³⁶ It is again important to be specific about what exactly is meant by flexibility though – it is not, by and large, working from home for non-office-workers (as is to be expected).

Instead, the flexible working arrangements that are most valuable to non-office-workers are time-related. This is not only working schedule, but total number of hours and amount of paid

³³ Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. 2023. *Hybrid working and employee wellbeing: International SOS Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/case-studies/international-sos/>

³⁴ Deloitte. 2023. *Gen Z and Millennial Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/content/genzmillennialsurvey.html>

³⁵ Reisinger, H. and Fetterer, D. 2021. *Forget Flexibility. Your Workers Want Autonomy*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2021/10/forget-flexibility-your-employees-want-autonomy>

³⁶ Randstad. 2023. *Flexibility: What it means to non-office workers*. Retrieved from <https://www.randstad.com/workforce-insights/hr-trends/flexibility-what-it-means-to-non-office-workers/>

time off. Blue-collar workers are three times more likely than white-collar workers to say that flexibility about total number of hours is their preferred form of flexibility (26% vs. 9%), and twice as likely to prefer more paid time off (11% vs. 5%). Non-office-workers would like to be able to work fewer hours provided that they still meet their responsibilities.³⁷

The same report shows a perception among non-office workers that their office-based colleagues enjoy more flexibility. While 52% of ‘white collar’ workers have seen greater flexibility in the last three years, only 26% of ‘grey collar’ and 20% of ‘blue collar’ staff reported the same. In short, there is a flexibility gap that non-office workers want to close.

That said, *Personnel Today* argues that non-office-workers appreciate there are some constraints to what is possible here,³⁸ noting that there is an appreciation they are often needed on-site to enable operations within fixed hours. *Personnel Today* conducted its own research, which suggests that non-office workers prefer other benefits to flexible working. Employees in roles that involve manual or high-risk labour are more likely to experience workplace injuries. As a result, they are more likely to prefer private insurance or enhanced healthcare benefits.

These views are not irreconcilable, as *Personnel Today* is working with a less nuanced concept of flexibility which does not fully differentiate between flexibility in hours and location. It is perfectly consistent for non-office workers to want more flexibility than they currently have in terms of hours worked, *and* to prefer other benefits to flexibility in terms of location, *and* for them to accept that flexibility in terms of location is not realistic for all job roles.

Nevertheless, the apparent lack of consensus reinforces the importance of listening to the priorities and desires of individual operational staff. Flexibility will look different to different employees.

The importance of flexibility to disabled workers

Flexible working in terms of location is particularly important to certain groups and employers need to be alert to this. The Work Foundation think tank at Lancaster University surveyed 406 disabled people living and working across the UK,³⁹ finding that four in five (80%) would regard remote working as either essential or very important when looking for a new job, and that two in three (66%) ideally want to work remotely 80–100% of the time.

Different disabilities make office-based work challenging for different reasons – it is again important to not treat everyone’s needs and preferences as the same, and to train managers to facilitate conversations about specific needs in a comfortable way without fear of judgement from the manager.

For some disabled workers, mobility challenges and associated difficulty with public transport may be the main reason that remote work is preferable. For others, it is more about lack of

³⁷ ‘Blue-collar’ workers are defined here as ‘people who perform high- and low-skill labour in manual industries’ and ‘gray-collar’ workers as ‘people holding jobs with aspects of blue- and white- collar roles that involve a service or are customer-facing but not based in an office’. See: Randstad. 2023. *Why flexibility means freedom to blue- and gray-collar workers*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.randstad.com/workforce-insights/hr-trends/why-flexibility-means-freedom-to-blue-gray-collar-workers/>

³⁸ Jackson, K. 2023. *How to compete on flexible benefits for non-office workers*. Retrieved from <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/flexible-benefits-non-office/>

³⁹ Florisson, R., Holland, P., Taylor, H. and Wilkes, M. 2022. *The changing workplace: Enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working*. Retrieved from <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/work-foundation/publications/the-changing-workplace>

control of the office environment itself. Autistic workers, for example, stress the benefits of being able to control lighting and noise levels at home, which they cannot do in an open-plan office.

Properly supporting disabled workers in this area involves *actively facilitating* hybrid work, not just *allowing* it in principle. The same study found that many disabled employees end up having to purchase their own equipment in order to properly work remotely, and one in five (19%) who requested additional support or adjustments while working remotely had those rejected.⁴⁰ Ensuring that adequate equipment and support is available for disabled employees to work flexibly is essential for them to actually be able to realise this benefit.

Whilst flexibility in terms of location is especially important to many disabled workers, flexibility in terms of hours worked is just as important for meeting certain needs. For instance, a qualitative research study conducted amongst people with chronic pain found that they would be better-placed to manage their condition if they had both flexibility around working hours *and* physical location.⁴¹

Whatever the specific needs, a common thread in each of these cases is that a main perceived benefit of remote work for disabled people is the greater autonomy and control it affords them to better manage their health and wellbeing. Flexibility is therefore an important part of creating an inclusive workplace every bit as much as it about facilitating work-life balance for all.

Demographic focus: caregivers

Gen Z may be more vocal and uncompromising on work-life balance. Yet caregivers represent a quieter demographic that faces numerous challenges when it comes to the juggling of competing responsibilities. Discourse about the need for caregiver support has snowballed since 2020. HR Dive identifies increased support as a key inclusion trend for 2023, and notes that adequate caregiver support has shifted from a ‘nice-to-have’ to a necessity for employers to compete for talent post-pandemic.⁴²

Work-life balance/integration is a particular challenge for the 44% of the UK workforce who combine paid work and care.⁴³ In most cases this care takes the form of looking after children under the age of 18, but 36% of carers are responsible for an adult of working age or older.

Research by Business in the Community, in partnership with Ipsos, produced alarming insights. Two in five carers say their caring responsibilities have prevented them from applying for a job or a promotion. Given women continue to perform a disproportionate amount of care duties, it is unsurprising that this is far more common among women (58%) than men (20%). One in five women surveyed have left a job because of the challenge of combining paid work with care. Counterintuitively, BITC recommends the promotion of flexible working to men as a means of improving work-life balance for women, and addressing the gender pay gap. More generally, BITC recommends that organisations start by considering caregiving the norm, rather than a minority issue.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Blake, H., Somerset, S., and Greaves, S. 2022. *The Pain at Work Toolkit for Employees with Chronic or Persistent Pain: A Collaborative-Participatory Study*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8775489/>

⁴² HR Dive. 2023. *Diversity and inclusion trends to watch in 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrdiver.com/news/2023-diversity-and-inclusion-trends/641211/>

⁴³ Business in the Community. 2022. *Who Cares? Transforming how we combine work with caring responsibilities*. Retrieved from <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/bitc-gender-report-whocares-march2022.pdf>

Even with measures to promote work-life balance in place, proactive support from managers is needed to encourage caregivers and especially women to actually take advantage of these opportunities. Research from McKinsey shows that, across a range of metrics, mothers in dual-career couples consistently indicate they feel judged for seeking great work-life balance in higher numbers than fathers in dual-career couples. Moreover, the research indicates that supportive managers are critical to ensuring team members feel comfortable discussing and taking time for household and non-work responsibilities. Ensuring that managers are given the training and encouragement necessary to play this role are therefore an important accompaniment to other work-life balance measures.

Considerations for WWU

WWU may wish to consider the following in order to embed a healthy work-life balance/integration across the organisation:

- **Increased employee expectations around work-life balance/integration are here to stay.** The pandemic blurred the boundaries between work and life and provoked a collective reappraisal of priorities. Simultaneously, a demographic ‘changing of the guard’ is taking place. With every passing year, Gen Z and Millennials form a larger proportion of the workforce. These younger workers are unwilling to compromise on work-life balance. **It is vital for both talent attraction and retention, then, that WWU is alert to this new reality and takes tangible action.**
- **Treat flexibility in terms of hours and flexibility in terms of location as separate topics – and be clear about which is being discussed when asking employees about their views.** The perceived importance of each differs considerably, and treating them as one and the same can obscure important nuances such as non-office workers caring about time-based flexibility in much higher numbers than office workers.
- More generally, there is no out-of-the-box solution to embed a positive work-life culture. **WWU must actively listen to employees on an individual basis** to understand their individual priorities, grievances, worries, and needs in terms of work-life balance. For example: do individual employees prefer work-life balance or work-life integration, and how can WWU accommodate both preferences? What kinds of flexibility do operational staff want, and how does it compare to other benefits? Properly training and empowering managers to be able to facilitate these discussions on a one-to-one basis without managers feeling judged is essential.
- **Autonomy is key.** Once WWU better understands the desires of its employees, it should not mandate one-size-fits-all policies, but give each employee the autonomy to choose an approach that works best for them.
- **Do not forget the less vocal employees.** Caregivers, for example, are not as neat or marketable a demographic as Gen Z. They may also be less demanding of employers. But caregivers could gain more than other demographic groups through a reshaping of work-life priorities and principles.

Chapter 3: Development and progression in role

As mentioned in Chapter 1, feeling valued at work is an important facet of belonging – and so it is important in attracting and retaining talent.

Seeing a clear path to development and progression is also more directly important for attraction and retention than ever. Adecco's 2023 *Global Workforce of the Future* survey finds that, whilst workers are more likely to intend to remain in their current jobs than in 2022 (73% in 2023 vs. 61% last year), an important qualification to this is that an increased number say they want to *progress* with their current employer, and to upskilled (or reskilled) for a new job within their current company.⁴⁴

Across the literature, the most frequently mentioned driver of changes to expectations in this area is the emergence of Gen Z in the workforce. As the World Economic Forum notes, upskilling this generation is not only a challenge in the post-pandemic world, but a requirement for retention – as this group are highly motivated by development and learning opportunities when choosing employers.⁴⁵

This chapter discusses those changes in expectations and makes recommendations for WWU, covering the following expectations:

1. Autonomy in job roles
2. Control over upskilling and career path
3. Changed expectations of line management and the urgent need for *managerial* upskilling

Autonomy in job roles

As is the case with working location and pattern, autonomy is important in the context of job roles and upskilling too. A reoccurring theme across topics in our review was increased expectations of employee autonomy in terms of *what* people are working on.

As Arvind Malhotra, a University of North Carolina academic specialising in the future of work, puts it:

“Organisations in the past were only focused on what work they need to get accomplished. And they said: "Hey, we hired you. Do the job, whether it matches your interests or not". Now, there is a greater need to match individuals with the right work rather than make them do work that might not interest them.”

Source: Business Insider. *Giving employees control over when, where, and how they work is key to attracting and retaining talent.*

Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/workers-want-autonomy-post-pandemic-workplace-2021-4>

This demand is not driven exclusively by younger employees only, but, like other increased expectations of autonomy, it is particularly pronounced amongst this group. Research from

⁴⁴ Adecco. 2023. *Global Workforce of the Future 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.adeccogroup.com/global-workforce-of-the-future-research-2023/>

⁴⁵ World Economic Forum. 2021. *How to upskill Gen Z and engage them in a post-pandemic workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/05/upskill-engage-gen-z-workplace/>

Deloitte finds that there is a large gap between how much Gen Z value autonomy about job role and how many bosses *recognise* that agency is a top priority:

6 in 10

Gen Z workers appreciate having autonomy in their job role and wish they had more

1 in 10

Bosses recognize that agency is a top priority amongst Gen Z workers

Source: Deloitte. *Hey bosses: Here's what Gen Z actually wants at work.*
Retrieved from <https://www.deloittedigital.com/us/en/blog-list/2023/gen-z-research-report.html>

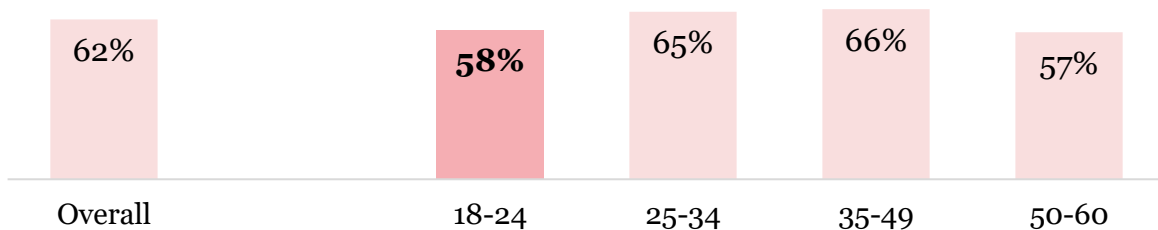
The pandemic has also played a role in shaping expectations. Several sources note that the advent of remote working made micromanagement became more common.⁴⁶ As workplaces adapted to an entirely new work setup, managers were much prescriptive about how exactly employees should work. As is discussed later in this chapter, training managers to ensure they are better equipped to respond to employee preferences in this changed environment is an essential part of meeting expectations in this area. WWU should ensure that line managers are engaged on challenges in this area and trained to empower employees in this area.

Control over upskilling and career path

Employees also want more autonomy than they currently receive with regard to upskilling. Workers want more control over their skills development, and want employers to upskill them in line with their career goals, not merely in strict accordance with the necessary skills and responsibilities in their current role.

The 2023 Adecco study mentioned earlier has found that three-fifths of employees (62% worldwide, 59% in Europe) intend to take greater control of their career in this area,⁴⁷ and expect to be supported by their employer in doing so. Interestingly, this is *not* highest amongst Gen Z:

"I intend to take greater control over my skills development in future" – agreement by age group



Adecco. *Global Workforce of the Future 2023.*
Retrieved from <https://www.adecgroup.com/global-workforce-of-the-future-research-2023/>

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Thrive4Life. 2023. *The Rise of Micromanagement and How to Overcome it.* Retrieved from <https://www.thrive4life.co.uk/blog/the-rise-of-micromanagement-and-how-to-overcome-it/>. This covers lack of autonomy in the broadest sense, so also applies to some of Chapter 2's discussion.

⁴⁷ Adecco. 2023. *Global Workforce of the Future 2023.* Retrieved from <https://www.adecgroup.com/global-workforce-of-the-future-research-2023/>

The prevailing narrative in the wider literature is that Gen Z want most autonomy in this area, and yet this study seems to contradict this. Further study is required to settle this question, as this was the only study we reviewed that examined this particular topic by age. That said, even if this picture is accurate, it isn't *necessarily* contradictory with Gen Z wanting to shape their career path and skills development. It is consistent with the hypothesis, for instance, that Gen Z want more autonomy but they are still working out exactly which skills they want to develop. The Adecco studies tests *intention* to take greater control of skills development, which might plausibly be informed by having a clearer picture of what specific skills development one wants to pursue. It is not, strictly speaking, exactly measuring the desire for autonomy in this process.

This is definitely worth investigating further, as the findings here are inconclusive. Other sources *do* suggest that Gen Z are particularly likely to expect input on the upskilling they receive, in order for them to be able to pursue upskilling opportunities in line with their career ambitions (even if those do not fit perfectly with their current role), but we could find no robust quantitative data to support this contention.

For instance, qualitative research amongst graduates by Robert Half found that autonomy is particularly important here, as Gen Z expect the development opportunities that they can access to support their wider career goals, not just the tasks required in that specific role. Or, as one participant put it:

“When I interview for a job, it’s not just for that job, it’s for that career *path*. If I’m not interested in the next steps after that job, it’s probably not a good fit.”

Source: Robert Half. *Gen Z Characteristics Employers Need to Understand*.

Retrieved from <https://www.roberthalf.com/us/en/insights/management-tips/gen-z-characteristics-employers-need-to-understand>

However, whilst this appears to be a common line taken across the literature, it is notable that the evidence in this area is fairly inconclusive.

One final point of note regarding autonomy over career path and upskilling is that meeting the workers' expectations of support in developing their skills and pursuing their career path, beyond their current role, is closely linked to employer openness to internal recruitment.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the Adecco study finds that workers are increasingly inclined to stay in their current job, but that a high proportion want to move roles *within their company*.⁴⁸ Being increasingly open to internal movement, is therefore an important consideration in retaining talent, and something that WWU should look to support and publicise where possible.

Changed expectations of line management

Throughout this report, the changed role and employee expectations of managers is a clear theme:

- Chapter 1 notes managers have an important and increased role to play in helping employees navigate mental health discussions and resources, especially with burnout on the rise. It is up to the managers to reassure employees that prioritising wellbeing does not mean they are not a dedicated employee, for instance.

⁴⁸ Adecco. 2023. *Global Workforce of the Future 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.adecgroup.com/global-workforce-of-the-future-research-2023/>

- Chapter 2 notes that managers have a more active role to play in encouraging employees to discuss the challenges they face with their working pattern and environment, and to empower employees to work in a way that suits them.
- Chapter 4 notes that managers need to be more attentive to the difficulties in giving good feedback in a hybrid work environment.
- Chapter 5 notes that when it comes to navigating the rising cost of living and reducing stigma surrounding discussions about finances in the workplace, managers should play a comparable role to the one they play with mental health – signposting resources for managees and making them feel psychologically safe in having these discussions.

This chapter’s discussion of giving employees autonomy in their job roles and upskilling also has managerial relevance – again, creating a psychologically safe environment in which employees can discuss their views without fear of judgement or reprimand.

A through line across these new expectations are empathy and receptivity. These are key traits to emphasise, especially to Gen Z. A study from Deloitte⁴⁹ shows that empathy is another area where employees and employers’ views are not aligned. Gen Z workers rank empathy as the second most valuable characteristic when trying to relate to bosses, but just 35% say that they would describe their boss as empathetic. On the other hand, empathy is not one of the main characteristics that bosses say they value when trying to relate to Gen Z employees. Further, nearly half (45%) of bosses are reluctant or unwilling to change their leadership style based on new Gen Z expectations.

<p>Gen Z’s most valued characteristics when trying to relate to bosses</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Patience 2. Empathy 3. Availability 	<p>Gen Z’s most valued characteristics when trying to relate to bosses</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Patience 2. Transparency 3. Availability
--	--

Source: Deloitte. *Hey bosses: Here’s what Gen Z actually wants at work*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloittedigital.com/us/en/blog-list/2023/gen-z-research-report.html>

Across the literature, co-creation of solutions is suggested as one way in which managers might demonstrate both empathy and agency to the people that they manage; more than any other generation, Gen Z wanted to be heard and understood, and to have real input into solving the problems their organisations face. As the Deloitte study makes clear, enlisting their energy and problem-solving skills could be one way to meet this expectation.⁵⁰

Unsurprisingly given the scale of change in what is expected from line management, there is evidence to suggest that managers themselves are in urgent need of upskilling. Research from Gartner argues that the most effective organisations will take two key measures to support managers:⁵¹

⁴⁹ Deloitte. 2023. *Hey bosses: Here’s what Gen Z actually wants at work*. Retrieved from <https://www.deloittedigital.com/us/en/blog-list/2023/gen-z-research-report.html>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gartner. *Future of Work Trends for 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/9-future-of-work-trends-for-2023>

1. **Provide fresh support and training to mitigate the widening managerial skills gap.** The approaches that were successful in 2019 are ill-suited for the workforce of 2023.
2. **Clarify manager priorities.** Given how *many* new expectations workers have of managers, organisations such as WWU should make it clear how managers should allocate their time and redesign their roles where necessary. Much like managers showing empathy to managees, senior leadership being empathetic about the scale of change required from line management and being realistic about the pace at which this can happen is important to maintain welfare.

Considerations for WWU

- **Continuously seek to understand employees' priorities and skills in the context of their career development,** not just their ambitions within their current role. Where possible, look to facilitate internal recruitment that allows new employees to find a role that best suits their goals.
- **Ensure that workers are continuously upskilled in both technical and human skills,** and make sure that workers understand its relevance to their progression goals.
- **Engage with line management to understand the difficulties that have emerged as expectations of them have changed,** and ensure that they are given 'refresher' training on how to line manage effectively in a post-pandemic workplace.
- **Emphasise the importance of empathy and autonomy to managers, especially for Gen Z employees.** Line management and employees have very different views in this area, and helping line managers to understand the value of these traits in supporting their managees is crucial.

Chapter 4: Technology at work

The increase in remote and hybrid working brought by the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted to many the need for better technology provision and support within organisations.

Frustration with technology in the workplace is not new. But it is increasingly perceived to be an important factor in employee retention, with recent research from Freshworks finding that seven in ten (71%) business leaders think employees will consider looking for a new employer if their current job does not provide access to the tools, technology, or information they need to do their jobs well.⁵²

Good technological capabilities are a pull factor towards new jobs as well, rather than it merely being the case that poor workplace technology drives people away from existing roles. 2023 data by Benefex shows that 50% of employees worldwide regard great workplace technology as an important factor when choosing a new employer.⁵³

Expectations of higher quality workplace technology

As well as often feeling frustrated by the technology they use, employees have increasingly high expectations when it comes to the quality and sophistication of workplace technology. In other words, it is not only that the stakes of meeting this requirement have increased – it's that the actual level of technology *required* to meet said requirement has increased too.

The aforementioned Benefex study finds that the employees expect a level of technology at least on par with the quality of the technology they use at home.⁵⁴ Given rapid advancements in personal technology, it is therefore unsurprising that expectations in this area have increased so much.

Further, it does not appear that technology used at work is keeping pace with expectations, with 70% of workers saying it lags behind the personal technology they use at home. Moreover, this gap appears to be widening, with the proportion who say this having grown from 60% in 2022.

The Reward & Employee Benefits Association also emphasises how a stark contrast in quality between personal and workplace technology can lead to unhappiness:

“People are no longer prepared to put up with slow, unresponsive platforms or outdated devices at work. [...]

For employees used to the hyper-personalised and seamless experiences that they get from the likes of Netflix, Spotify and Amazon, the friction they're experiencing when accessing benefits, wellbeing and recognition from their employers can cause frustration, disengagement and damage their perception of what their employer can do for them.”

⁵² Freshworks. 2022. *Is work tech keeping pace with employee expectations?* Retrieved from <https://www.freshworks.com/freshservice/is-work-tech-keeping-pace-with-employee-expectations-blog/>

⁵³ Benefex. 2023. *The Evolution Report*. Retrieved from <https://hellobenefex.turtl.co/story/evolution-report-employee-edit/>

⁵⁴ Reward and Employee Benefits Association. 2023. *Technology and trust are pillars of better global benefits – survey*. Retrieved from <https://reba.global/resource/technology-and-trust-are-pillars-of-better-global-benefits-survey-benefex.html>

Source: Reward and Employee Benefits Association. *Technology and trust are pillars of better global benefits – survey.*

Retrieved from <https://reba.global/resource/technology-and-trust-are-pillars-of-better-global-benefits-survey-benefex.html>

Demands for high standards of technology are particularly pronounced amongst Generation Z. This makes sense in the context of the study just mentioned – as digital natives, Gen Z are more confident with technology and expect seamless digital experiences in the workplace. As early adopters of emerging technology, appealing to Gen Z requires investing in technology that makes it more efficient and effective to complete work⁵⁵.

Expectations of better technology are not just about efficiency and a frustration-free work environment. For operational workers, good technology and increased automation can also enhance safety – and the perception of safety – both of which are important for the happiness of operational workers. In an article for Forbes, Jochen Apel gives an example of what this might look like in the utilities industry specifically:

“Digitalization can help ensure that happens, dramatically improving safety through innovative technologies and solutions such as on-site anomaly detection and digital twins that allow organizations to safely reveal and examine areas of risk. Utility companies, for example, are testing drones to replace the use of helicopters when inspecting power lines in remote locations – a dangerous and expensive undertaking.”

Source: Apel, J.. *Safety, Tech Skills and Worker Satisfaction Will Define the Future of Work.*

Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nokia-industry-40/2023/03/20/safety-tech-skills-and-worker-satisfaction-will-define-the-future-of-work/>

Reducing risks and improving overall safety in the workplace is a key priority for operational workers, so WWU should look to develop both its offering and its messaging around technology with this in mind.

Meeting expectations in the area of technology provision is important for employee retention and happiness, but there is also an opportunity here to leverage this sentiment to attract talent with the new, more technical skillsets that the utilities industry needs.

Much like Chapter 1’s discussion of how WWU can compellingly situate itself in younger prospective employees’ thinking by appealing to concerns about the environment, West Monroe also argues that there is an opportunity here for utilities organisations to position themselves as places with the opportunity to work with exciting and sophisticated emerging technologies. As the industry pursues increasing Internet of Things (IoT) integration and other emerging technologies, West Monroe argues that:

“Utilities have a strong, positive story to tell in the talent marketplace: that they are immersed in some of the most exciting new technologies, with a mission to serve their communities and the planet.”

Source: West Monroe. *How Utilities Can Win the War for Talent.*

Retrieved from <https://www.westmonroe.com/perspectives/signature-research/how-utilities-can-win-the-war-for-talent>

⁵⁵ Segal, E.. 2023. *How Gen Z’s Impact On The Workplace Continues To Grow.* Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/edwardsegal/2023/05/24/how-gen-zs-impact-on-the-workplace-continues-to-grow/?sh=3c4b99036a5b>

The aforementioned Forbes article concurs with this, arguing that this appeal is particular apparent amongst Gen Z workers who are looking for roles “that will allow them to use the latest in cutting-edge technology”.⁵⁶

Technology in the workplace, then, should be understood not merely as an expectation that WWU must meet – but an opportunity to position WWU as an attractive employer to younger, high-skilled talent in a very competitive labour market.

Upskilling as a prerequisite for flexibility and work-life balance

The need for good quality and reliable technology at work is not limited to Generation Z. However, for older age groups to fully utilise and benefit from technology offerings – especially ones enabling efficient hybrid or remote working – dedicated training is more likely to be needed. The Institute for Employment Studies argues as much.⁵⁷ In this sense, upskilling in technology is an enabler of flexibility, which ultimately increases job retention.

Chapter 2 discussed the stakes of ensuring that employees can work in the way that best suits them to have a good work-life balance or good work-life integration, and upskilling in technology should be seen through this lens.

Additionally, those who lack necessary technology skills for their job may report unhappiness in their roles and struggle to focus on developing their skills in other areas. This links to the contents of the previous chapter on development and progression; upskilling is important not only for benefitting from flexibility and thereby better work-life balance, but also for career and skills development.

Challenges posed by an increased focus on technology

Whilst technology and upskilling in technology are necessary to benefit from flexibility and to be able to focus on development in other areas, the increase in focus on technology brought by the advent of hybrid working has also created new challenges that should not be overlooked by employers.

Wellbeing and the ‘always-on’ mindset

The first relates to employee wellbeing. Whilst technology is an enabler of hybrid work, which can *support* the wellbeing of certain employees for whom this offers a better work-life balance or integration, for others hybrid work and the technologies involved in enabling it can lead to increased pressure and struggles with disconnecting from work. A study from Gartner from early in the pandemic found that remote workers were 27% more likely to struggle to disconnect from work than on-site ones due to the ‘always-on’ mindset that hybrid working technologies can bring out in some.⁵⁸

This relates back to Chapter 2’s point that neither work-life balance nor work-life integration are appropriate for every employee – pushing ‘integration’ as an ideal to employees who are

⁵⁶ Apel, J.. 2023. *Safety, Tech Skills and Worker Satisfaction Will Define the Future of Work*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nokia-industry-40/2023/03/20/safety-tech-skills-and-worker-satisfaction-will-define-the-future-of-work/>

⁵⁷ Institute for Employment Studies (IES). 2017. *What do older workers value about work and why?* Retrieved from <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-12/What-do-older-workers-value.pdf>

⁵⁸ Gartner. 2021. *Watch Out for 3 Challenges Driving Remote Work Fatigue*. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/hr-should-watch-out-for-3-challenges-driving-remote-work-fatigue>

susceptible to this ‘always-on’ mindset might ultimately worsen their wellbeing rather than support it. As such, the key learning is once again to utilise managerial relationships to fully understand what is required by individual employees.

The same Gartner study also finds that this ‘always on’ mindset can be exacerbated when HR leaders adopt monitoring systems. For example, knowledge workers who feel tracked are 94% more likely to sometimes pretend to be working due to the pressure to be ‘always on’.⁵⁹

Team culture and feedback

The shortcomings of feedback which is shared remotely is identified as another challenge of the recent increased focus on technology in the workplace. A paper from economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the University of Iowa, and Harvard University, notes that fully remote workers receive feedback less often than those who are in the office regularly. Further, it found that this gap between how often at-home workers get feedback compared to those who are regularly in the office could matter most to workers who are earlier in their careers, women, and people of colour – in part because these groups often don't benefit from the professional networks that offices can support.⁶⁰ A separate study by Deloitte found that in-person feedback also tends to be more *effective* as well as more frequent.⁶¹

The solution here is not to mandate increased office attendance to increase the frequency of feedback. In this context, more work needs to be done to find ways of effectively and regularly delivering remote feedback.

More research is needed on exactly what this looks like, but William Arruda of *Forbes* highlights three key considerations for delivering effective remote feedback:⁶²

1. Ensure that feedback effectively balances assertiveness and compassion, and emphasise that feedback is to enhance their development – it’s not just for the business’ benefit.
2. Give employees time to echo key takeaways and ask questions, making adequate time to discuss feedback rather than to merely share it within a document.
3. Give feedback that is specific, consistent and actionable with measured goals, as checking in remotely is less organic and therefore has to be more structured.

Considerations for WWU

The increase in remote and hybrid working brought by the pandemic has also give rise to a host of new considerations for employers:

- **Understand improving technology as a means to enabling flexibility, and ultimately work-life balance and wellbeing.**

⁵⁹ Gartner. 2021. *Watch Out for 3 Challenges Driving Remote Work Fatigue*. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/hr-should-watch-out-for-3-challenges-driving-remote-work-fatigue>

⁶⁰ Paradis, T. 2023. *Young remote workers are missing out on crucial IRL feedback from colleagues*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-young-remote-workers-miss-feedback-rto-wfh-2023-4>

⁶¹ Deloitte. 2023. *Rebuilding office culture in a post-pandemic world*. Retrieved from <https://action.deloitte.com/insight/3178/rebuilding-office-culture-in-a-post-pandemic-world>

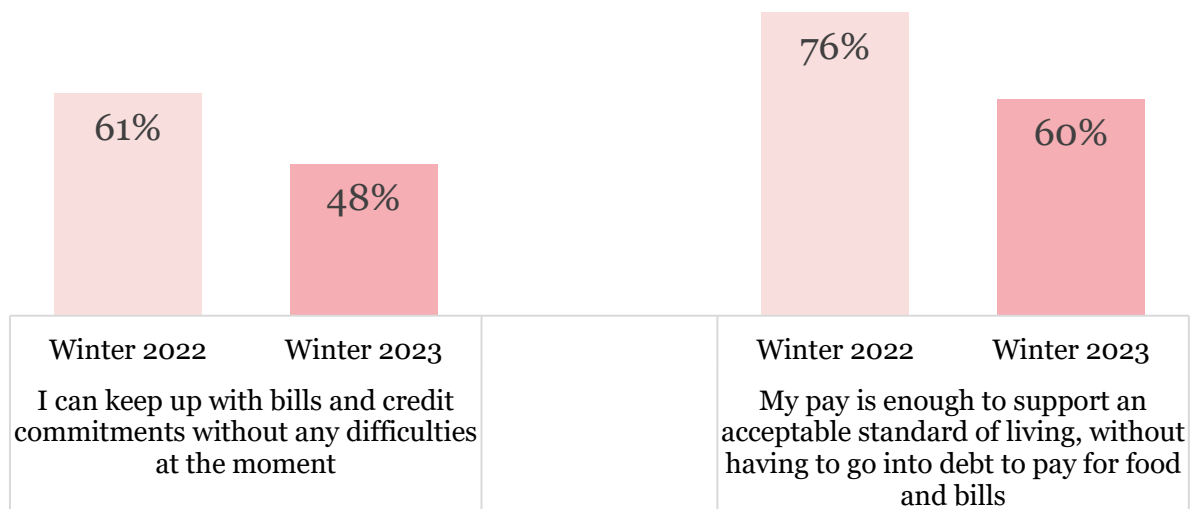
⁶² Arruda, W. 2023. *Why Feedback Skills Need To Be Stellar For Remote Leadership*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamarruda/2023/03/07/why-feedback-skills-need-to-be-stellar-for-remote-leadership/>

- **Ensure that communications about technology upskilling reflect this.**
Certain groups may not be interested in getting better at using certain technologies for its own sake, but might be interested in being able to work more flexibility and thereby achieve a better work-life balance.
- **Emphasise the use of emerging technologies to appeal to younger workers with more technical skillsets.** This is a key part of the compelling story that utilities organisations can tell to attract this in-demand talent. Given that WWU will be competing for this talent with organisations across sectors, not merely its own industry, finding a positioning that aligns with what these workers value is key.
- **Create an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing the challenges associated with technology usage and hybrid working,** and ensure teams are aware of these challenges so as to avoid exacerbating them.

Chapter 5: The impact of the rising cost of living on employee expectations

The rising cost of living is a significant concern for employees across various industries. Moreover, the impact it is having on UK employees has increased markedly even since 2022. Data from the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development found that UK employees are much less likely to be able to comfortably cover bills and credit commitments than in Winter 2022, and that far fewer are likely to say their pay is sufficient to support an acceptable standard of living, without having to go into debt to pay for food and bills.⁶³

Proportion of UK workers who agree with the following statements about the rising cost of living



Source: CIPD. 2023. *Hard times: how the cost-of-living crisis is affecting the workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/views-and-insights/thought-leadership/cipd-voice/cost-of-living-workplace/>

However, we did not find any evidence that suggests the rising cost of living has caused employee priorities to completely shift away from those discussed in previous chapters. That is, whilst the rising cost of living is on people’s minds, has clearly had a widespread and pronounced impact, and has introduced certain *new* expectations in addition to existing ones – there is no evidence to suggest that it has fundamentally changed the picture to the extent that the post-pandemic trends discussed in the first four chapters of this report have already become outdated. As stated in the introduction to this report, further research – likely primary research – is needed to fully settle this question, as current research is inconclusive.

For instance, we could find no evidence to suggest that expectations in terms of autonomy and flexibility have taken a backseat or are regarded as less important, as salary concerns have become more prominent. Additionally, a study from Benevity from 2023 finds that 62% of the workforce think that employers should dedicate *more* effort to DEI than before in the current period of economic uncertainty – not less.⁶⁴ There are no signs of employees deprioritising any of the main things that they want from an employer. Moreover, just 9% of

⁶³ Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. 2023. *Hard times: How the cost-of-living crisis is affecting the workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/views-and-insights/thought-leadership/cipd-voice/cost-of-living-workplace/>

⁶⁴ Benevity. 2023. *The State of Workplace DEI 2023*. Retrieved from <https://benevity.com/state-of-dei-2023>

workers think that employers bear primary responsibility for making sure they can manage the cost of living.⁶⁵

This, of course, is not to say that WWU should do nothing in this area. Whilst only one in ten believe that employers have *primary responsibility*, this is not to say that the other 91% think employers have *no* responsibility whatsoever for ensuring that their employees can manage the cost of living. Further, employers have an opportunity to stand out and appeal to prospective employees by developing policies that show they understand the issues in this area, empathise with employees, and want to support them where they can.

The actions suggested in the literature fall into two main categories: (1) explicitly acknowledging how exceptional the present situation is, and (2) taking tangible steps to alleviate financial pressure on employees. This chapter discusses each in turn.

Explicitly acknowledging the exceptional situation and reducing stigma

Wagestream's *State of Financial Wellbeing* research shows that there is an impact gap which prevents employer effort related to financial wellbeing from actually translating into the positive employee outcomes, and that one of the most pronounced obstacles is stigma about talking about money in the workplace. The research also advocates for four measures to reduce this stigma, drawing from success stories in reducing stigma around mental health in the workplace:⁶⁶

1. **Financial wellbeing 'champions' in the organisation** – a success story in the workplace, Wagestream argues, has been mental health champions who are trained and evangelise the importance of mental health. These people signpost resources and act as the visible face of mental health in organisations. Wagestream stresses the importance of doing the same for financial wellbeing, and properly supporting the individuals who do so with training and capacity. For instance, given the prevalence of financial scams during periods of financial difficulty, having someone signposting resources about how to avoid such scams may be useful.
2. **Training line management on the purpose and benefits of discussing this topic** – helping managers to understand their role in mental health discussions is not to 'fix' issues but to signpost to support and resources available has helped empower them in these conversations, Wagestream argues – and similar can be achieved in the area of financial wellbeing.
3. **Inclusive stories about financial situation** – voices from across the organisation, including senior leadership, being candid about their own stories, is regarded as something that will help reduce stigma.
4. **Non-judgemental language** – in the same way that using language like 'nuts' is deeply unhelpful in trying to reduce mental stigma, the research identifies phrases like 'bad with money' as a contributor towards stigma.

Taking tangible action to alleviate financial pressure

⁶⁵ Randstad. 2022. *What are employees expecting from their employers to help with the cost of living?* Retrieved from <https://www.randstad.co.uk/market-insights/staff-retention/cost-living-expectations/>

⁶⁶ Wagestream. 2022. *The State of Financial Wellbeing*. Retrieved from <https://wagestream.com/en/state-of-financial-wellbeing-cost-of-living-2022>

Acknowledging that the situation is exceptional is one way for employers to show that they are committed to improving employee experience in this area, but taking tangible action to reflect that is important in ensuring that that acknowledgement is seen as sincere.

A 2022 study by Randstad found that over half (53%) of UK employees would like to see their employer increase salaries outside of standard annual pay review windows.⁶⁷ A similar proportion (48%) said that they would like to see a monthly cost of living pay boost over the next six months. Given the aforementioned fall in the proportion of workers who perceive their pay to be adequate since 2022, it is likely that this proportion would be higher if the study was repeated again.

Whilst calling these measures employee expectations or demands is perhaps overstating the matter, they are nonetheless instructive for WWU. One other factor that is worth considering is that financial wellbeing is an important determinant of overall wellbeing. Showing that WWU is properly engaging with the impact of the rising cost of living on wellbeing may therefore be an effective way to demonstrate that WWU is genuinely committed to employee wellbeing in general. As we saw at the beginning of Chapter 2, a clear commitment to wellbeing is the number-one factor for workers globally when choosing a new employer.

Considerations for WWU

While not an explicit expectation, employers can make a positive impact by acknowledging the situation and taking steps to alleviate financial pressure. This might look like:

- **Explicitly acknowledging the exceptional circumstances** and taking steps to tackle workplace stigma surrounding financial stress and financial wellbeing.
- **Exploring tangible actions to show this acknowledgement is genuine.** This might include offering pay reviews outside the normal cycle or temporary cost-of-living wage boosts.
- **Emphasise the link between WWU’s actions in this area and their commitment to improving employee wellbeing overall.**

⁶⁷ Randstad. 2022. *What are employees expecting from their employers to help with the cost of living?* Retrieved from <https://www.randstad.co.uk/market-insights/staff-retention/cost-living-expectations/>

Appendix: Sources reviewed

- Adecco. (2022). Global Workforce of the Future 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.adecgroup.com/global-workforce-of-the-future-research-2022/>
- Adecco. (2023). Global Workforce of the Future 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.adecgroup.com/global-workforce-of-the-future-research-2023/>
- Apel, J. (2023). Safety, Tech Skills And Worker Satisfaction Will Define The Future Of Work. Retrieved from Apel, J.. Safety, Tech Skills and Worker Satisfaction Will Define the Future of Work.
- Arruda, W. (2023). Why Feedback Skills Need To Be Stellar For Remote Leadership. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamarruda/2023/03/07/why-feedback-skills-need-to-be-stellar-for-remote-leadership/>
- Benefex. (2023). The Evolution Report. Retrieved from <https://hellobenefex.turtl.co/story/evolution-report-employee-edit/>
- Benevity. (2023). The State of Workplace DEI: How DEI commitments impact the employee experience. Retrieved from <https://benevity.com/state-of-dei-2023>
- Business in the Community. (2022). Who Cares? Transforming how we combine work with caring responsibilities. Retrieved from <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/bitc-gender-report-whocares-march2022.pdf>
- Business Insider. (2021). Giving employees control over when, where, and how they work is key to attracting and retaining talent, says future of work expert. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/workers-want-autonomy-post-pandemic-workplace-2021-4>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. (2023). Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023: Employer and employee perspectives. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2023-pdfs/2023-flexible-hybrid-working-practices-report-8392.pdf>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. (2023). Hard times: How the cost-of-living crisis is affecting the workplace. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/views-and-insights/thought-leadership/cipd-voice/cost-of-living-workplace/>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. (2023). Hybrid working and employee wellbeing: International SOS Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/case-studies/international-sos/>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. (2023). Hybrid working: Guidance for people professionals. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/planning-hybrid-working/>
- Chen, C., Huang, J., Obeid, M., & Zucker, J. (2022). Supporting employees in the work-life balancing act. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/supporting-employees-in-the-work-life-balancing-act>
- deBara, D. (2022). Work-Life Balance Vs. Work-Life Integration – Which Hold More Benefits? Retrieved from <https://blog.trello.com/work-life-balance-vs.-work-life-integration>
- Deloitte. (2023). 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/content/genzmillennialsurvey.html>
- Deloitte. (2023). Mental health today: a deep dive based on the 2023 Gen Z and Millennial survey. Retrieved from <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/legacy/docs/deloitte-2023-genz-millennial-survey-mental-health.pdf>
- Deloitte. (2023). Rebuilding office culture in a post-pandemic world. Retrieved from <https://action.deloitte.com/insight/3178/rebuilding-office-culture-in-a-post-pandemic-world>
- Emmett, J., Komm, A., Moritz, S., & Schultz, F. (2021). This time it's personal: Shaping the 'new possible' through employee experience. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational->

- performance/our-insights/this-time-its-personal-shaping-the-new-possible-through-employee-experience
- FDM Group. (2023). Understanding Gen Z in the Workplace. Retrieved from <https://www.fdmgroup.com/blog/understanding-gen-z-in-the-workplace/>
- Florisson, R., Holland, P., Taylor, H., & Wilkes, M. (2022). The changing workplace: Enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working. Retrieved from <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/work-foundation/publications/the-changing-workplace>
- Forbes. (2022). 5 DEI Trends to Retire in 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/teresahopke/2022/12/01/5-dei-trends-to-retire-in-2023/>
- Freshworks. (2022). Is work tech keeping pace with employee expectations. Retrieved from <https://www.freshworks.com/freshservice/is-work-tech-keeping-pace-with-employee-expectations-blog/>
- Friedman, S. D. (2014). What successful work and life integration looks like. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2014/10/what-successful-work-and-life-integration-looks-like>
- Gallup. (2021). Things Gen Z and Millennials Expect From Their Workplace. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/336275/things-gen-millennials-expect-workplace.aspx>
- Gartner. (2021). How 2020 Accelerated Conversations on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/how-2020-accelerated-conversations-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>
- Gartner. (2021). Watch Out for 3 Challenges Driving Remote Work Fatigue. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/hr-should-watch-out-for-3-challenges-driving-remote-work-fatigue>
- Gartner. (2022). Future of Work Trends for 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/9-future-of-work-trends-for-2023>
- Gartner. (2023). Employees Seek Personal Value and Purpose at Work. Be Prepared to Deliver. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/employees-seek-personal-value-and-purpose-at-work-be-prepared-to-deliver>
- Great Place to Work. (2022). Belonging in the Workplace: What Does It Mean and Why Does It Matter? Retrieved from <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/belonging-in-the-workplace-what-does-it-mean-and-why-does-it-matter>
- Handshake. (2023). With 70% of Gen Z wanting to work for a company whose values align to their own, it's time to evaluate your employer brand. Retrieved from <https://www.joinhandshake.co.uk/posts/with-70-of-gen-z-wanting-to-work-for-a-company-whose-values-align-to-their-own-its-time-to-evaluate-your-employer-brand>
- Hoory, L. (2023). The State of Workplace Communication in 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/digital-communication-workplace/>
- Institute for Employment Studies. (2017). What do older workers value about work and why? Retrieved from <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-12/What-do-older-workers-value.pdf>
- Jackson, K. (2023). How to compete on flexible benefits for non-office workers. Retrieved from <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/flexible-benefits-non-office/>
- McKinsey. (2022). Women in the Workplace 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>
- Morgan, K. (2023, February 28). What does work-life balance mean in a changed work world? Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20230227-what-does-work-life-balance-mean-in-a-changed-work-world>
- Paradis, T. (2023). Young remote workers are missing out on crucial IRL feedback from colleagues. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-young-remote-workers-miss-feedback-rto-wfh-2023-4?r=US&IR=T>

- PwC. (2023). UK Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.pwc.co.uk/services/human-resource-services/insights/uk-hopes-and-fears-survey.html>
- Randstad. (2022). What are employees expecting from their employers to help with the cost of living? Retrieved from <https://www.randstad.co.uk/market-insights/staff-retention/cost-living-expectations/>
- Randstad. (2023). Flexibility: What it means to non-office workers. Retrieved from <https://www.randstad.com/workforce-insights/hr-trends/flexibility-what-it-means-to-non-office-workers/>
- Randstad. (2023). Why flexibility means freedom to blue- and gray-collar workers. Retrieved from <https://www.randstad.com/workforce-insights/hr-trends/why-flexibility-means-freedom-to-blue-gray-collar-workers/>
- Randstad. (2023). Workmonitor (2023 edition). Retrieved from <https://workforceinsights.randstad.com/workmonitor-2023>
- Reisinger, H., & Fetterer, D. (2023). Forget Flexibility. Your Workers Want Autonomy. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2021/10/forget-flexibility-your-employees-want-autonomy>
- Reward and Employee Benefits Association. (2023). Technology and trust are pillars of better global benefits - survey. Retrieved from <https://reba.global/resource/technology-and-trust-are-pillars-of-better-global-benefits-survey-benefex.html>
- Robert Half. (2018). Gen Z Characteristics Employers Need to Understand. Retrieved from <https://www.roberthalf.com/us/en/insights/management-tips/gen-z-characteristics-employers-need-to-understand>
- Segal, E. (2023). How Gen Z's Impact on the Workplace Continues to Grow. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/edwardsegal/2023/05/24/how-gen-zs-impact-on-the-workplace-continues-to-grow/>
- Thrive4Life. (2023). The Rise of Micromanagement and How to Overcome It. Retrieved from <https://www.thrive4life.co.uk/blog/the-rise-of-micromanagement-and-how-to-overcome-it/>
- Wagestream. (2022). The State of Financial Wellbeing. Retrieved from <https://wagestream.com/en/state-of-financial-wellbeing-cost-of-living-2022>
- Wales & West Utilities. (2022). Digitalisation Strategy. Retrieved from <https://wwutilities.co.uk/media/4365/wales-west-utilities-digitalisation-strategy-march-2022.pdf>
- West Monroe. (2019). How Utilities Can Win the War For Talent. Retrieved from <https://www.westmonroe.com/perspectives/signature-research/how-utilities-can-win-the-war-for-talent>
- Workday. (2022). Employee Expectations Report 2022. Retrieved from https://forms.workday.com/en-us/reports/employee-expectations-employee-voice/form.html?step=step1_default
- World Economic Forum. (2021). How to upskill Gen Z and engage them in a post-pandemic workplace. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/05/upskill-engage-gen-z-workplace/>
- YouGov. (2022). What workers around the world want from employers. Retrieved from <https://today.yougov.com/topics/economy/articles-reports/2022/11/19/what-workers-around-world-want-employers>

Note: this includes all sources reviewed in detail at Stages 2 and 4 of the research. Not all of these sources are directly cited within this report.