

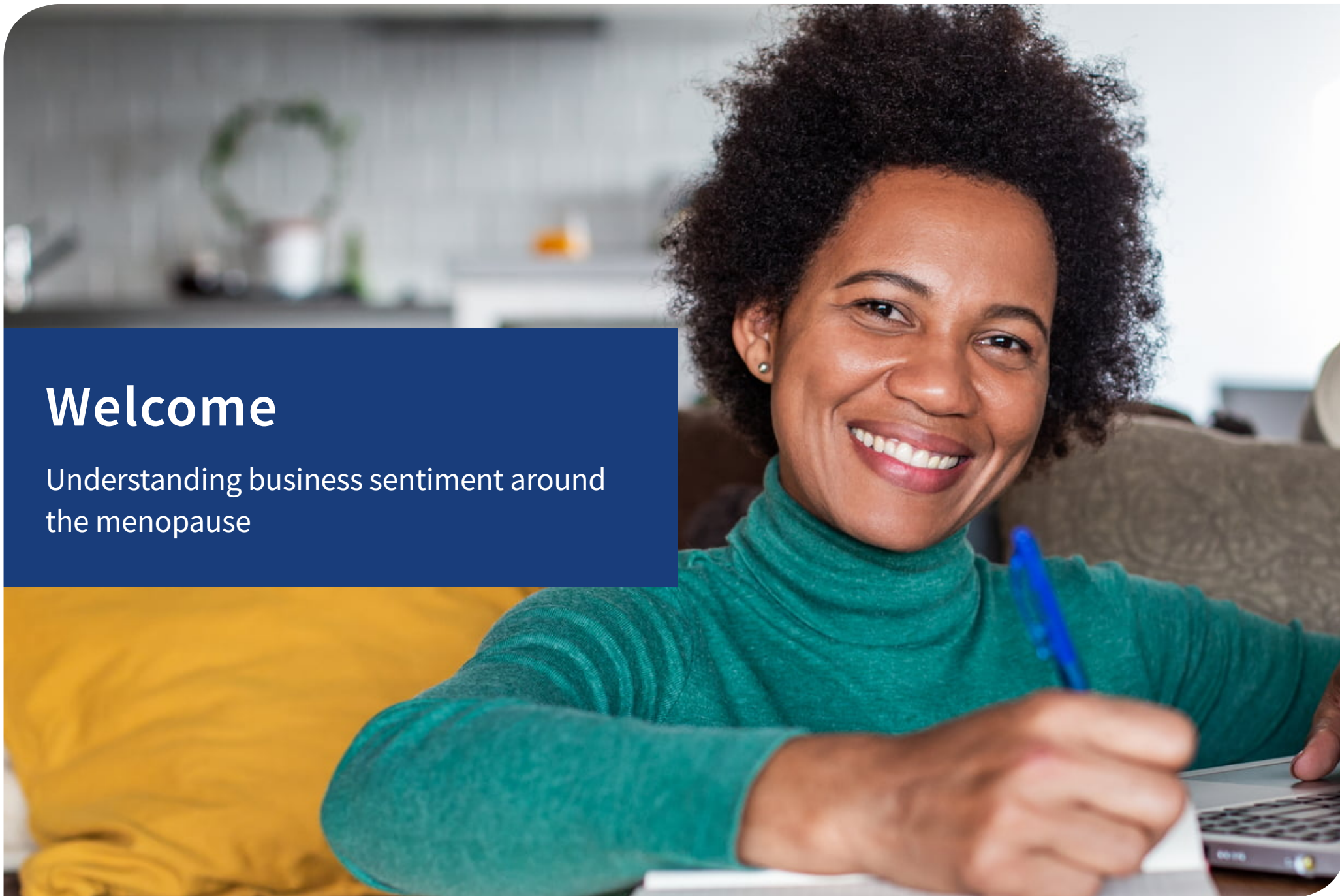
Tackling the Menopause Taboo in the Workplace

What more needs to be done to support women at work and why?



Welcome

Understanding business sentiment around
the menopause



Welcome to our latest report

In this study, we look closely at menopause. It's an issue which affects the fastest-growing demographic in the UK – namely, women aged 50 to 64 years old, but also women before this age too.

The symptoms can impact women in the years leading up to the menopause, sometimes for as much as eight years before. This is called perimenopause.

Menopause has moved up the corporate agenda as employers recognise it as a significant workplace issue. Those affected can lose confidence in their skills and abilities and have periods of absence. If they're not properly supported, they leave their roles.

In the context of the current skills gap and staff shortages, more organisations are recognising they need to go much further to support those affected, realising that this is also an age and gender equality issue.

The media and campaigning groups have played a key role in raising awareness of the menopause, and its impact on women's health and wellbeing in work. But there's limited support available to help employers understand the practical steps they need to take.



This lack of support for employers is reflected by an increase in the number of employment tribunals over the last couple of years.

This risk will increase if additional legal protection is given to those with significant menopausal symptoms, something the Women and Equalities Committee are considering.

In this unique and comprehensive study, we examine the issue of menopause in the workplace, and look closely at the progress being made. At the heart of this report are the results from our recently commissioned YouGov survey, where we spoke to 1,000 UK-based HR professionals.

We found that the vast majority of UK employers haven't yet introduced a menopause policy. Our study also showed that awareness of menopause impacting performance is low due to limited line manager training.

The results of the survey are summarised on the following pages. They're combined with our own expert legal commentary and analysis from Dr Louise Newson, GP and menopause specialist. Dr Newson is the founder of the balance app, which empowers users to track their symptoms, access expert content, share their stories to the community, and, crucially, download a personal Health Report © to take to their healthcare professional.

Throughout this guide we refer to the menopause affecting women. However, we recognise that people who don't identify as women also go through the menopause.

I hope you find this report valuable. If you have any feedback or questions about any of the issues raised, please don't hesitate to [get in touch](#).



Jenny Arrowsmith

Partner, Employment

The Need for a Menopause Policy

How to protect your employees



The Need for a Menopause Policy

Menopausal women are the fastest-growing demographic in the workplace, with around eight-out-of-10 menopausal women in work, according to the [Local Government Association's menopause fact file](#).

Despite this, our YouGov report reveals that 72% of businesses don't have a menopause policy in place.

According to our survey, 54% of large businesses (250 employees or more) say they don't have a menopause policy in place. With 82% of small firms (0-50 employees) also not having a menopause policy.



54% of large businesses and 82% of small businesses don't have a menopause policy in place

Taking action

There has been a [sharp rise in the number of tribunals where the menopause is mentioned](#). The number of cases increased from five in 2018 to 21 in 2021.

According to balance, with 77% of women not fully understanding that their symptoms relate to menopause, many other claims will arise from the impact of menopausal symptoms in work without specifically referencing menopause in their claim, despite it being an underlying issue. This demonstrates the growing importance of this topic and the need for businesses to do more to support employees.



The number of tribunals mentioning the menopause has increased from five in 2018 to 21 in 2021

Recent developments

As we mentioned at the beginning of this report, the Women and Equalities Committee are looking into how menopausal women are treated at work and what steps should be taken to protect them.

The Committee is investigating how government policy can better support those experiencing the menopause. One option being considered is whether to recommend [adding menopause to the list of protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010](#).

In addition, Labour MP Carolyn Harris has called for a “menopause revolution.” She explained how there’s a lack of knowledge in the medical profession, with 41% of medical schools not having menopause on the curriculum.

Some organisations are aware of the challenges that women face when going through the menopause. This puts them in a much stronger place to retain colleagues who are often at the peak of their experience.

According to Employee Benefits, [29% of employers have recently launched menopause or pregnancy loss initiatives](#). To name a few, Royal Mail, M&S, RSA, University of Sheffield and Mace have implemented initiatives to support their employees.

On the whole, though, the number of UK businesses with menopause policies in place remains very low. This suggests a lack of initiatives, as a policy can be indicative of the work that’s being done. Our survey showed that just one-quarter (25%) of organisations in London have a policy in place, with the lowest level being recorded in the South West at 8%.

Retaining Female Employees

How to enable your employees to thrive



Retaining Female Employees

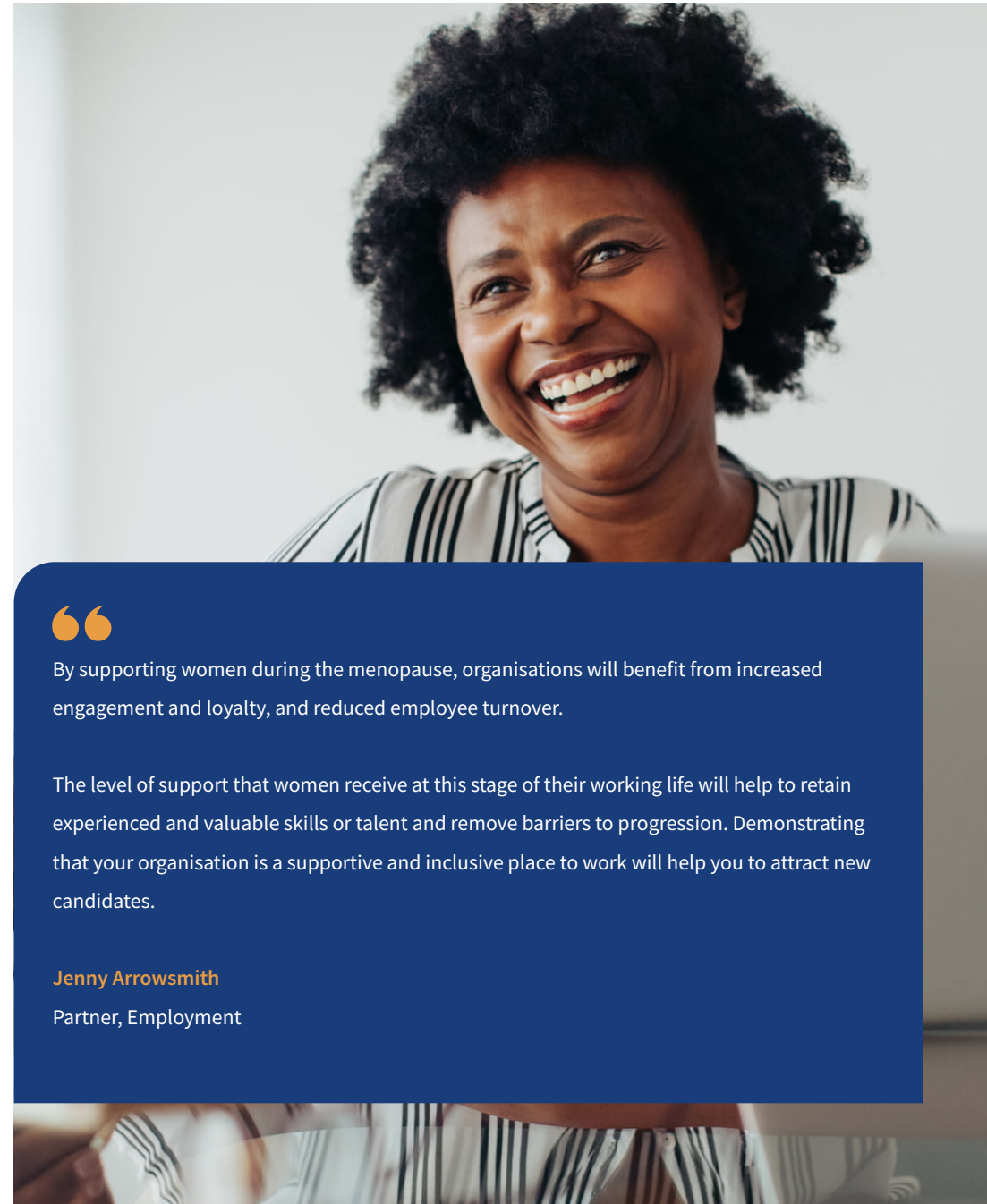
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people are reassessing what they want out of work and life. It's been reported that up to [40% of employees are looking to move jobs](#) in 2022 if they don't feel valued, engaged, and properly rewarded.

It's widely reported that there are now more vacancies than job seekers, which is impacting growth, holding down capacity, and slowing productivity. Businesses need to do more to attract and retain the talent they have.

It is widely recognised by medical professionals that menopausal symptoms can have a significant impact on a woman's physical and psychological health, including fatigue, anxiety, brain fog and sleeplessness.

Loss of confidence or productivity can follow, as can decisions to not access promotional opportunities despite having the skills and experience to do so.

Our YouGov results show that almost two-thirds of British businesses don't consider menopausal symptoms during the performance reviews of their female staff.



By supporting women during the menopause, organisations will benefit from increased engagement and loyalty, and reduced employee turnover.

The level of support that women receive at this stage of their working life will help to retain experienced and valuable skills or talent and remove barriers to progression. Demonstrating that your organisation is a supportive and inclusive place to work will help you to attract new candidates.

Jenny Arrowsmith

Partner, Employment

The percentage of businesses that don't consider the menopause during performance reviews



This graph takes a deep dive into various industries. For some women, symptoms can adversely impact on performance or cause absence from work, yet many sectors don't consider the relevance of those symptoms during performance or absence reviews

According to the research we commissioned, three-quarters of businesses within the manufacturing industry don't consider the menopause in performance reviews. That's 41% higher than companies in the IT and telecoms industry.

Women who see their performance being impacted may feel too embarrassed to say that this is a connecting issue, and may not understand it themselves or feel confident in raising it with their employer. Doing so would however, enable them to access workplace support which would mitigate the risks of performance issues. Confidence in this being a workplace conversation therefore matters.

However, our results show that only 12% of businesses within the manufacturing sector feel very confident that women in their organisation are comfortable enough to talk about the menopause. This is 43% lower than businesses within the retail industry.

Menopause – an age and gender issue

70% of women who took time off due to menopausal symptoms didn't tell their employer the real reason for their absence. That's according to a survey of 2,000 women experiencing menopause symptoms across the UK, commissioned by childcare service Koru Kids. Not being able to talk about symptoms in the workplace won't help to lower sickness absence.

It's been reported that [73% of menopausal women don't feel able to openly discuss their symptoms at work](#). This has led to [more than one million women feeling pressured to quit their jobs](#).

On the other hand, [28% of employers claim the pandemic has increased the difficulty of supporting menopausal workers](#).

A survey undertaken by the not-for-profit company Newson Health Research and Education of 3,800 UK women found that 99% stated that menopause had a negative impact on their career.

59% have taken time off as a result of this, with 18% having taken more than eight weeks off.



73% of menopausal women don't feel able to discuss their symptoms at work



Expert Advice

Businesses don't always understand the extent to which menopause symptoms can impact a woman's performance, or offer an option of flexible working for example. But this can mean they may lose skilled workers, and find it difficult to attract new employees. This is an important age and gender equality issue. Employers need to recognise it, and include it as part of its equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies.



If you implement strategies to support the women progressing within your organisation and retain their talent, you're likely to reduce the disparity in senior positions or roles which are currently male dominated. You'll also ensure women with valuable skills and talent thrive in the workplace, despite the many symptoms they may be having relating to menopause.

Jenny Arrowsmith

Partner, Employment



The workforce is hemorrhaging female talents, with 12% who have resigned , 18.6% who have reduced their hours and 21% who did not go for a promotion because of their undiagnosed or untreated menopause symptoms. We need to stop that. It's the responsibility of organisations to empower individuals with evidence-based medical information, so they can reach a diagnosis, understand their treatment options, open up a conversation at work, and continue to lead successful careers.

Gaele Lalahy

Chief Operating Officer, balance app

Break the Stigma Through Education

How to tackle training



Break the Stigma Through Education

It's crucial to start conversations in the workplace and provide training to all employees.

Opening discussions and starting to dismantle the menopause taboo can facilitate a space for women to learn more about their own menopause and the treatment needed to address their symptoms. Most women will experience symptoms around the menopause, and you can find the full list on the [free balance app](#).

Gaining access to treatment is so important for alleviating menopausal symptoms. Women don't need to put up with debilitating symptoms that affect daily life, work, relationships and future health. There are safe, low-cost, and effective treatments available.

Symptoms



Hot flushes



Memory loss
or brain fog



Anxiety



Fatigue



Headaches



Joint aches
and pains



Night sweats

The need for training

For a quarter of women, these symptoms can be severely debilitating, and can have a huge effect on their comfort and performance at work.

That's why it's important for employers to understand the range of symptoms women can suffer from and educate their workforce.

This will help employees and managers to understand and recognise the impact that these issues can have on women in the workplace.

Equipped with this understanding, managers are much better placed to manage attendance and deal with any performance or absence-related issues in a supportive and constructive way.

Ultimately, the menopause is an [employment law issue](#).

One-in-four women have thought about leaving their jobs due to menopause symptoms. Yet according to our research with YouGov, 88% of small businesses and 62% of large businesses still don't train their line managers about the menopause.



88% of small businesses and 62% of large businesses don't train their line managers about the menopause

The percentage of businesses providing menopause training by sector



Our research shows that businesses don't train their staff because:

- 19% believe they don't employ enough women of menopausal age
- 15% don't consider it a priority
- 7% claim sensitivities and embarrassment about the menopause hold them back.

Businesses within the IT and telecoms sector were nearly three times more likely to provide training than those in the hospitality and leisure industry.

Our research also found that there isn't one sector where over half of the organisations provide training.

Thoughts vs reality

Our survey results show that of all HR professionals surveyed, only 16% of businesses train their line managers on the menopause. 19% of those organisations explained they didn't train line managers due to not employing enough women of menopausal age.

The menopause doesn't just happen to women aged 45-55, though. It can happen before 45, with one-in-100 women under the age of 40 experiencing an early menopause. Men can also feel the impact of it through their relationships with colleagues in work, or partners (where applicable) or friends at home. Education on menopause should be for all staff, not just those of menopausal age.

Reasons given in our survey for not training line managers on the menopause include:

- The menopause is an irrelevant distraction
- We don't need to be trained or have a policy
- It's none of our business
- It's our priority in the next twelve months
- We're currently in the early stages of forming a policy and designing training.



Training is extremely valuable because it ensures meaningful discussions can take place and encourages employees to start conversations, even if they are sensitive. It also helps managers to be aware of the signs of poor wellbeing or issues, which could be linked to menopause difficulties.”

Jenny Arrowsmith

Partner, Employment

Training best practice

Some employers have taken positive action around the menopause issue, implementing strategies to help their employees thrive:

Employer	Strategies to help employees thrive
Santander	<p>Conducted some internal research and found that over 25% of its female workers were menopausal. This group accounted for 15% of absences, and only one-in-three felt supported at work. Following this research, the bank has created four focus areas to improve its approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building awareness and understanding• Creating a psychologically safe workplace• Providing guidance and practical support• Training menopause advocates.
DFS	<p>Appointed menopause champions to support employees.</p>
Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust	<p>Introduced menopause guidance. This activity was driven by the experiences of one of its Chief Nurses, who instigated regular menopause conferences.</p>
Severn Trent	<p>Implemented a framework to support menopausal employees. This includes: awareness events, training sessions and practical guidance. Training is also a mandatory element of the company's 'Awesome Leadership' programme for managers.</p>

Menopause strategy set to boost employee-empowered culture



Louise Fort

**Head of People and
Culture at NOCN Group**

“NOCN Group is an educational charity which aims to help learners reach their full potential and enable organisations to thrive. For over 30 years, we’ve been creating opportunities through learning and skills development. We’re passionate about supporting the growth of businesses across the UK, and we’re committed to building a supportive and diverse environment for our 180 employees.”

Diversity leader

“As an accredited ‘Leader in Diversity’, we’re well tuned into the growing awareness about menopause in the workplace. We’re on an upward trajectory in terms of building our culture, and want to lead on this issue.

“In 2021, we attended one of Irwin Mitchell’s seminars, which was dedicated to supporting HR teams in dealing with the menopause.”

Phase two

“The next stage of our strategy is to give practical support and make a positive difference to the lives of those impacted at NOCN Group.

“The focus will be on gathering data about staff absence, with the intention to identify those people currently affected by the menopause. It’ll treat any related absence due to menopausal symptoms in the same way as the protected characteristic of disability.

“Another action we’ve planned is specific menopause training for employees. This will initially be in the form of general awareness training for all staff, followed by specialist sessions for line managers.

“I’m very excited about what our menopause strategy will offer. Our approach to understanding absence will give greater knowledge of the issues and concerns affecting our employees. Quite simply, we’ll be able to target new approaches more effectively and with greater accuracy.”

College on the right course with new menopause strategy



Amanda Marsh

**HR Business Partner
at City College Ipswich**

“With over 10,000 students and notable alumni, City College Ipswich is not only a highly respected Further Education college, it is one of the UK’s largest.

“We’ve always maintained a modern outlook when it comes to supporting staff and investing in the future of our students. And we’re now one of a growing number of colleges that recognise the importance of supporting employees who are directly and indirectly affected by menopause.”

Challenge

“Further education has the potential to be hit hard by a failure to tackle the impact of menopause. According to the Association of Colleges, our sector is predominantly made up of women and, out of the 70,000 employees, the average age is 46.”

Action

“Our HR team have looked at ways to provide practical menopause support for all staff members.

“We recently established a menopause support network. Although it’s at an early stage, this new forum is already offering valuable opportunities for women and men to share their experiences.

“We also used the National Menopause Day in 2021 as a platform to share menopause information across the organisation and at our occupational health drop-in clinics. We produced a guidance document for managers along with a risk assessment form. This is used to help provide support and consider reasonable adjustments.

“More recently, we’ve used external trainers to conduct a menopause awareness session amongst our staff. We’re going to roll this out more widely to line managers to help them spot the signs of menopause and deal with it with confidence. Our college is keen to ensure that engagement is high amongst both female and male line managers.”

Results

“There’s been complimentary feedback from our staff who’ve welcomed the support. We expect that when this support is combined with training, we’ll improve staff retention and productivity.

“Our menopause activity is geared towards raising awareness and ensuring that our colleagues are well supported and looked after.

“Wellbeing should be at the centre of everything. I believe that if we look after our employees, we are also looking after our students.”



Recommendations

How you can support your employees



Recommendations

You can support your employees and break down the stigma around menopause by:

- Educating your employees and raising awareness through internal events
- Creating a page or area on your intranet, which provides information and useful links so they can learn more about the menopause themselves. Link this to a better understanding of the treatments available, the wellbeing and lifestyle changes that will help them manage their symptoms, and explain how they can ask for support where needed
- Training your line managers
- Encouraging your colleagues to share their experiences of the menopause, appointing menopause champions or ambassadors to listen to and support your menopausal employees
- Putting your own menopause policy in place.



Enabling your employees to thrive

You can also ensure your female employees feel more comfortable and able to do their jobs to the best of their ability by removing or reducing any barriers they may face.

Our research found that the businesses with a menopause policy in place also had other support in place for their employees. These included new uniforms, training sessions, coaching for managers, staff meetings, and webinars. Making adjustments and supporting employees will help businesses avoid costly discrimination claims in the future.

Training line managers so they can understand what is possible and why it helps will ensure adjustments are implemented properly and effectively. Also, encouraging women to learn about their own menopause and facilitating a space so they feel comfortable to start open conversations and ask for treatment is vital.

You may need to make some adjustments, which will vary on a case-by-case basis, such as:

- Providing desk fans and access to cool drinking water
- Making sure uniforms aren't too tight or made of synthetic materials, or if that's not possible, providing extra uniforms so staff can change them more regularly
- Allowing employees to take more frequent or longer toilet breaks
- Flexible start times, where this is possible or other flexible working arrangements
- Enabling employees to book time off for medical appointments.



The devastating impact of the menopause in the workplace is evident and our research found that 84% of women want their workplace to offer more advice and support, with 79% saying that had they received support, it would have helped them stay.

Only through a change of culture, education of the entire workforce, and by giving access to specific evidence-based tools to support women educate themselves about their symptoms and medical options, will we enable women to thrive in their jobs and tackle the parity of women, especially in senior positions.

Gaele Lalahy

Chief Operating Officer, balance app

If you need any additional support, download our employer guide or contact our expert. This covers why the menopause is a workplace issue, how you can support your staff, what claims female employees can bring, a template menopause policy, and more.

[Download the guide](#)



Thank you for reading

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