

# Are family-friendly facilities the way forward for the workplace?

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*Employment analysis: Goldman Sachs is building family-friendly features—including lactation suites for new mothers, a nursery, and an ‘art gallery’ for children’s nursery work—into its new London headquarters. This analysis explores the reasoning behind ‘family-friendly’ facilities and the impact they will have on work-family life balance and the gender pay gap. Jessica Bowman, associate at Lewis Silkin, discusses the practical implications of ‘family-friendly’ facilities in the workplace for employees and employers alike and the challenges they present for business regulation. Bowman says that, while large businesses are increasingly likely to move towards introducing these types of facilities into the workplace, ‘change will not happen overnight’.*

## **How will ‘family-friendly’ facilities like those at Goldman Sachs support parents in the workplace and what potential issues is it seeking to address?**

The introduction of family-friendly features, particularly lactation suites and a nursery, suggests that Goldman Sachs has recognised the difficulties parents can face balancing their work and family life and the fact that these cannot always be neatly compartmentalised. The lactation suites are presumably designed to help new mothers transition back to work. Having a nursery on site should help both parents manage childcare, both administratively and financially (the Evening Standard [reports](#) that the nursery will be free for 20 days a year).

As women still generally take on the majority of childcare responsibilities, clearly one of the key issues this revamp is intending to address is that of women returning to work after maternity leave and being able to continue progression in their careers. The hope will be that these features assist with the retention of women in the workforce after having children and perhaps also help close the gender pay gap, which statistics show tends to worsen after women have taken maternity leave.

Although the introduction of lactation suites and a nursery undeniably show that Goldman Sachs supports its employees in returning to work after family leave, arguably the most effective and progressive way to deal with this—particularly in enabling women to return to work—is to offer flexible-working opportunities.

## **Are these facilities necessary in the modern workplace? What will be the practical implications for employees and employers?**

Such facilities are not necessary, but they may be desirable in a modern workplace. They may provide a way to improve retention of staff by not only showing the employer supports and values its employees, but also affords employees the facilities and infrastructure they need to be able to remain at work.

The most obvious practical implication for employers looking to instate such facilities is the significant cost involved—although that may be wholly or partially offset over time through greater productivity and retention of staff—as well as providing a means of attracting new talent.

For employees, the availability of facilities such as a workplace nursery should significantly help parents to manage their childcare responsibilities—for example, not having to rush home from work at a certain time to pick children up or relieve the nanny, or leave home very early in the morning to drop children off before work.

**What challenges do introducing these facilities present to employers and is there anything else employers should be mindful of when implementing these changes?**

Probably the most obvious challenge to employers looking to introduce these types of facilities is the cost involved although, as mentioned above, presumably the idea is that this is largely an upfront cost that will be recouped indirectly by way of greater employee productivity and retention. Nonetheless, there will be ongoing costs to consider, such as the cost of the 20 days free childcare annually.

Another major issue that employers will need to consider is health and safety. The health and safety risks in an office-based workplace are generally fairly limited, but the introduction of a nursery is clearly a significant change to the working environment. Employers will need to ensure that thorough risk assessments are carried out.

Another consideration is how the nursery would be managed—would staff hired to care for the children be employees of Goldman Sachs or would the service be outsourced? There are various rules, regulations and bureaucracy involved in setting up a workplace nursery that would need to be negotiated and complied with (eg registering with Ofsted).

Employers would also need to think carefully about safeguarding issues and whether any additional measures will need to be put in place to ensure they comply with all regulatory requirements. Such factors will inevitably take a lot of time, consideration and planning—employers should anticipate a relatively lengthy lead-in time if they are considering introducing any such facilities.

**In 2018, Goldman Sachs began offering staff free emergency care for sick children or elderly parents as part of its ‘family-friendly’ revamp and an attempt to reverse its large UK gender pay gap. How effective will these family-friendly introductions to the workplace be at closing the gender pay gap and helping women move up the career ladder? Why?**

In March 2019, the government produced an [action note](#) for employers on the gender pay gap which stated that ‘one of the biggest drivers of the gender pay gap is that women tend to spend more time out of the labour market and work part-time, often due to caring responsibilities’.

On this basis, family-friendly policies such as offering staff free emergency care have a positive influence in helping close an organisation’s gender pay gap. Other initiatives such as the lactation suites and nursery are also likely to help by way of supporting women on their return to work.

The most effective family-friendly workplace policies, however, are likely to be flexible working and enhanced parental leave in order to encourage the more equal sharing of childcare between men and women.

Change will not happen overnight. Even with policies of this type, there will be other hurdles to face in seeking to close the gender pay gap. These include more engrained societal factors, such as how much value is placed on women's participation in the workforce. This is particularly relevant to certain sectors and industries in which issues of unconscious bias in recruitment are prevalent.

### **What is the future of 'family-friendly' workplaces and will more companies follow Goldman Sachs' example?**

In respect of larger employers, we are likely to see the move towards more family-friendly offices continue. The more employers that implement these features, the more likely it is that other employers will feel the pressure to compete in order to be able to retain and recruit the best talent.

In addition, the established trend towards flexible working becoming more accepted in workplaces, including job sharing, remote working and condensed hours, is likely to maintain momentum. Working practices of this nature will become increasingly widespread as employees expect greater flexibility to support them in balancing their professional and personal commitments.

*Interviewed by Samantha Gilbert.*

*The views expressed by our Legal Analysis interviewees are not necessarily those of the proprietor.*

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