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ALIGNING REWARD WITH BUSINESS STRATEGY

Inside information

Use data to shape flexible benefits schemes

A class of its own

The University of Lincoln revamps its benefits package

All change for pensions

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STRONG POSITION

Financial wellbeing supports business needs

eVouchers now available to order online

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT SUSAN ON RECEPTION:

1) SHE HAS A CRUSH ON JOHN IN ACCOUNTS

2) SHE WAS A BACKING DANCER FOR ALL-GIRL RAP GROUP SALT 'N' PEPA

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Source: Research carried out among 270 companies Jan 2011.

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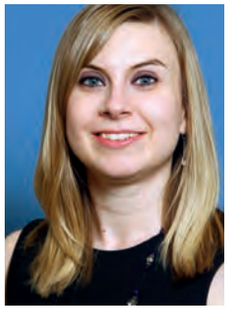
LEADER



Employers primed for financial wellbeing

How much involvement should employers have in their employees' lives, specifically in their financial affairs?

This question came to the fore again last month when the government rolled out a new interest-free loan scheme across the UK.

The scheme, which was previously piloted in London, works in the same way as a season ticket loan, enabling employees to take out a loan for a house rental deposit from their employer. Repayments are then made from their gross salary over an agreed period of time.

The very nature of this scheme highlights the prime position that employers are perceived to have when it comes to facilitating access to such support.

With many Britons still recovering from the effects of the economic downturn, and several years with no, or low, pay rises, such schemes can provide much needed support for staff. Yet with money matters still often perceived to be a taboo subject by many, will employees always be prepared to admit that they need help to their employer?

While there will undoubtedly be some who remain sceptical about placing all their eggs in one basket and relying on their employer for financial support, there are arguments for employers to provide a financial wellbeing strategy for their workforce.

Recognising the adverse effect that financial concerns can have on individuals' wellbeing, and taking steps to counter this, is one of the primary drivers behind the financial wellbeing strategies now offered by some employers.

Recognising the effect financial concerns can have on wellbeing is one of the primary drivers behind the strategies offered by some employers

But for these to achieve the maximum impact for employers, financial wellbeing strategies must be integrated into an organisation's wider benefits strategy, as well as its business objectives (see *Joined-up thinking* on page 16).

Financial wellbeing is just one of the areas that will come under the microscope at Employee Benefits Connect on 4 March. The event, which will take place at the Lancaster London, will bring together HR, benefits and reward professionals to discuss the hottest issues in benefits today, as well as discover future trends. I look forward to seeing you there.

Debbie Lovewell-Tuck, *Editor*
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PENSIONS

Pensions still pose challenges

Robert Crawford

As the first wave of re-enrolment requirements begins to loom into view later this year, pensions auto-enrolment is continuing to pose challenges for many staged employers.

The *Business barometer survey* published by Close Brothers Asset Management in January, for example, found that more than three-quarters (76%) of employer respondents now notice the administrative burden created by auto-enrolment, a 7% increase since September 2014.

But 2015 marks the year for larger employers to embark on the next stage of their ongoing duties and re-enrol those employees that opted out when the first batch of organisations first auto-enrolled employees in 2012.

These employers must first identify all affected employees.

Tim Middleton, technical consultant at the Pensions Management Institute, said: "It is vitally important that the employer is able to distinguish between those who are to re-enrol and those who are to be enrolled for the first time.

"This is because postponement cannot be used in the case of re-enrolment. Following on from this, communications material issued needs to address the different circumstances of those being re-enrolled and those being enrolled for the first time. Employers will need to ensure that payroll software correctly identifies the two categories of employee affected."

With opt-out rates among these employers having been much lower than expected, pension and benefits professionals managers may not face as much of a challenge as originally predicted. Re-enrolment may also provide an opportunity for employers to review the systems that they have system in place to manage auto-enrolment.

According to Close Brother's survey, 45% of employers are now seeking to review their auto-enrolment processing system, with 32% planning a review within the next year.

@ Read a longer version of this story at *bit.ly/19oYG2M*

BETTELLEY'S BROODING

Follow Clare Bettelley on Twitter: @ClareBenefits

Employers should review their pensions provider

Clare Bettelley

Auto-re-enrolment provides a great opportunity for employers to review their pension scheme setup, to help re-engage with staff.

Organisations should consider, for example, whether they have appointed the right provider with which to auto-enrol. Has the provider offered the employer the necessary or expected level of support for both the organisation and its employees?

Has the provider's technology coped with employee volumes and opt-out requests? If not, how can the employer address these issues as part of its re-enrolment project, assuming that it has a project under way, or at least in the pipeline?

Has the provider assisted the employer with its employee communications campaign? Assuming an employer has measured the effectiveness of its campaign, has it been effective? If not, how can it work with its provider to tweak its strategy for the re-enrolment project?

And what wider opportunities does re-enrolment present? Could, for example, employers use it as an opportunity to re-engage employees with their financial education programme, or perhaps their entire benefits package?

But a number of employers I've been speaking to in recent weeks are not making any special provisions for re-enrolment.

Employers need to remember their pensions duties did not stop with their staging dates.

SHUTTERSTOCK

TOP 15 MOST VISITED STORIES ON THE WEB

1. John Lewis Partnership faces £12m holiday pay cost *bit.ly/1KV8IHh*
2. The desk staff can use in bed *bit.ly/15cUrVy*
3. Lookers launches employee discounts scheme *bit.ly/1C67TZC*
4. Disney, Pepsi and Starbucks to take part in wellbeing event *bit.ly/1DewJ8N*
5. BP freezes pay globally for 2015 *bit.ly/1yMVWFC*
6. John Lewis reviews DB and DC pension schemes *bit.ly/1K77wz3*
7. FCA to introduce protection for DC pension members *bit.ly/1tpgAeA*
8. Sports Direct faces bonus claims from zero-hours staff *bit.ly/1xfpk2h*
9. Tesco and Carillion to introduce health app *bit.ly/1ASLC1O*
10. Center Parcs incentivises financial education take-up *bit.ly/1KdVSki*
11. H&M, Welcome Break and Kings Group fail to pay minimum wage *bit.ly/1DHY3xG*
12. Obesity ruling could lead employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' *bit.ly/1zeJmiN*
13. Pensions minister sets out pot follows member change *bit.ly/1C5VmSn*
14. TalkTalk implements total reward statements *bit.ly/1u2T4iu*
15. Tesco closes DB pension and introduces new flex package *bit.ly/14QBGYr*

Ranked by number of page impressions between 9 January and 9 February.

The latest information on legislation and tax issues affecting employee benefits, including a dispute over bonuses at Sports Direct, the introduction of governance committees and new pension developments

CASE LAW

Sports Direct in legal tussle

Robert Crawford

Sports Direct is facing a legal tussle with 300 of its employees over claims made by those on zero-hour contracts that they were not eligible to participate in its bonus scheme.

In February, law firm Leigh Day sent letters to the retailer's legal team claiming more than £1 million in compensation on behalf of 30 zero-hours employees. The staff had worked there for more than five years, but were allegedly excluded from its bonus scheme because they were not classed as permanent staff.

In April 2013 alone, the scheme paid out more than £100 million to 2,000 employees.

Martin Warren, partner and head of human resources group at Eversheds, said: "The letters act as a warning to Sports Direct of the details of the claim. The defendant [Sports Direct] is expected to give a full written response within a reasonable period and both parties will explore the potential for settlement.

"We expect the claimants' solicitors to argue that long-serving zero-hour contract workers are 'permanent' employees and had a contractual entitlement to receive a share of the bonus paid out in previous years.

"Depending on the wording of the bonus scheme, this may involve legal arguments over the employment status of the zero-hour contract workers: whether they are employees or workers, with workers being more likely to work on a casual or irregular basis."

Sports Direct agreed to change its recruitment and policy practices for zero-hours staff in November 2014, which included clear written policies setting out the sick pay and paid holiday to which staff were entitled.

Although this is quite a specific case, if, as a result, it is found that zero-hour employees are entitled to the same benefits as employees engaged on more traditional employment contracts, zero-hour contracts might no longer be attractive for employers.

Any ruling is likely to analyse whether such arrangements circumvent the rights a 'fixed-contract employee' would otherwise be entitled to, and could therefore influence how employers treat the UK's estimated 1.4 million zero-hour contract workers and their benefits.

@ Read a longer version of this story at *bit.ly/1L2xkLp*

PENSIONS

Latest changes impacting pensions

Draft regulations to cap defined contribution (DC) pension scheme charges at 0.75% were put before Parliament in February.

From April, scheme charges will be capped at 0.75% unless employees have specifically chosen a more expensive option. The government will now allow employers to breach the cap if defaulting members into schemes with life insurance contracts attached.

Employees with life cover written into their pension scheme will benefit from the change.

The cap could save DC scheme members £100,000 over the course of their working life,.

The Financial Conduct Authority also made corresponding rules to control charges and the introduction of independent governance committees (IGCs) for workplace personal pension schemes from April 2015.

The role of IGCs will be to assess the value for money of pension schemes.

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

Jacqueline Reid
is a senior lawyer at Linklaters

Will IGCs bridge the pensions gap?

Following increased government scrutiny of defined contribution pensions, providers of contract-based pension arrangements will have to introduce and maintain independent governance committees (IGCs) from April 2015.

In a trust-based model, schemes are run by trustees, who operate independently from sponsoring employers, and have duties to look after members' interests. There is currently no equivalent for contract-based arrangements. The government will change this by transposing certain trust law duties into requirements for IGCs. In particular, IGCs acting independently will have to assess and report on the extent to which their providers' schemes offer value for money for their members.

The jury is out, however, on the extent to which this will bridge the governance gap. IGCs can make recommendations, which providers can (but are not required to) implement for future members.

IGCs can also whistleblow to the Financial Conduct Authority, employers or members where they feel that the provider has not addressed their concerns satisfactorily. However, IGCs cannot make changes to improve value for money for existing members.

Even where it is clear that a fund is underperforming, neither IGCs nor providers can vary existing members' contractual pension arrangements by moving their savings from that fund without members' express consent.

@ To read more advice from tax and legal experts, go to: *bit.ly/RYrvb6*

Meet the Employee Benefits Awards 2015 judges

The 13th annual Employee Benefits Awards 2015 comprise 23 categories, allowing benefits professionals to showcase, and gain recognition for, outstanding work that they have undertaken in the last year.

Entries will be judged by a highly respected panel of judges, and winners will be announced during the awards ceremony on 12 June in the Artillery Garden at the HAC, London.

This is the biggest industry gathering in the employee benefits calendar, so make sure you are there.

The judges are:

Panel chairs:


Debbie Lovewell-Tuck, editor, Employee Benefits


Clare Bettelley, associate editor, Employee Benefits


Jane Fenwick, global head of benefits, Shire Pharmaceuticals


Neil Morrison, group HR director, Penguin Random House

Judges:


Roland Baskeyfield, group reward manager, the Co-operative Group


Carol Baylis, EMEA total rewards senior director, Hitachi Data Systems


Joanna Bean, head of reward (UK and Ireland), Samsung Electronics


Neal Blackshire, reward manager, McDonald's Restaurants


David Brackwell, head of organisational health, Fujitsu UK and Ireland


Adam Brooke, employee benefits and wellness manager, JP Morgan


Kristina Caxton, business partner, people and culture, MEC UK


Mark Cliff, reward director, Manchester Airports Group


Nick Court, reward and benefits manager, Carlsberg UK


Gemma Dainty, reward manager, benefits, Vodafone


Sushma Dhonsi, benefits manager, EMC Computer Systems UK


Paul Durrant, director, compensation and benefits and pensions, Thales


Claire Eckett, HR manager (reward and benefits), University of Reading


Richard Farrer, corporate pensions and benefits manager, Novartis Pharmaceuticals UK


Amber Garner, benefits team leader, Home Retail Group


Susan Gee, employee health and wellbeing manager, Yorkshire Water


Narinder Kaur, group human resources director, Churchill Retirement


Daryl Maitland, HR manager, Cafcass


John Mayor, head of UK reward, Danone UK Affiliates


Toria McCahill, head of reward, Dentsu Aegis Network


Neil McCawley, head of reward, benefits and policy, Wolseley UK


Leanne McLean, senior general manager, reward (UK, Ireland and Nordics), Ceva Logistics


Brian Newman, vice president, HR International, Live Nation Entertainment


Sally Purbrick, head of reward, Anglian Water


Joanne Reed, reward business partner, benefits, Virgin Media


Jacqui Riches, employee health and wellness manager, EMEA, Quintiles


Phil Rixon, senior reward manager, Ladbrokes


Tony Robertson, group pensions manager, William Hill


Pete Strudwick, pension and benefits partner, LV=


Sharon Tebb, compensation and benefits manager, Withers


Anne Teggart, global head of benefits, Misys


John Whitaker, benefits consultant, Sky


Ashleigh Witcher, senior benefits co-ordinator, Serco

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PEOPLE MOVES

Cross takes up role at Equinix

Robert Cross has joined web hosting organisation Equinix as senior reward manager, Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA). He is responsible for developing and implementing reward policies, processes and procedures, as well as managing projects and programmes. Cross previously held roles at Tui Travel as interim head of reward, UK and Ireland, and at ESAB Holdings as global head of reward.

Hutchinson receives promotion

Euan Hutchinson has been promoted to global process owner, total rewards to pay, at Johnson and Johnson. In his new role, Hutchinson will be responsible for ensuring that the organisation's total reward to pay processes run as optimally and smoothly possible. He previously worked at Skype and Hewlett-Packard.

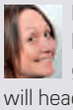
Hope joins TSB Banking Group

David Hope has joined TSB Banking Group as director of performance and reward. In this role, Hope will be responsible for developing and delivering TSB's reward strategy. He has joined the bank from Aviva, where he was HR director, group reward.

Coats hires John Lovell

Coats has appointed John Lovell group pensions director. Lovell is responsible for overseeing Coats' global pension schemes as well as developing the organisation's pension strategy. He has joined from Sainsbury's, where he was head of pensions.

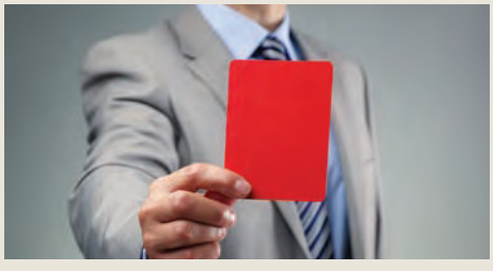
Davidson now at Dixons Carphone



Dixons Carphone has hired Jenny Davidson as group reward director. She will head up the reward function across the Dixons Carphone Group, with responsibility for the strategy and implementation of all pay and benefits, as well as reward integration projects across the organisation.

MOST TALKED-ABOUT NEWS

The total number of employers fined for failing to comply with their workplace pensions duties totalled 169 by the end of 2014, according to figures from The Pensions Regulator (TPR).



"The message from TPR is loud and clear. Not complying is not an option. The crackdown is crucial to the continued success of auto-enrolment. Those employers left to stage should sit up and take notice; TPR is prepared to use the stick as well as the carrot to ensure compliance."
Nathan Long, head of corporate pension research, Hargreaves Lansdown

"This backs up our belief that smaller employers are finding auto-enrolment more difficult to deal with than big employers with larger resources that made the task seem easy. Without having the luxury of large HR, payroll and finance departments that larger employers benefit from, it seems logical that we will see the number of fines increasing at a greater rate as the months go by."
Adam Bexson, consultant, Barnett Waddingham

100 Club column

Kelly Mitchell is HR business partner, policy and reward, at Home Group

employee benefits 100 Club

In association with AON

Prepare for childcare changes

With the upcoming changes to childcare vouchers in autumn this year, now is the time for employers to act to ensure that their organisation and employees are prepared.

Some parents could potentially be worse off under the new tax-free childcare scheme, due to different conditions for eligibility and lower savings for some.

Once the tax-free scheme is introduced, employer-provided childcare voucher schemes will no longer be open to new applicants. However, employees already receiving childcare vouchers can continue to order these while their employer continues to run the scheme, or until their child is 15 years old (or 16 if disabled).

It is therefore an ideal time for employers to communicate their childcare voucher scheme to their employees, and to make them aware of the changes, to ensure that they have the opportunity to make the right choices.

Employers should speak to their provider to see if they can provide assistance.

Communication methods that we are using to engage and inform our staff include a 'Congratulations' card when employees go on maternity or paternity leave containing information on childcare vouchers and links to family-related videos, webinars, emails and live chats.

It is also important for employers that use the savings that they gain from paying lower national insurance (NI) contributions to reinvest back into their benefits package to start planning for the potential reduction now.

Consideration could be given to introducing new salary sacrifice arrangements that may be attractive to their employees, as well as to produce employer NI savings. These include cars, bikes for work, holidays, professional qualifications and mobile phones.

Childcare vouchers are one of our most popular benefits on offer to staff, so employers need to be already planning for the change by providing other benefits that appeal to working parents.

These include relevant retail discounts and a bespoke re-introduction back into the workplace when returning from maternity leave.

The 100 Club comprises industry leading lights who have contributed to Employee Benefits

This month's big question:

How could the general election impact employee benefits?

The upcoming general election comes against a backdrop of a growing UK economy.

Although pay is now outpacing the cost of living, it will take a few years more before real earnings are back to their pre-recessionary levels.

The idea of a living wage is one reward issue that will come to the fore during the election campaign. This could put pressure on some employers to switch their reward budget from benefits towards increasing base pay. In addition, I expect political parties to be looking at how they can boost the tax take in light of the way in which the government is still spending more than it is getting back in tax receipts.

One target could be the tax treatment of workplace pensions. For example, the annual allowance on pension contributions could be cut further, along with the lifetime allowance, with the justification being that it is high earners who enjoy the lion's share of pension tax relief.

We could also see a review of salary sacrifice arrangements to examine whether they should be restricted to particular benefits.

And there could be workplace benefits that political parties want to promote through their tax regime. For example, concerns about the physical, mental and financial resilience of the UK workforce could stimulate debate on which employee benefits best foster wellbeing.

Looking ahead, we hope the general election also encourages the political parties to debate what can be done to improve workplace productivity, including the role of benefits in fostering long-term sustainable growth.

Charles Cotton is performance and reward adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

The pre-election campaign is heating up, with political parties battling for votes by focusing on some key issues affecting employees.

We can expect to see the national minimum wage continue to increase. The Conservative Party's sights are set on reaching a minimum wage of £7 per hour, while the Labour Party has pledged to increase the minimum wage to £8 per hour by 2020.

A Labour government would also increase the level of fines payable by employers that fail to pay the national minimum wage.

A continued focus on pensions is guaranteed. If the Labour Party wins the majority of votes, it will seek to make more employees eligible for auto-enrolment by decreasing the minimum earnings threshold from £10,000 to £5,773.

Another big topic will be zero-hours contracts, with the exclusivity clause on its way out. Labour and the UK Independence Party have both pledged a law that would require employers to offer a fixed-hours contract to any employee who has been on a zero-hours contract for one year.

Regarding childcare, the Conservative Party plans to implement its proposal for a tax-free childcare allowance of up to £2,000 for every child under 12 years old and Labour pledges to increase free childcare for working parents to 25 hours per week, but we will have to wait until 7 May to see which pledges come to fruition.

While none of these policies are groundbreaking, one can see that the intention is to improve employee benefits.

Michelle Tudor is an employment and education solicitor at Barlow Robbins

I think that pensions will be a focus of the general election, because this topic is always a political hot potato.

I don't think any new government will back-track on the new flexibilities offered following the 2014 Budget. Not only would it be a huge amount of work to unravel, but the changes bring in much needed additional tax revenue for the UK.

But I suspect we will see a reduction in pensions tax relief. I don't think it will be removed, but I think it will be restricted, particularly for higher earners. There is also a good chance of the annual allowance being reduced again.

It is unclear whether anyone will be brave enough to curtail the state pension further. I doubt we will see any really significant changes, but I think we'll hear further murmurings of an increase to the state pension age.

The possibility of merging income tax and national insurance remains on the agenda, but it is not yet clear what this would mean for salary sacrifice arrangements.

I think that the replacement of childcare vouchers later this year remains in the balance, with existing childcare voucher providers challenging how National Savings and Investments was appointed.

I do not think that we are likely to see a significant realignment of NHS services following the election.

Pressure to fill NHS provision gaps will continue for large employers through private medical insurance arrangements, along with a continued focus on mental health.

Dave Roberts is head of pensions and benefits at Virgin Media

Do you agree with these views? Join the discussion by searching for the **EmployeeBenefits** group on LinkedIn

GLOBAL BENEFITS IN NUMBERS

Marianne Calnan rounds up the latest facts and figures around global benefits

When asked if their employer currently has a travel plan in place, nearly half (49%) of employee respondents said no, 29% said yes and 22% said they did not know. *(Source: Policy in practice 2015 business travelers, The Forum for Expatriate Management, February 2015)*

In emergencies, 38% of employers have a communication protocol and 20% have a crisis management plan. *(Source: Policy in practice 2015 business travelers, The Forum for Expatriate Management, February 2015)*

Most employees around the world received a pay increase in 2014 and can expect to receive comparable increases in 2015. *(Source: Global salary increases survey, Aon Hewitt, November 2014) bit.ly/1E0Ylg7*

The UK improved its position in the European pay league in the last 12 months according to base salaries for professional staff in the UK at both entry and middle-manager level, which are now ranked 13th and 17th, respectively, out of the top 15 European economies, compared with 15th and 10th in 2013. *(Source: Global 50 remuneration planning report, Towers Watson, December 2014) bit.ly/1AmDSTZ*

Less than a quarter (20%) of UK organisations have a fully implemented wellbeing strategy, compared with 29% of global businesses. *(Source: Working well: A global survey of health promotion, workplace wellness and productivity strategies, Buck Consultants at Xerox, December 2014) bit.ly/1z7U5I9*

22%

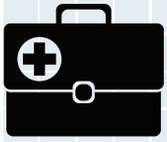
of global or regional benefits managers in multinational organisations said they have access to financial data on the cost of their global benefits programmes *(Source: 2014 current and emerging global benefits themes research, Towers Watson, June 2014) bit.ly/1DFnIG5*

82% of employers in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) cited the increased financial burden on their benefits budget as the key barrier to implementing employee choice programmes. *(Source: 2014 EMEA Employee choice survey in benefits report, Mercer, June 2014) bit.ly/1DhVMHZ*

The highest global salary increase budgets for 2014 are in Brazil, China and India, at 7.2%, 8.2% and 10.5% respectively. *(Source: 2014–15 Salary budget survey, WorldatWork, July 2014) bit.ly/1DFosuQ*

38%

More than a third (38%) of HR professionals said they have difficulty in providing a flexible global benefits strategy for different employee demographics. *(Source: Global employee benefits watch 2014, Thompsons Online Benefits, June 2014) bit.ly/1Md5MGu*



25%

of expatriates said they do not have international health insurance cover because they think they do not need it and 12% of respondents thought that they would be looked after by their new country's state healthcare system *(Now Health International, October 2014) bit.ly/1weBuNq*

JOINED-UP THINKING

An integrated financial wellbeing strategy linked to business needs can help to ensure the health and happiness of employees, says **Robert Crawford**

JACKO

Even the most paternal of employers will have boundaries in place around their involvement in employees' lives. Many will still draw the line at any involvement in employees' finances beyond the workplace benefits they offer, but there are solid reasons why employers should be concerned about improving the financial wellbeing of their workforce.

Barclays Corporate and Employer Solutions' (C&ES) *Financial wellbeing: the last taboo in the workplace* research, published in May 2014, found that 46% of employee respondents worry about their finances, 18% often lose sleep worrying and 20% of employees said financial problems often interfere with their work.

Improving financial capability and wellbeing among employees increases general health scores by a far higher percentage than giving them an extra £1,000 per month, regardless of income level, according to the *Financial capability, income and psychological wellbeing* report, published in July 2011 by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex.

Having low financial capability could cause employees stress, worry and, in some cases, to take time off sick from work. Cognitive psychologist and business improvement specialist Dr Lynda Shaw says: "Improving financial capability is critical on the journey to better financial wellbeing."

Employers therefore need to understand just what financial wellbeing involves. In short, it refers to subjective perceptions and objective indicators of an individual's personal financial status. Financial wellbeing involves having adequate financial resources, as well as the capability and capacity to make informed decisions in order to attain and maintain financial security. It also means having the motivation and resilience necessary to achieve wellbeing.

Roger Breeden, UK defined contribution and savings product leader at Mercer, says: "It's about understanding an employee's financial state and offering, not just to those that want it but to all, guidance and resources to help staff make better-informed decisions."

Identify needs of employees

Employers looking to boost their workforce's financial wellbeing should start by identifying the needs of their employees to get a clear picture of the key issues they are facing. This can be done through short surveys, focus groups and segmentation.

Katharine Photiou, head of workplace savings at Barclays C&ES, says: "HR directors need to understand the pillars of a strategy. For example, what are employees' needs? What is the business case for it? Is it engagement, productivity or risk? How can it be aligned to the [organisation's] objectives? Then they need to develop financial wellbeing and identify the appropriate solution."

Tim Perkins, director of financial education provider Nudge Global, adds: "An integrated strategy means three things: first, making sure a wellbeing strategy is integrated with what the organisation is doing, and integrated with the wider benefits offering such as health, pension, total reward and flexible benefits. It is also about good communication but, importantly, the actual content of the programme needs to deal with an employee's financial wellbeing."

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS. . .

- **46% of employees worry about their finances.**
- **An effective financial wellbeing strategy should support the needs of employees.**
- **Workplace savings and education can encourage saving and boost wellbeing.**
- **An integrated strategy must link to business needs.**

> HR directors need to understand the pillars of a strategy. For example, what are the employees' needs? What is the business case for it?
>
> Katharine Photiou, Barclays C&ES

Education will be the most important aspect of any financial wellbeing strategy, but looking at this in the context of a business's total reward package, and using this to encourage savings, increase employee spending power and provide assistance where needed is also important.

Employee share schemes can help to create a greater sense of financial wellbeing, while other savings vehicles such as a pension and a workplace individual savings account (Isa) can encourage staff to increase their savings buffer.

Meanwhile, incorporating an employee assistance programme into a strategy can help support debt management, while employers could also promote their voluntary benefits offering or employee discount schemes to help money go further.

Jeanette Makings, head of financial education at Close Brothers Asset Management, says: "A lot of employers offer something in each category, such as childcare vouchers, savings schemes via salary sacrifice [arrangements] or voluntary benefits. While increasing financial wellbeing is important [through education], a strategy should make employees aware of benefits available to use to help save money and reduce spend."

A financial wellbeing strategy therefore should not be looked at in isolation. Given that it can be a cause of physical ill health, some employers have addressed this within the context of their health and wellbeing policies.

For example, Google's wellbeing programme encompasses employees' emotional, physical and financial health. This was launched in 2010 as an extension of its healthcare plan.

CASE STUDY **ANGLIAN WATER**

Strategy evolves to help employees' financial matters

Anglian Water has integrated financial wellbeing into its approach to employees' health and wellbeing since 2007.

Sally Purbrick, head of reward at Anglian Water, says: "It is not done in isolation. All the areas join up around financial management with a theme of healthier employees. Financial wellbeing is just one of the enablers to a less stressed workforce."

The first step of Anglian Water's financial wellbeing strategy was a loyalty savings scheme, which replaced its share scheme after the organisation delisted in 2007.

The scheme, which is now provided by Barclays Corporate and Employer Solutions, is designed to encourage employees to save, with payments coming directly out of pay over a three-year period. The scheme is also linked to the organisation's business objectives, which, if met, means employees receive a bonus on top of their saving.

"The scheme is about helping staff save for the short term, with contributions up to £250 per month," says Purbrick.

"We also have a good pension scheme and we make the schemes all about good-practice money management to help remove stress and inconvenience."

Anglian Water's offering has expanded to include hardship loans for employees hit with unexpected circumstances, and water bill salary sacrifice.

It also offers financial masterclasses for employees to help with money management and to build employee wellbeing around, for example finances, mortgage deals and savings.

Purbrick says: "Financial wellbeing is about being mindful that staff do need help. It might not be that they have problems, but that there can be better opportunities with the way money is managed."

Meanwhile, BlackRock rebranded its financial education programme for US staff in April 2012 by grouping it into three financial wellness categories, one of which comprises group risk benefits.

According to Katie Nedl, global head of benefits at BlackRock, the organisation encourages its employees to think about financial wellness and plan for their goals, whether short term or long term, as well as for the unexpected.

Creating a strategy linked to an organisation's health and wellbeing strategy should be underpinned by measures ensuring it caters to all financial health segments and life stages. Jonathan Watts-Lay, a director at Wealth at Work, says: "Relevant education around different career stages will lead to wellbeing.

"Benefits will help to drive more value around wellbeing. Someone at 23 will not want to talk about pensions but might want to talk about saving for a mortgage."

Introducing any new strategy will require buy-in and employers should align this to business objectives, be that reducing absence through reduced financial stress, improving productivity or reducing risk to boost shareholder return.

The University of Lincoln linked financial wellbeing with its business objectives by extending some reward initiatives to its business focus: its students. Where possible, it provided financial wellbeing support across the campus for staff and students (read the employer profile, p44).

> "Any wellbeing strategy can be aligned to what the organisation is trying to achieve"
>
> Jeanette Makings, Close Brothers Asset Management

"Employers should look at what it is," says Makings. "Is it to produce wellbeing around a certain benefit, or benefits change or to help employees understand more to be financially well?

"Any wellbeing strategy can be aligned to what the organisation is trying to achieve. Employers can do that by setting metrics from the outset and looking at where it sits on the HR agenda or wider overarching objectives, such as a more productive workforce. Only then can it be aligned with the whole strategic piece to fit with what the organisation is trying to address."

Barclays' Photiou adds: "When appealing to a finance director, talk in pounds and pence, but also talk in terms of boosting engagement, improving productivity and reducing risk. Financial wellbeing with high engagement scores has greater shareholder return."

Everyone is different

Technology helps employers to take a personalised approach, but communications should be segmented to provide relevant information to the right staff. Simple, clear, consistent and timely communications can all aid take-up and knowledge.

Nathan Long, head of corporate pension research at Hargreaves Lansdown, says: "Learning how to segment can build attractive communications. It can give information about debt management through to pension changes to the relevant [staff] but employers do need to be careful how to pitch messages to encourage financial wellbeing, to encourage them to attend events or anything the employer puts on."

One way to optimise take-up could be to incentivise staff. For example, at Center Parcs, more than 500

employees attended financial education seminars after it introduced an incentive scheme to boost take-up. The most effective strategies will combine human interaction with a strong base of online or electronic resources, says Angus Jones, chief executive officer at independent financial advisery firm Clarity. "An online portal needs to be the hub of this process to hold the key information of an individual's circumstances. It then becomes the norm rather than an events-based project," he explains.

But no matter how comprehensive the strategy, employers should bear in mind that some employees may see money as something of a taboo subject. They may be reserved about asking for help when in financial difficulty and may refrain from talking about it.

Shaw says: "People do not talk about their financial wellbeing. It is a taboo. You get some employees that are glued to it, but others, more often that not, deny it. Employers are not sure how to handle it, but with the right strategy they can encourage people to assess their finances and boost their wellbeing overall."

While the government's plan for children to be taught about money from 2014 in schools will go some way to help future generations of employees, employers must step up and show a duty of care for existing generations.

Photiou says: "Younger generations will force financial wellbeing into the norm. They have different needs than the older generation. They want a sense of purpose and will want to work for an employer that cares. But employers need to complete the whole cycle to make a holistic approach. It takes three-quarters of the year to look at employees' needs. It is an eight- to 12-month job. It has got to be embedded into everything the organisation does." EB

> "People do not talk about their financial wellbeing. It is a taboo. Some employees deny it"
>
> Dr Lynda Shaw

Robert Crawford
is a reporter at
Employee Benefits

@ Read also *The role of group risk in financial, mental and physical wellbeing* at *bit.ly/U6Ct19*

Viewpoint

Lindsay Cook
is co-author
of *Money Fight Club: Saving you money one punch at a time*

Employers recognise that financial worries are a cause of workplace stress and that this is not restricted to those on the lowest salaries.

The higher up the pay scale you travel, the more likely it is that discussing money worries is a financial taboo, leaving these employees feeling isolated.

One of the first things to do is to unravel where the money goes. The fact is that after tax, national insurance, commuting costs, housing, utilities and that ultimate luxury, food, even healthy salaries can look denuded. And that is before employees layer on things such as entertainment, a car, holidays and school fees.

Acknowledging this, and realising that many colleagues may be in a similar boat, is a first step towards a less stressed financial attitude.

Employers could also deal with work-specific spending issues, such as Friday spending and pay-day spending, effectively treating ourselves for having got through the working week or month.

This form of comfort spending is not necessarily indicative of too much work pressure or job unhappiness, but is worth exploring in a wellbeing context.

Often, employees need more information about practical things: whether a student debt will affect a mortgage application, how to save enough for a deposit when they are paying rent, how to cancel a TV sport or entertainment package and pension decisions.

Given that the world is going to continue to become more financially complex, empowering employees to get the most from their pay packet works well for all.

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A NEW DAWN?

Technology will be a key focus for cash plan providers, says **Clare Bettelley**

The ongoing strain on NHS services is continuing to fuel the growth of the health cash plan market, as employees demand more timely support for their health complaints.

According to the *Health cover UK market report 2013*, published by Laing and Buisson in July 2014, demand for employer-funded health cash plans rose by 15.4% between 2012 and 2013 to reach a total of 588,000 contributors.

Paul Shires, executive director of sales and marketing at cash plan provider Westfield Health, says: "The general election is looming and all of the [political] parties are promising to invest [in the NHS], but the reality is that money needs to be saved.

"More elective, non-urgent surgeries in the NHS are being delayed, even rationed, and mental health provision is falling short, too, so the whole NHS landscape is a difficult one, but it does provide opportunities for cash plan providers."

SHUTTERSTOCK

Consultation benefits

Westfield Health plans to focus on its consultation benefits, such as its health scans, with cash plan users able to access unlimited MRI and CT scans.

"This is probably our fastest-growing claims area, which shows that people are demanding to be seen quicker by a consultant of their choice, which our cash plans facilitate," says Shires.

The provider will also focus on wellbeing benefits this year, particularly wearable technology, to help employers track employees' health data with which to inform their workplace health and wellbeing strategies.

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS...

- **The health cash plan market will continue to grow off the back of the NHS's ongoing struggle to cope with the demands placed on its services.**
- **Wellbeing services will be a particular focus for cash plan providers in 2015.**
- **Online services to help speed up claims processes are also expected to grow.**

Fellow cash plan provider Medicash is also focusing on technology this year, with plans to launch an app that enables employees to submit their claims via their smartphones.

Sue Weir, chief executive at Medicash, says: "I think there is an expectation from [employees and employers] around wanting to work more with this digital age, so [they are] looking at speed of response and being paperless."

GP support service

Medicash also plans to enhance its GP support service, which currently enables employees to submit email queries to doctors. The cash plan provider is currently considering how to provide private GP appointments.

Weir says: "We can see a real pinch point at GP surgeries and employees wanting to get appointments when it suits them."

Bupa is also focusing on the speed with which employees can transact with the business, in addition to helping employers introduce integrated health and wellbeing strategies to their business as part of efforts to refine its existing product range.

Andy Nicholson, senior product manager at Bupa, says: "We are looking at the products that we have in place now in terms of making them better and enhancing them."

Nicholson, who says that dental, optical and complementary therapies continue to dominate the top three health cash plan claims made by employees, adds that Bupa will further develop its product range with employers' budgets in mind. "It is about making sure that plans meet their budgets," he says. "We have got be aware that [cash plans] are a low-cost product."

Medicash's Weir adds that providers must also be mindful of employers' need to demonstrate a return on investment as part of their focus.

The forthcoming launch of a health cash plan to cover statutory sick pay from Essential Supplementary Medical Insurance (ESMI), which launched in January 2013, is also designed to help employers address this need EB

Clare Bettelley
is associate editor
at *Employee Benefits*

@ **Read also *Top benefits taken up via health cash plans* at** *bit.ly/1hvDIkx*

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2. **What is right for me?**

   Individual guidance and support can be provided including a helpdesk and fully regulated advice. Questions can be answered such as, 'should I retire now, delay retirement or work part time?' and 'how should I take my income?' Also, other considerations such as their partner's pension and savings can be taken into account.

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CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Employers and their pension providers need to ask themselves 10 key questions ahead of April's reforms, says **Clare Bettelley**

Employers must be ready for the pension reforms coming into effect in April, so here are 10 key questions they should ask themselves and their pension providers to help them prepare.

1. Have I left it too late to prepare for the new pension reforms?

In a nutshell, no; employers have plenty of time to tweak their pensions strategies to incorporate the new pension reforms.

Jamie Jenkins, head of pensions strategy at pensions provider Standard Life, says: "Employees do not suddenly need to do things on 6 April just because the rules have changed. The freedoms become available forever more from 6 April."

Rob Booth, head of proposition at Now: Pensions, adds: "There is no such thing as too late, because employers may look at their demographics and see that no-one is near retirement in the next three or four years."

2. What level of responsibility do I want to take for retiring employees?

Employers must consider whether they want to simply inform their employees about their new retirement choices or whether they also want to educate them about the possible implications of these choices.

Booth says: "Employers may just want to wash their hands of [employees], or they might be a bit more paternalistic and want to ensure that they make the right choice."

SHUTTERSTOCK

3. How are employees likely to use the new pension freedoms?

Come April, employers will experience a whole range of approaches by their workforce to retirement, from some staff drawing down their entire pensions pots to others who will not touch their pots at all.

Mark Futcher, partner and head of defined contribution (DC) at Barnett Waddingham, says: "Lots of [employers] are guessing at the moment how the freedoms might be used."

It may be the case that some employees consider their DC pension scheme the more trivial aspect of their pension planning, and one that they can spend in the knowledge that they have a defined benefit (DB) pension scheme underpinning their income.

4. Does our scheme have a glide path structure that reflects employees' likely choices?

Employers must ensure that their pension scheme's glide path, its asset allocation strategy, is aligned to their employees' retirement plans. This means, for example, that the scheme's risk profile reflects, say, plans

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS...

- It is not too late for employers to prepare for the new pension reforms.
- Employers must decide if and how they plan to support employees approaching retirement.
- Preparation is likely to involve tweaking existing strategies, rather than spending additional budget, for many employers.

CASE STUDY **SCAPA GROUP**

Scapa questions employees' financial nous

When Ruth Patten joined Scapa Group as group reward manager in June 2014, she had a barrage of questions about the pension schemes in place.

She was keen to understand the level of financial awareness among employees at the adhesive parts manufacturer: "[I wanted to know] how much they really knew about pensions and how much of that is in the context of a wider financial savviness."

Patten found that most staff have a good understanding of when they want to retire, but a limited understanding of their pension.

"We have a smart employee population, but they had less awareness around the pension than I would have hoped for," she says. "I think this comes from a culture of employers having always provided very little choice on DB schemes and everything pretty much happening for [staff, which means that] they have had many years of not having to think about an investment strategy."

Consequently, Patten had to consider how best to communicate to staff, and the most appropriate messages to use.

Scapa, which operates a group personal pension scheme, provided by Zurich, and a closed DB scheme, has a workforce with a wide variety of employee demographics.

by the majority of the workforce to remain in work and contribute to their pension scheme into later life.

Booth says: "If the scheme is contract based, the pensions provider is going to come up with [a solution], but is the employer going to take [an] off-the-shelf [package] or design its own?"

5. How can I manage multiple drawdowns?

Employers must consider whether to manage multiple drawdown requests in-house using their existing workplace pensions scheme, or whether they plan to rely on their pensions provider to manage the transactions for them.

Jenkins says: "Our experience is that the vast majority of employers have been asking their providers how they will help them manage these."

Employers would therefore be best placed to talk their pensions provider about the possible support that it can provide to manage these requests.

6. Will employees be able to draw down just tax-free cash?

Employers need to prepare for employees that want to draw down just tax-free cash, or a mix of taxed and untaxed cash, from their pension pot.

Under the new rules, employees will be able to draw down up to 25% of their pension pot tax free as and when they choose.

Jenkins says: "Some pension schemes are just offering [a mix of taxed and untaxed cash drawdowns], so an employee wanting to just take the tax-free cash actually could not do so."

Employers need to ascertain their provider's approach to employees' drawdown requests.

7. How should I update my communications campaign to keep employees informed?

Employers with established pensions communications strategies may simply need to tweak their messages to incorporate the new pension reforms.

Futcher says: "It is not necessarily about employers increasing their spend on communication and engagement exercises, but about redirecting [their messages] at the most appropriate times."

But Angus Jones, chief executive officer at Clarity, says: "Employers must also consider which communications are appropriate in light of employees' total retirement savings."

8. How can we boost employees' general financial awareness?

Employers that have identified gaps in employees' pensions nous may consider offering workplace retirement planning support. This could be in the form of online financial modelling tools, seminars, workshops and access to independent financial advice.

9. This all sounds really complicated, so how will I cope?

Employers must consider their response to the new pensions rules in the context of their resources, as well as the extent to which their business strategy and corporate values actually require them to support staff in retirement.

Barnett Waddingham's Futcher says: "It is not [employers'] responsibility to help staff access their money."

Jones adds: "Employers have just got to provide tools [with which employees can make informed decisions], not all the answers."

10. What support can my pensions provider offer?

Employers should ask their pensions providers which products and services they will offer come April, how they will offer these and whether there is any additional cost involved in doing so. But organisations must accept that they may have to wait for this support EB

Clare Bettelley
is associate editor
at *Employee Benefits*

@ Read also *Will the market be ready for the 2015 pension reforms?* at bit.ly/1sYo6ww

iSTOCK

SUPPORT STRUCTURE

Employers are becoming more aware of the importance of eldercare, says **Marianne Calnan**

As more employees find themselves caught between caring for both children and elderly relatives, more employers are becoming aware of the support they may need.

This is set to become more of an issue as the population continues to age. According to the Institute of Public Policy Research's (IPPR's) *The generation strain: Collective solutions to care in an ageing society*, published in April 2014, by 2017 the number of older people needing care will outstrip the number of adult offspring able to provide this.

This is beginning to be reflected in employers' benefits provision. For example, the *Employee Benefits/Towers Watson Flexible benefits research 2014*, published in April 2014, found that eldercare looked set to be one of the fastest-growing benefits offered via a flexible benefits scheme.

The ability to work flexibly, enabling staff to better balance their work and caring responsibilities, is one way in which employers are offering staff support. More than a quarter (27%) of employers have introduced flexible-working initiatives to meet the needs of their ageing workforce, according to *The group risk employer research* published by group risk industry body Group Risk Development in January 2015.

Ben Black, managing director at care provider My Family Care, says: "The first step for employers when implementing eldercare is to identify those employees who are eldercarers. Caring for an elderly relative is something unusual to share in the workplace, because many employees and employers do not necessarily understand the emotional aspects of it."

Denise Keating, chief executive of The Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, adds: "Being part of the sandwich generation can be very stressful, so any help with career-limiting responsibilities such as eldercare can ease the pressure. Carers networks can also be great, because carers of all kinds can meet to share ideas and struggles."

Flexible-working options, therefore, can help to ease the stress faced by carers. Chris Minett, managing director at Ageing Works, an organisation that supports employees and families with ageing issues, says: "The blurring of the line between work and home is absolutely a good thing, as employers need to recognise and deal with employees' issues in order to get the best productivity from them."

Employers that do not currently provide eldercare solutions could face employee retention issues, says Black. "In terms of a business case, if an employer [does] not offer a sympathetic ear to staff who care for elderly relatives, staff are more likely to quit."

However, the *The Benefits research 2014*, published in May 2014, showed that just 4% of the 256 respondents offered eldercare in any form as a core benefit and 3% offered it as a voluntary benefit.

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS...

- **Emergency eldercare is the fastest-growing flexible benefit in the employee benefits market.**
- **Staff and employees seem to be becoming more aware of the importance of eldercare.**
- **Employers should provide emotional support, flexible working, practical advice and hotlines.**

Simple guidance

Keating says: "Administratively, employers need to get their heads around eldercare and provide staff with simplistic guidance.

"An advice and support strategy would work well, as employees do not necessarily know where to go or what to do when it comes to caring for an elderly relative, particularly because help is so disjointed."

Simon Bottery, director of policy and external relations at eldercare charity Independent Age, says: "At a basic level, employers need to comply with the laws of eldercare, and the spirit of the law, by understanding the problems that eldercarers face with humanity.

"Eldercarers can experience difficult and upsetting times, so support groups can help them discuss common problems with other carers, as well as gain free legal and benefits advice."

CASE STUDY JP MORGAN

Banking group adds eldercare to package

Investment and commercial banking organisation JP Morgan introduced eldercare benefits in February 2015.

Employees can select health screening and dental cover for their parents at the current corporate rates that they and their partners receive.

The new section of the organisation's flexible benefits portal, Elements, provided by Allianz Global Assistance, provides employees with the opportunity to cover themselves, their partner and their parents and parents-in-law for homecare assistance should an unforeseen accident or illness occur.

This covers help with getting dressed, preparing meals, chores, getting in and out of bed, travelling home from hospital and shopping.

Adam Brooke, employee benefits and wellness manager (Europe, the Middle East and Africa), says: "We found that eldercare really resonates with our diverse workforce."

Assistance is provided by a comprehensive homecare provider network with fully trained, experienced care staff, and there is no maximum age limit for parents covered.

My Family Care's Black believes that involving professional assistance is essential to ensuring that employees are offered the correct advice and support. "The home care system is one of the most complex systems; therefore it is likely staff will need help to know their rights and requirements," he says.

"Although most frontline care demands can be met by the relatives of the older person, more complex needs require a professional's approach."

SUPPORTING CARERS IN EMPLOYMENT

Government ministers launched a series of pilots exploring ways to help carers balance work with caring responsibilities in February 2015. The initiative encourages carers to use smartphones, email alerts and pop-up care centres to help them plan and co-ordinate formal and informal support.

The ideas are being trialled for two years as part of £1.6 million of pilot projects announced by minister for women and equalities Nicky Morgan, and Norman Lamb, minister for care and support at the Department for Health.

The nine pilot areas will explore how technology can be combined with professional support from the local authority, friends, neighbours and Time volunteers to ease the pressure of caring.

Minett adds: "Both reactive and proactive services can educate employees about the impact of the ageing workforce and eldercare.

"Reactive services include adapting an eldercarer's role around their caring responsibilities, perhaps flexible working, and proactive services include introducing staff to the resources about the ageing workforce that are out there, usually through seminars. But those with caring responsibilities have zero time to attend seminars."

Employers also have a key role to play in ensuring that employees are aware of the working patterns and support available to them when caring for older people. Black says: "Flexible working is something lots of employers are capable of doing now, and the best employers will provide emotional support, practical advice and hotlines."

Types of support

According to the *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)/Simplyhealth absence management survey*, published in October 2014, flexible-working arrangements are the most common type of support for eldercarers (68%), followed by compassionate leave (53%), paid or unpaid carers' leave (48%) and access to counselling (42%).

But even the best-laid plans can come under unexpected pressure. Should employees' caring arrangements fall through unexpectedly, benefits such as emergency eldercare can be used to fill the gap. This covers employees when the unexpected occurs and the member of staff needs time off work at short notice. Products such as My Family Care's Emergency Homecare offer access to a database of trained carers who staff can book when needed, by giving up to two hours' notice. In order to use the service, they must register and undergo an assessment of their dependent's needs. Services that are available through some employee assistance programmes can also help staff to source care for elderly relatives.

> Reactive and proactive services can educate employees about the impact of the ageing workforce
>
> Chris Minett, Ageing Works

Whatever support employers offer, they must ensure staff know that it is available. "Communication and marketing around eldercare need to improve to inform employees in a more effective manner," says Minett. "Smaller organisations are better placed to give advice and assistance on an ad-hoc, personal basis."

While supporting eldercarers can be a challenge for employers, there are advantages of doing so. "It's a lot of work for organisations to recognise eldercarers, but introducing something like a carer passport to be part of the employee's HR file, covering their caring responsibilities and how their role may need to be adapted saves that employee repeating the challenges they face to different line managers," says Minett.

"Or a carers' network can comprise something as simple as a private meeting or conference call, it does not cost too much and reflects progressive workplace culture."

Keating adds: "If employers want to have a competitive edge, they should be looking for the next big thing."

These elements are integral to effective eldercare agendas. Although it is clear that some employers are reacting to the appetite for eldercare, there is a great deal more that can be done EB

Marianne Calnan is a reporter at *Employee Benefits*

@ **Read also *What is driving demand for eldercare as a benefit?* at** *bit.ly/1pgHAbM*

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JUMP START SHARE SCHEME TAKE-UP

Well-communicated share plans can lead to more motivated and engaged employees, says **Georgina Fuller**


SHUTTERSTOCK

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS...

- **Last April, the government increased sharesave and share incentive plan (Sip) savings limits from £250 to £500 per month for sharesave, and from £125 to £150 for Sips.**
- **Organisations with Sips are entitled to employer national insurance contribution (NIC) savings, but employers are required to expense options under IFRS2.**
- **A good share plan can reportedly help boost productivity, engagement and recruitment, and aid retention.**

Share plans have been gathering momentum in recent years and their popularity is showing no signs of abating. According to Martyn Drake, managing director at Computershare Plan Management, there has been an increase in share scheme take-up, both on the employer and participant sides, over the past few years. "[Employers] have introduced or amended plans because they have more confidence in the economy, and the [sharesave] and share incentive plan (Sip) savings limits have increased thanks to changes the government made last April," he says.

These changes saw savings limits rise from £250 to £500 per month for sharesave schemes and from £125 to £150 for Sips.

The business case for share plans is pretty clear, adds Drake. "Employees who take part in share plans take less time off, work longer hours, are more motivated and are more likely to stay with the [employer]," he says.

According to research by Computershare and the London School of Economics, published in September 2014, 36% of 3,800 respondents said that a share plan was likely to help attract talented people to the organisation and 43% said that they would be more likely to recommend the firm to a friend if it had a good share plan.

Growing awareness

So how can employers boost take-up among their workforce? Simon Stafford, head of relationship management at Capita Asset Services, says many employees have come to expect plans as part of their employee benefits package. "We've noticed that employee awareness of share plans has grown in the last few years, leading to an expectation that they are included in employee benefits," he says.

Share plans can also help to boost engagement if they are communicated effectively. "Through intelligent plan design and communication, [employers] can encourage employees to share in the organisation's vision and objectives," says Stafford.

Pointing out the tax advantages to employees could also work in an employer's favour. Many share schemes, including company share option plans (Csops), sharesave schemes and Sips, are favourable for employers and employees alike. For employees, the link to transferring shares to individual savings accounts (Isas) within 90 days of release can be an effective way of avoiding capital gains tax. And employers offering Sips are entitled to employer national insurance contribution (NIC) savings, although there is a requirement to expense options under IFRS2.

It is also vital to make sure a scheme is communicated effectively and ensure that

CASE STUDY **ASDA**

Supermarket behemoth increases sharesave scheme take-up

Asda has made its sharesave scheme an integral part of its reward strategy in order to boost employee take-up.

Simon Bell, senior reward manager at the supermarket behemoth, explains: "Our sharesave scheme plays a key part of our reward strategy and we openly encourage participation throughout our organisation from hourly paid and salaried colleagues to board members."

Before designing its 2014 sharesave campaign, Asda carried out face-to-face research with a broad section of employees to test their understanding of the organisation's share plan and how effective they find the communication.

"One of the clear messages we received was that now our business is diversifying, colleagues have a strong affinity with their part of the organisation, and want to see things that are familiar and relevant to them reflected in our communications material, even down to the uniforms that [employees] wear," says Bell.

"Our material needed to be representative in order to encourage participation across the board. They also told us that they frequently make decisions based upon endorsements by their peers. This meant drawing on real-life examples and anecdotes from [employees] in each part of the business to better reflect the experience of their peer group."

One of the main challenges is to successfully connect with all of the 170,000 colleagues. This year, Asda used a blend of tried-and-tested methods, as well as new approaches. "Of paramount importance was the use of clear, simple language and strong visuals to make the subject matter easy to understand and readily accessible to every [employee]," explains Bell. "Our 2014 sharesave plan take-up increased by 8.6% on the previous year."

After reviewing enrolment methods

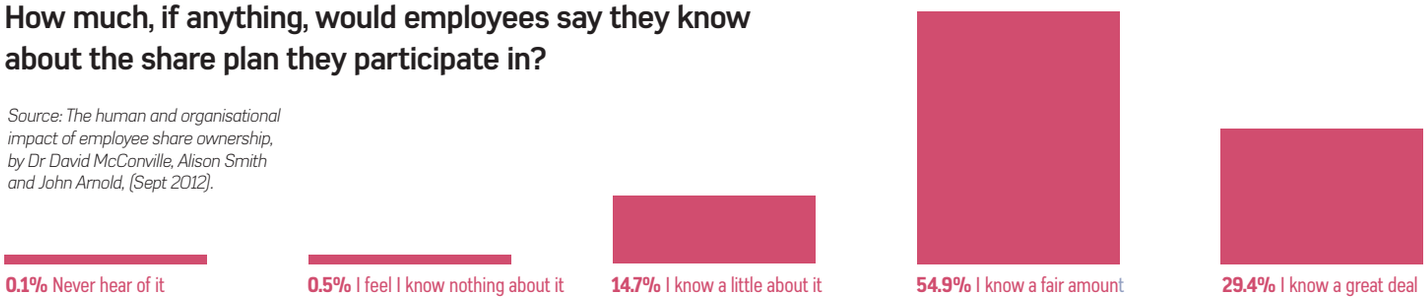
to make it easier for staff members to participate, this year 77% of Asda employees enrolled using SMS texts compared with 23% joining online.

Bell says that Asda's key tips for sharesave success are to create clear, simple and relevant communication and to create a brand. "Ours is the sharesave Asda piggy bank that appears in all our communications," he says.

Making sign-up as straightforward as possible is also key.

How much, if anything, would employees say they know about the share plan they participate in?

Source: The human and organisational impact of employee share ownership, by Dr David McConville, Alison Smith and John Arnold, (Sept 2012).



employees know what's on offer to them. "The success of a scheme is underpinned by two fundamentals: firstly, accurate systems and processes and, secondly, amazing communications," says Drake. "Understanding how to present, explain and embed an employee share plan using tailored communications is imperative. If [employers] don't get their communications right, their share plan will fall at one of its first hurdles. If [employers] do get it right, then they will be able to drive up participation, particularly on larger broad-based plans, and will reap all the rewards that come with that level of staff engagement."

> Understanding how to present, explain and embed a share plan is imperative
>
> Marytn Drake, Computershare Plan Management

Communication is key

Stafford agrees: "Don't underestimate the importance of awareness and educational communications; they can have a major impact on share plan take-up."

Phil Ainsley, managing director of employee services at Equiniti, says the surge in interest in share plans is also down to a number of other factors. "Market issues and the increases in market share values have had an impact and successful share plan maturities have increased confidence among employees," he says.

However, there are issues that could hinder growth in the market. These include the fact the share price has fallen in some organisations and there have been sharesave scale-backs.

But despite the challenges, actively taking steps to boost take up of share plans can prove beneficial for both employers and employees EB

Georgina Fuller
is a freelance journalist

@ Read also The impact of share ownership on productivity at: *bit.ly/1t7pgQW*

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QUIRKY CAMPAIGNS

Many organisations are thinking outside the box to light up workplace benefits for staff, says **Marianne Calnan**

SHUTTERSTOCK

Information overload is a feature of modern life, which means that employers have their work cut out when it comes to communicating their organisation's benefits package to employees.

Many organisations have devised quirky methods and messages for doing so. For example, E.On devised quirky campaign themes to engage staff in its benefits and to maximise take-up in its pension scheme take-up ahead of its auto-enrolment staging date on 1 April 2013, to coincide with its flexible benefits annual enrolment window.

Themes for the energy provider's pioneering pensions and benefits education campaign included 'Don't gamble with your future', which began with a pensions scratchcard, and an online game called 'Who wants to be comfortably retired?', which offered employees the chance to win £1,000 in a prize draw.

It also used a 'You're in the driving seat' theme to illustrate tax disc inserts, which went into employees' pay slips explaining its benefits.

Such initiatives led to it being awarded 'Best benefits communications – large employer' at the Employee Benefits Awards 2014.

Fellow employer Danone created a garden theme for its 'A great place to grow' employee communications campaign in 2014.

The campaign, which won the dairy organisation the 'Most engaging benefits package' at the Employee Benefits Awards 2014, was used for games to enhance employees' understanding of, and engagement with, Danone's benefits.

'Norman the gnome' was the star of the branding, and gnomes were delivered to each area of the business.

Alternative approach

Samsung also took an alternative approach to communicating with staff about its pension scheme by tasking its benefits champions to target 'at-risk' staff, such as those who had opted out of the pension scheme post auto-enrolment.

Its campaign won the award for 'Best pensions communications – small employer' at the Employee Benefits Awards 2014.

Cheryl Clements, business development manager at Tusker, advises employers to use existing workplace channels, such as cups, napkins, posters on the back of toilet doors and stickers placed over payslips encouraging employees to register with their benefits portal, through which to communicate their benefits. She says: "There is no point [employers] reinventing the wheel."

Meanwhile, Iain McMath, chief executive officer at Sodexo Motivation Solutions, believes in communicating through celebrations, such as staff parties.

But employers should not overlook more traditional communication methods.

Andrew Johnson, director-general of the UK Gift Card and Voucher Association, says: "Handwritten letters or putting a card on staff desks can still stand out more than the quirkier methods.

"Finding the right method for the right person can be the biggest motivator." EB

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS...

- **Quirky communications strategies can help engage staff with their workplace benefits.**
- **Strategies could include quirky campaign themes, staff champions and even traditional handwritten letters.**
- **Employers should ensure that their communications methods are appropriate for their workforce.**

Marianne Calnan
is a reporter at
Employee Benefits

@ **Read also *Gamification in pensions communication* at** *bit.ly/1pLcLgu*

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PUMP UP INTEREST

Employers should breathe new life into car salary sacrifice schemes, says **Marianne Calnan**

SHUTTERSTOCK

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS...

- **Refreshing a scheme will first require reassessing the initial principles for offering it.**
- **Car salary sacrifice schemes offer staff an all-inclusive package with a brand-new car, servicing and maintenance, road tax and insurance.**
- **All the advantages need to be emphasised to employees.**
- **Employers must also highlight the risks of schemes to staff.**

Car salary sacrifice schemes can be an attractive benefit for both staff and employers, but, at times, the complexities involved may affect take-up. And once a scheme has been in place for some time, what can employers do to maintain its attraction and breathe new life into their scheme?

Matthew Walters, head of consultancy services at Leaseplan, says: "Revamping a scheme is about reassessing, going back and exploring the initial principles of a scheme and tweaking them accordingly. Employers must make sure they still meet the business's and employees' needs."

Schemes offer staff an inclusive package of a car, maintenance, road tax and fully comprehensive insurance in return for employees forgoing a portion of their gross pay. Therefore, the money staff can save from participating in a scheme needs to be highlighted to them.

Sarah Hodgkin, salary sacrifice development manager at Hitachi Capital Vehicle Solutions, says: "Emphasising the advantages of taking a car through salary sacrifice is vital. In terms of cost, peace of mind and convenience, the schemes are ideal because they are usually provided on an all-inclusive basis."

Andrew Kirby, commercial director, employee benefits, at Zenith, adds: "Staff need to be well aware of the fact that car salary sacrifice plans include everything apart from fuel. They need to be encouraged to consider the other costs of running a car, and therefore understand the value of a scheme."

The positive aspects of taking part in a scheme for employees, such as the ability to reduce their carbon footprint by taking a low-carbon-dioxide (CO_2) car, and the savings that are available, should be emphasised to staff both when a scheme is implemented and beyond.

For example, according to research by Fleet Evolution in February 2014, employees who drive cars provided through a salary sacrifice arrangement can reduce their motoring carbon footprint by up to 42%.

Emissions limit

Meanwhile, according to the *Company car trends* research by GE Capital, published in August 2014, 22% of employers said a CO_2 emissions limit was the top criteria for employee car choice,

Andrew Leech, managing director of Fleet Evolution, says: "There are so many options in the market for staff to choose from, such as plug-in hybrid, four-by-fours or cars with low CO_2 emissions."

Reminding staff of the potential savings available can also help to revive a scheme and reinvigorate employee interest.

Michelle Howles, marketing director at Affinity Leasing, believes that such reminders are key to boosting and maintaining employee engagement with a scheme. "Staff can easily forget about what benefits are on offer to them if they are not at the forefront of their mind," she says. "Staff simply need to be reminded that the scheme is there when they need it."

Employers should also consider the communication methods used to reinvigorate a car salary sacrifice scheme. Guy Roberts, director of Novalease, says: "Different people like different things, so a range ➤

of communication through emails, online portals, videos and personalised communication of any kind works best."

In some cases, employers will need to increase the level of communication around their scheme. According to research by Zenith in July 2014, 85% of 327 employees would be open to further communications about their employer's car salary sacrifice scheme.

Leaseplan's Walters says: "The biggest issue we find is schemes are not marketed well. A car salary sacrifice scheme will fall over and die if so. HR, IT and marketing departments all need to be on board to keep it vibrant and relevant."

Understand workforces

Roberts also believes that employers should research their workforces to better understand what they want from a scheme. "Research conducted across the workforce can better engage those interested in a scheme," he says. "Surveys conducted online through short, simple text tend to be the most effective."

Knowing a workforce well enough to know what it requires from its benefits package can also enliven a car salary sacrifice scheme. Kirby says: "Employers could run car salary sacrifice surgeries for staff, as they are a really effective way to get individual questions answered through a web chat.

"It is always useful for employers to do upfront research to test demand, and to make sure the scheme is launched accordingly."

Sharon Richardson, commercial projects implementation manager at Leaseplan, adds: "Tailored communication can be really effective, as general communication can put a lot of staff off. Employers need only share what is necessary with employees, because it is easy to over-burden them with information and updates; keep it simple."

Planned campaigns, therefore, can be particularly effective. These could include email marketing, pop-up shops, e-shots highlighting special offers and open forums between management and employees, says Hodgkin.

"Staff should also be kept updated on new model availability," she says. "Highly anticipated models can encourage fresh take-up."

Employers should also keep staff informed of any tax or legislation updates that affect the scheme. "It is important to keep an eye on legislation updates associated with a scheme," says Leaseplan's Walters.

Furthermore, employers can benefit from the national insurance (NI) savings made, and many opt to reinvest these savings back into their car scheme in order to make the benefit more attractive to employees.

Employers should ensure they keep a car salary sacrifice scheme updated to ensure staff are aware of what is available to them when they need it. Employees will not necessarily join a scheme when it is launched, but rather when they need a new car.

Zenith's Kirby says: "Organisations tend to bombard their workforce with information, when the most effective strategy tends to be planned in advance, in a creative and fresh manner with a good mixture of communication.

"Highlighting the risks of a scheme is vital, because staff need to be educated correctly, and they need to be extremely careful when it comes to knowing how a scheme will affect their salary."

Another way to give a scheme a new lease of life is to physically show staff the cars on offer. As Leech says: "Nothing speaks louder than showing employees the products to touch and get excited about." EB

Marianne Calnan
is a reporter at
Employee Benefits

@ Read also *Buyer's guide to salary sacrifice car schemes* at *bit.ly/17hoz2K*

CASE STUDY UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Revamping car scheme re-engages staff

Ever since the University of Birmingham launched its car salary sacrifice car scheme for all 6,500 members of staff in October 2014, it has constantly reviewed its offering to help increase take-up.

Through the scheme, which is provided by SGFleet, staff can take up a fully maintained and insured car, and make savings through tax and national insurance (NI) efficiencies.

The scheme enables the university to compare CO_2 emissions of employees' new cars to the cars they are replacing. CO_2 emissions for cars available through the scheme have been capped at 120g/km as part of the university's carbon reduction strategy.

Monica Guise, post, portering, transport and interim sustainable travel manager at the University of Birmingham, says: "About 37% of employees drive to work and it's been fantastic to see how great this scheme is for them. We compiled an action plan including workshops, case studies, posters, e-banners and emails, because the success of a scheme is reliant on a strong marketing campaign"

The university has also communicated the scheme to staff using email, posters and TV displays around campus and on the university intranet. It will also be holding roadshows at its various colleges and around campus in the next few months.

Reviving car salary sacrifice

Word cloud created by Employee Benefits

TURN FOR THE BETTER

Data can inform flex plans but employers have yet to maximise the advantages, says **Clare Bettelley**

Employers are beginning to realise the value of data-based evidence to show the return on investment from their flexible benefits scheme to their finance and procurement teams, and there are myriad benefits in doing so.

Flexible benefits scheme providers hold data on every aspect of their employer clients' flex schemes, from the frequency with which their employees take up particular benefits to how they flex these up and down, based on factors such as their age, location, marital status and whether or not they have children.

Benefits professionals can use this data to monitor the effectiveness of their flex scheme in, say, supporting their organisation's talent management strategy by tracking scheme engagement levels among employees that have recently left their organisation.

Employers could also use their data to monitor any correlation between employees' engagement in their flex scheme, particularly in any health and wellbeing benefits on offer, and their sickness absence levels, to help measure the effectiveness of the scheme in boosting staff wellbeing.

IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS...

- **Employers can use flexible benefits scheme data to assess how well their scheme supports their organisation's business objectives.**
- **But they need to ascertain from their flex providers and benefits consultants the range of data that is available on their scheme, plus the format in which it can be provided.**
- **Flexible benefits providers may charge for data analysis.**

But employers' interest in, and requests for, flex scheme data is currently low. Alex Tullet, head of benefits strategy at benefits consultancy Capita Employee Benefits, attributes this to cultural issues surrounding many benefits professionals' approach to flex scheme design.

Gut instinct

"A lot of decision making has historically been based on the gut feel of HR departments and benefits consultancies and very little on data, but now we have the data to test [these instincts]," he says.

This gut-instinct-based approach to benefits selection helps to explain why so many employers struggle with flex scheme issues such as low take-up.

Tullet recalls one employer that suffered low scheme take-up because of its inappropriate benefits offering, based on what it thought staff wanted. The organisation offered private medical insurance, life assurance and a workplace pension to a workforce with an average age of 31 and an average annual salary of around £25,000.

"Employees at that level are interested in where they can save money, such as through gadget loans; they are not interested in insurance," he says.

"Because of that, the employer had low engagement, so we had to get it to re-engage with its employees with a revised benefits package based on an understanding of what it is that its employees will be interested in, and [teach it] how to communicate effectively with those employees off the back of the investigatory work that we did with the data we have."

The majority of the current interest in flex scheme data is dominated by large employers, which are particularly interested in benchmarking the take-up rates of their flex benefits with those of their industry peers.

Terry Gostelow, an account director at flexible benefits software provider Staffcare, says: "At the end of an enrolment window, employers will be interested in the take-up rates of benefits, so they can see whether or not staff are actually interested in the benefits that they provide.

"Increasingly, we are seeing [employer] clients wanting analytics around scheme usage, to be able to understand the staff journeys [motivating their benefits selection]."

Benefits consultants are driving employers' interest. "Consultants might provide advice on whether that fits within industry benchmarks, which informs employers' decisions for the following scheme year," he adds.

Review trends

Manesh Patel, senior benefits consultant at Aon Employee Benefits, says: "If a scheme has already been in place and the employer is going through a renewal cycle [around its enrolment window], we have a review session explaining the trends we are looking at for the following years and which benefits to consider.

"We use this as a basis to provide any recommendation, because employers do not necessarily know what is happening [in the benefits market]."

He adds that employers typically want analysed information rather than raw data to work with. Tullet believes that now, in light of the UK's economic recovery, is the perfect time for employers to start sourcing the data underlying their flex scheme, whatever their preferred format. "Post 2007, there was a massive switch away from some of the more luxury-type benefits, such as wine clubs and concierge services, and into defensive benefits, such as retail discounts," he says.

"We are now looking at whether or not we are starting to see the tail-off of that trend, and whether employers are starting to move back [into luxury-type benefits]. It has not happened yet, but that is our prediction."

Employers that are keen to use data to help shape their flex scheme should start by talking to their flex providers about the data that they can, and are willing to, provide, ➤

Viewpoint

Jim Lister
is a principal lawyer at Pannone, part of Slater and Gordon

Employers must consider possible risks of data mining

The mining of staff data raises data protection issues, although in-house mining is usually much less problematic than wider big data projects.

Any third party that employers use to mine their data will be considered to be a 'data processor' for the purposes of the Data Protection Act. That means employers will need to tie them up to a data processor agreement, which commits them to good practices.

A data mining report is unlikely to create new personal data. It will usually identify trends, but not name individual staff members. But any data trawl is itself considered to be 'processing', even if it is automated, and that processing must be conducted lawfully.

Data mining associated with incentive schemes will usually involve processing 'ordinary' and 'sensitive' personal data. Information on sickness and maternity leave, for example, will be 'personal data' and must be handled accordingly.

Consideration must be given to whether the individual consent of staff members is needed before a data trawl is undertaken. It is arguable that the general consent wording appearing in most modern contracts of employment, which permits processing for normal HR purposes, would be sufficient to allow data mining of ordinary and sensitive data. Most organisations will proceed on that basis, without seeking specific consent.

The issue that could really hurt employers is data security. Fines for breach of data security can be substantial, up to £500,000 in serious cases. Employers should therefore ensure that only staff who really need to are able to access mined data.

CASE STUDY **SKY**

Sky uses data to help shape its benefits package

Sky uses the data underlying its flexible benefits scheme to ensure that its benefits package is fit for purpose for its workforce.

The home entertainment and communications provider works with its benefits consultant, Capita Employee Benefits, to analyse data on, for example, its workforce demographic broken down by employee location and age profile.

John Whitaker, benefits consultant at Sky, says: "We can then start to make some informed decisions in terms of the benefits that we should be introducing, the benefits that we should be archiving off because they are just not adding value and the benefits with really low take-up and some of the reasons behind that."

One particular exercise involved the organisation investigating whether or not there was any correlation between the number of benefits employees select and the likelihood of them being employed by Sky a year later.

But Whitaker says: "You can come up with up with all of these correlations that may be interesting, such as employee engagement versus benefits spend, and it looks pretty on a graph, but it is really important [for employers] to identify what it is they want to achieve."

Sky attempted to analyse its scheme data in-house, but found the process too hard due to its lack of resources, the proliferation of systems on which data was held and the way data moves around.

as well as the format in which they can provide it.

Level of support

Organisations should also consider the level of support that they may need to analyse their data, whether a provider can deliver this and at what cost, as well as how their provider can help them to manage potential risks such as data protection breaches around employee data access, if at all. (See column p41).

Employers that are currently considering introducing a flex scheme to their organisation should ask these questions during the due diligence process that they undertake when selecting a flex provider.

Employers should ask their flex providers to help identify any trends around employee scheme usage; whether they can break down employees' benefits take-up based on their salary, grade and location; and how they can help them to segment their communications campaigns for different groups of employees.

But employers should first identify what it is that they want their data analysis exercise to achieve.

Matthew Gregson, consulting director at benefits consultancy Thomsons Online Benefits, says: "Employers have to consider how much better informed their decision making will be as a result of their data analysis."

And in the process they should carefully consider the challenges involved in the exercise, such as how to analyse their findings, because poor scheme take-up, for example, may not necessarily be a result of poor benefits provision, but because of poor communications around these benefits.

> Employers have to consider how much better informed their decision making will be as a result of data analysis
>
> Matthew Gregson, Thomsons Online Benefits

Similarly, benefits take-up rates do not necessarily indicate whether or not employees subsequently use the benefits, or if they do whether it is for a sustained period of time.

Finally, employers need to consider the resources required to ensure the accuracy of their data to optimise the value of their analysis.

Growing trend

But these challenges should not deter employers from embarking on their project as soon as possible, because data analysis around flex is a growing trend that they cannot ignore, particularly in light of the potential cost savings.

Capita's Tullet, who believes that flex data analysis is more about behaviourial economics and HR analytics than it is about 'big data', which refers to terabytes of data, claims to have helped 15 employers generate around £15 million in savings.

"This is just by redirecting their benefits spend so it's more effective," he adds EB

Clare Bettelley
is associate editor
of Employee Benefits

@ **Read also *Why hard data on employee benefits is so crucial at:*** *bit.ly/1kxogVF*

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

A revamped benefits offering is helping the University of Lincoln to attract skilled staff, says **Robert Crawford**

The University of Lincoln's employee benefits package is instrumental to its talent attraction and retention policy, which is why the organisation has had to overhaul its offering in the last few years as it strives to attract new blood.

Ian Hodson, reward and benefits manager at the university, says: "The type of employee that we are trying to bring to the organisation now will not be motivated by the typical [benefits] package [of a good salary, a pension and sickness benefits]. We had to change our thinking.

"Lincoln is not a big labour market like London, so we have to make a package to attract and retain people with specialist skills, such as academics, researchers and people from overseas. We have put a lot of effort into a variety of benefits."

Hodson, who was tasked with creating the university's first reward package when he joined the seven years ago, has introduced two health cash plans, provided by BHSF and Bupa, and installed a health monitoring point via Wellpoint, as well as salary sacrifice arrangements for benefits including parking, give as you earn and childcare vouchers.

As well engaging staff, the introduction of health and wellbeing weeks, a bikes-for-work scheme and access to onsite sport centres has helped the university to reduce its sickness absence costs from £1.2 million to around £700,000 between 2011 and 2014, with savings reinvested into its benefits package.

Hodson favours best-of-breed benefits providers, rather than opting for a one-stop-shop approach, despite this arrangement creating more work for him and his team following his decision to avoid using benefits consultants.

"We took the decision to administer our own benefits as a deliberate approach to work closely with [benefits] providers and to create broader relationships."

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES AFFECTING BENEFITS

- Improving the employment prospects of departing students
- Increasing income generation through its relationships with benefits providers
- Implementing benefits to support its green agenda

THE UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN AT A GLANCE

Humberside Polytechnic was transformed into a university in 1992 and become the University of Lincoln in 2001. It has centralised headquarters in the heart of Lincoln, where it has become one of the largest employers, and a number of campuses in Holbeach and overseas as the university expands.

The organisation's staff range from students and academics, who span the globe, to employees who work as caterers and student liaison officers.

It has a workforce gender split of 50% men and 50% female, with an average length of service of six years.

CAREER HISTORY

Ian Hodson has been reward and benefits manager at the University of Lincoln for seven years. He has a mix of private and public sector experience and a background in accountancy and payroll management, which led him to a career in reward. He has worked for Moy Park, Mars, Prudential and Lincolnshire County Council. "I am most proud of creating a package with something for everybody," Hodson says. "When I joined, the university was a blank canvas and there was no reward agenda."

THE BENEFITS

Pension
- Three schemes in place including a Teachers Pension, a Local Government Pension Scheme and the Universities Superannuation Scheme. A number of additional voluntary contribution (AVC) schemes are available
- Employer contribution levels range from 14% to 28% across all schemes

Healthcare and wellbeing
- Private medical insurance, employer-funded for executive level and heavily discounted for all staff
- Health cash plan
- Health screening
- Dental care
- Eyecare
- Financial education workshops
- Subsidised sports-centre access
- Employee counselling
- Employee assistance programme
- Wellpoint assessment station

Group risk
- Critical illness insurance

Travel
- Bikes for work
- Car lease scheme

Work-life balance or family-friendly policies
- Extended parental and carer policies
- Childcare voucher scheme
- Discounted nursery sessions
- Support networks and an assistance programme available

Holidays
- Between 22 and 35 days per year plus six additional days for long service
- Holiday trading enabling staff to buy and sell days

Voluntary benefits
- Online discount scheme

Bonus
- All-staff merit awards
- Staff suggestion scheme
- Corporate achievement site
- Encouragement awards
- All-staff award and executive bonus scheme

Other
- Subsidised canteen
- Subsidised parking
- Discounts for local facilities or onsite facilities
- Interest-free loans
- Discounts on advisory services
- Relocation assistance programme
- Times Higher subscriptions
- Payroll giving
- Volunteering days
- Staff development programmes

This has involved expanding the remits of staff who work in payroll and pensions to focus on the wider reward market.

But one of the downsides of Hodson's decision is the lack of support with rolling out new projects, such as the university's benefits portal in 2011.

Communication challenge

"What we have missed out on, and is a big challenge, is the communication and the hosting [offered by consultants]," he says.

"We had to come up with our own portal and our own branding, which was a significant challenge," Hodson adds.

The international spread of many of the university's employees was also a challenge.

Rosie Damarell, reward and benefits administrator at the university, says: "Communication is certainly a big challenge [because] we have employees overseas and staff [who are] on campus one day a week, so the portal is vital to executing communications."

The portal, and all employee benefits offered through it, is also vital in helping to support the organisation's corporate objective of creating a unique and quality experience for students while studying at the university, to support its talent management policy. To help achieve this goal, the university is committed to offering students access to some of its benefits, such as financial education.

Hodson has spent the last 12 months rolling out a financial education strategy for employees with the help with its provider, Wealth at Work. Workshops relate to early, middle and late career stages and cover topics including financial career and retirement planning.

The university also offers students access to its bike-for-work scheme, which is provided by Halfords.

Student experience

Hodson says: "We have tried to connect wherever possible the benefits for our employees to our organisational objectives to help aid the student experience."

In the future, this joint staff and student experience will be more heavily weighted towards community engagement, in line with the university's quest to be seen as a corporate-social-responsibility-minded employer.

Benefits to support this quest already include two days' paid holiday per year for each employee to use for volunteering, known internally as 'give-back days'.

"When we came up with what we wanted the reward strategy to achieve, there was a link between collective performance and reward," says Hodson. "It was [about] linking [reward] with the organisation's values, which is why we give the 'give-back days' and [run a] green travel agenda [including] student cycle hire.

"It is the type of employer we want to be seen as, and we are well on our way to achieving [this] aim." EB

Robert Crawford
is a reporter on
Employee Benefits

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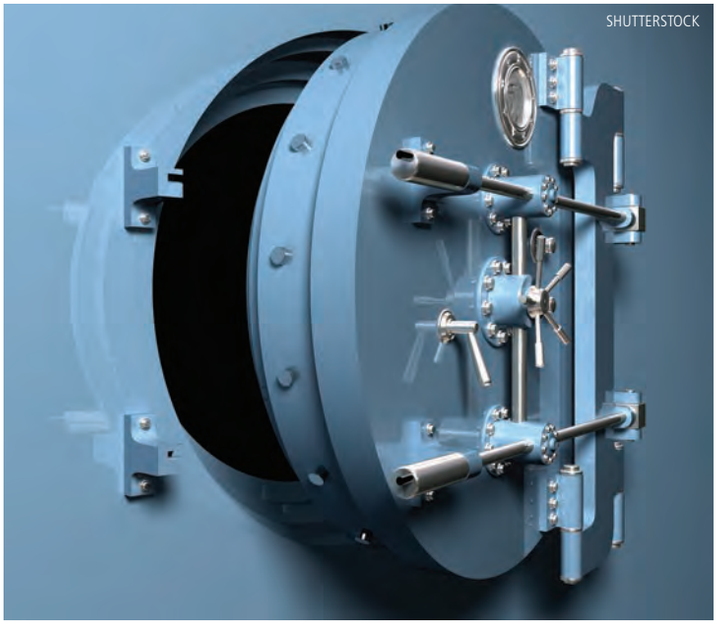
PRODUCT FILE

GROUP INCOME PROTECTION

The GIP market is growing, with products evolving to meet demand, says **Sam Barrett**



SHUTTERSTOCK

Group income protection (GIP) is an insurance policy that provides a replacement income to an employee if they are unable to work due to long-term illness or injury. Depending on the contract, the benefit is paid until they return to work, the end of a fixed term or retirement.

The benefit is payable in the event of a wide range of illnesses and injuries that prevent an individual from working. The most common have tended to be musculoskeletal injuries and mental health problems, but last year industry body Group Risk Development (Grid) reported that in 2013 the main causes of claim were cancer, which was the cause of 25% of claims, and mental illness, in 24% of claims.

As well as being a valued benefit, employers can also take advantage of the rehabilitation services wrapped up alongside the insurance. These seek to help reduce the length of absence wherever possible by offering support and assistance to employees who are unable to work. This could include the provision of medical treatment or access to psychological support and counselling.

Returning to work

Where required, insurers will also work with employees and their organisations to help them return to the workplace. This could include advice on adapting the workplace or the role to enable the individual to come back to work. It may also involve the employee returning on a part-time basis or to a lower-paid position, with their income topped up through GIP.

This type of rehabilitation support can even kick in before a claim starts. As it becomes increasingly difficult to get someone back to work the longer they are absent, if an insurer can get involved earlier, the greater the chance of reducing the length of the claim.

As the average GIP policy has a six-month waiting period before benefts are paid, insurers have introduced incentives to encourage employers to notify them of potential claims as early as possible. For example, Legal and General offers an early-notification bonus that returns 5% of the premium where an employer covering more than 250 employees flags up at least

The facts

What is group income protection?

Group income protection (GIP) provides an income to an employee when they are unable to work as a result of an illness or injury. Payment normally starts after a waiting period, typically six months, and can continue until the employee returns to work or, if earlier, state pension age. Limited-term policies are also available that provide benefits for between two and five years.

As well as the financial support, GIP can help an organisation manage long-term sickness absence. Policies include rehabilitation to help support employees back into the workplace and they can also provide partial benefits when an employee is able to return on a part-time basis or to a lower-paid role.

What are the origins of GIP?

The first modern GIP policies were written in the 1950s but a broader form of cover, the Holloway scheme, was available from friendly societies from the late 19th century. These offered retirement benefits alongside income protection.

Where can employers get more information and advice?

Group Risk Development promotes group protection products including GIP. Further information about the product including contact numbers can be found on its website: *www.grouprisk.org.uk*

What are the costs involved?

Full cover costs between 1% and 1.5% of gross payroll, although a limited-term plan can cost as little as 0.25%.

What are the legal implications?

GIP can cover an organisation's contractual promise of long-term sick pay to employees. It is exempt from default retirement age legislation, enabling organisations to stop providing it when employees reach state pension age.

What are the tax issues?

Employers can usually get corporation tax relief on premiums and it is not a P11D benefit.

What is the annual spend?

The GIP market was worth nearly £600 million in terms of in-force premiums according to Swiss Re's *Group watch 2014* report, which was published in April 2014.

Which providers have the biggest market share?

No market data is available but the largest provider is Unum, with Canada Life in second place. Other providers include Aviva, Ellipse, Friends Life, Legal and General, MetLife and Zurich.

Which have increased their market share the most?

No market data is available.

PRODUCT FILE

80% of long-term absences within a set period.

While the main objective of a GIP scheme is to provide support to employees unable to work, insurers have also developed a wide range of added-value services to supplement cover. These help to differentiate products but also provide a benefit to employees and employers whether or not anyone needs to claim.

Employee assistance programmes (EAPs) are the most common add-on. These support insurers' early-intervention goals by offering employees access to confidential, telephone-based support and information on topics ranging from stress and mental health problems to debt and childcare. They can also support line managers by providing assistance with work-related issues.

Other added-value services are also available. For example, Aviva includes access to its Home of Health website, which contains advice and information on everything from combating stress to getting fit, while Canada Life increased its range of added-value services in 2014, introducing a treatment sourcing service from Medical Care Direct. This negotiates private medical treatments tailored to an individual's requirements and at a fixed price wherever possible.


SHUTTERSTOCK

Market growth

Perhaps as a result of the breadth of cover, the GIP market has been growing steadily in recent years. For example, the latest statistics from Swiss Re's *Group watch 2014* report show that the number of employees with cover broke the two million barrier for the first time in 2013.

Another factor behind this growth is pensions auto-enrolment. Membership of a GIP scheme can often be a condition of being in a workplace pension, so as more employees are swept into the pension, the number of people with GIP cover has increased too.

Market growth has also led to the emergence of new types of products. For example, rather than pay benefits until retirement, limited-term schemes are growing in popularity, especially among organisations introducing cover.

These limited-term schemes pay for a set period, usually between two and five years. In addition, it is also possible to include a lump sum of up to five-times salary, payable at the end of the term. This can be used as a redundancy payment or to boost an early-retirement pension.

As well as fitting the modern employment pattern where few expect a job for life, a limited-term product is also cheaper. While full cover costs between 1% and 1.5% of gross payroll, a limited-term plan can cost as little as 0.25%.

Short-term cover

Some plans offer even more short-term cover. For example, Unum's Sick Pay Insurance, which was launched in 2013, is designed to take some of the volatility out of sickness absence costs. In exchange for a set monthly premium, it provides the benefit of rehabilitation but only pays an income to an employee for up to 12 months. Employers can also select from a one-week to a four-week deferred period and there are a variety of payment terms from 12 to 52 weeks.

But while many expected to see a shift to a limited payment, figures from Swiss Re's *Group watch 2014* report indicate that it has been a much slower switch. In 2013, the percentage of schemes with a maximum five-year benefit term nudged up to 7.7% from 6.9% the previous year, although among larger-than-average schemes almost 17% are written on a limited-term basis.

GIP compulsion

With the GIP market seeing expansion on the back of pensions auto-enrolment, many are now calling for some form of compulsion for GIP itself. This also fits with the government's drive for welfare reform, with insurance able to take some of the pressure off the state.

In addition, the government's Fit for Work service will help to bring more attention to the role of rehabilitation. As part of its remit, this service will provide occupational health assessments and return-to-work support to employees off work for four weeks or longer. Showcasing this approach could help to underline the benefits of GIP.

STATISTICS

960,000: the number of employees on sick leave for a month or more each year on average between October 2010 and September 2013 *(Long-term sickness absence statistics, Department for Work and Pensions, February 2014)*

£9 billion: employers' annual bill for sick pay and associated costs *(Department for Work and Pensions, February 2014)*

£318 million: the value of group income protection claims paid in 2013 *(Group Risk Development, May 2014)*

82%: the percentage of claims paid by group income protection insurers in 2013 *(Group Risk Development, May 2014)*

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No pain, no gain

Candid is in for some nasty surprises when she tries to make a health insurance claim after waking up with a locked neck

I wouldn't mind if I had spent the weekend bungee jumping or rock climbing, but all I did was get on the wrong side of my pillow. I haven't just got a stiff neck; it is completely locked. I can't move my head sideways at all, and to look behind me I have to turn my whole body. I need to get it sorted.

It seems like a good idea to put this through the health plan. I am paying enough tax on the benefit; I might as well use it for a change. I realise that although I have been responsible for this plan for a couple of years, I have no idea how to go about making a claim. And it is not as if I can ask anyone. How embarrassing. I consult the booklet that I give to new starters. It is not at all clear what I need. Oh dear.

Although I have a morbid fear of it, I am going to have to call the customer service line. Gulp.

The first thing it does is demand my plan number. Well, all I have in front of me is the booklet, which doesn't have a number on it. The letter with the number is probably at home. How about if I give my date of birth? That doesn't work. The customer service line has a strict script to work to and you can't miss out any of the steps.

The irony is that the last time I called it, it treated me like a member when I wanted to talk to it as a scheme administrator. Now I am calling as a member, it refuses to acknowledge that I am one.

I ask my colleague Lazy Susan to find my plan number, because it must be on one of the lists she maintains. It is, so I call back and give my number. Step one completed.

The customer service representative cannot tell me if osteopathic treatment will be covered, so I have to consult the booklet again, which has a lot of vague statements about outpatient claims. Either way, it seems I will need a referral from my doctor.

Step two will have to wait until the morning, because my doctor has this new system where the only way you can get an appointment is to call at eight in the morning. As all the local unwell are calling in at precisely that time, it is impossible to get through, and you have to be feeling quite robust to keep trying.

You can also call in the afternoon, but the receptionist, whose personal charter is to prevent people from actually seeing the doctor, will cross-examine you and if your complaint is not serious, urgent and positively life threatening, she will tell you to call again in the morning.

At length, I get referred and visit a specialist to have my neck miraculously snapped back into place. I am still sore, but I can move normally again.

So onwards for step three: the claiming process. I complete the form and send it off along with the receipts for the treatment. And I wait. And wait. There is nothing for it, but to call the customer service line again. Geez.

This time I am armed and ready with my plan number. It still takes it an age to find my record. It has indeed received my paperwork, but it is still being assessed.

Still being assessed? It has had it for six weeks. I am not impressed. Does it realise I am the company contact for the scheme? Clearly not.

> **I have no idea how to go about making a claim. And it is not as if I can ask anyone. How embarrassing**

I call again a week later. Yes, it has received my paperwork. I know that. Yes, it has assessed my case. That's good. But there is no refund due. Eh? How can that be?

I am ashamed to say I get quite shirty with the poor person on the line. She tells me there is a personal excess on my policy that is more than my claim. No there isn't; I am adamant. She insists that there is, and will not be moved.

It is true that we have one department that came from another company where the scheme has an excess, but I have always been in the main group.

I quiz Lazy Susan who maintains the lists. She looks confused, but then she always looks confused; that is how her face is. It turns out that she didn't see the point of maintaining two lists for the head office, so she merged them into one list to be more efficient. More efficient? Since when has Lazy Susan considered anything in terms of efficiency? It was less work, more like. Now, everyone in our location is going to be charged an excess in error. I am surprised I haven't had complaints about it already.

I'm going to have to call the customer service line again to straighten out the scheme as a whole. I give my plan number, but then they go straight to my claim record and don't seem to understand that I am calling as the company contact. Ready to scream, I ring off and start again asking to speak to sales.

Eventually I get through to an account manager who tells me it is going to affect the premium. As we told it 100% of the potential claimants were subject to an excess when, in fact, only 5% should be, we are going to have to make a substantial extra payment. Big Bad Boss isn't going to like it, and worse, because I have brought it to his attention, I will get the blame, rather than Lazy Susan. There are times when I think I would be better off working alone.

Next time...*Candid tries the employee assistance programme.*

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