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**Assessing the impacts of the Menopause and the case for policy reform: call for evidence**

**Submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Menopause**

**Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)  
September 2021**

## **Background**

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 155,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Public policy at the CIPD draws on our extensive research and thought leadership, practical advice and guidance, along with the experience and expertise of our diverse membership, to inform and shape debate, government policy and legislation for the benefit of employees and employers, to improve best practice in the workplace, to promote high standards of work and to represent the interests of our members at the highest level.

## **Our response**

We focus our response to this call for evidence on the workplace, as that is our area of expertise and focus at the CIPD.

### **Evidence on current workplace attitudes, policy or initiatives towards Menopause and detail on further workplace action that should be taken**

#### ***Current workplace attitudes, policy or initiatives towards the menopause***

Women over the age of 50 are the fastest growing segment of the workforce, and most will go through the menopause transition during their working lives.

The menopause is a natural stage of life experienced by most women and yet it remains a taboo subject in many workplaces. While some menopausal women receive help and understanding from colleagues and managers, research shows that many do not disclose their symptoms to management (Griffiths et al 2010)<sup>1</sup>. Many employees are too embarrassed to discuss the issue or think their manager would be embarrassed. The result is that most women ‘typically suffer in silence’, while often a few small practical adjustments at work could make a world of difference to someone experiencing some of the uncomfortable symptoms of the menopause.

The research also shows that nearly one in five women thought the menopause had a negative impact on their managers’ and colleagues’ perceptions of their competence at work. CIPD research shows that for every ten women experiencing menopausal symptoms, six (59%) say it has a negative impact on their work; three in ten (30%) said they had been unable to go into work because of their symptoms, but only a quarter of them felt able to tell their manager the real reason for their absence.

This reluctance to discuss the menopause is understandable, but there should be no need for women to feel isolated and scared to seek the support that could transform their working life. With the right support, there’s no need for women to press pause on their career during this natural transition. But many women will continue to suffer in silence unless we break the taboo and start talking openly about the menopause at work.

In essence, employers need to support people with menopausal symptoms in the same way they would support someone with any other health condition. Information and education about the menopause should be included as part of the organisation’s inclusion and diversity training for the whole workforce, and health and wellbeing policies should signpost to the support available.

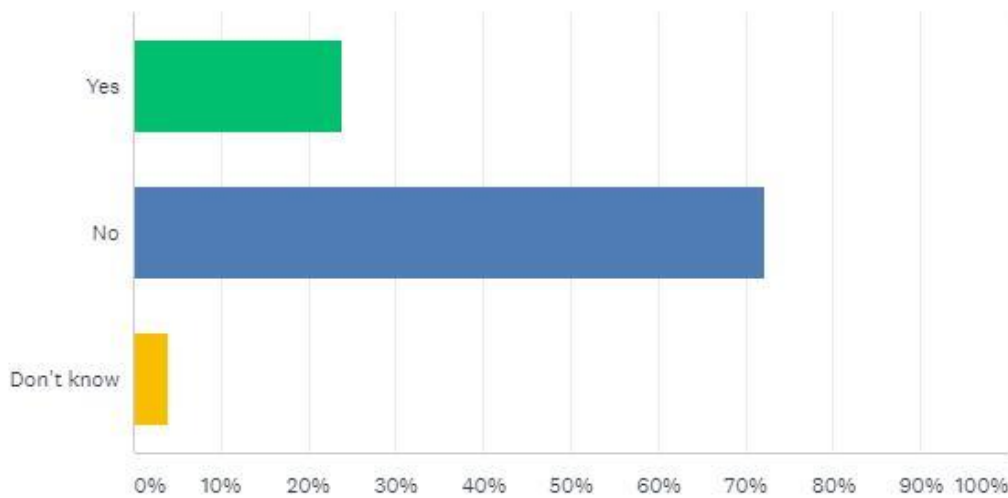
#### ***Growing support but organisations still have some way to go***

In 2019, the CIPD ran a poll question with HR professionals and found that less than 1 in 10 had any form of policy, framework or guidance in place relating to the menopause. We re-ran the same poll question in 2021 and encouragingly that figure

has now increased to almost a quarter of organisations (24% of 421 organisations) having a menopause related policy, framework or guidance. While the increase in awareness and support is shows some progress, it still suggests the majority of organisations have some way to go in creating menopause-friendly workplaces.

Does your organisation offer any support to women going through the menopause (such as a policy, framework or guidance)?

Answered: 421 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	23.75% 100
No	72.21% 304
Don't know	4.04% 17
TOTAL	421

### Examples of good practice

In the CIPD's 2019 Menopause guidance<sup>2</sup> for People Professionals, we shared a number of case study examples of good and inclusive practice in terms of creating menopause-friendly organisations. We featured the following organisations:

- The Environment Agency
- Network Rail
- Civil Service HR Team
- West Midlands Police
- Severn Trent
- The Solicitors Regulation Authority

We attach the Network Rail case study as an Appendix to this call for evidence.

Helpful practices across these case study organisations include:

- Viewing the menopause as a serious and pressing business issue
- Gaining senior level sponsorship
- Holding focus groups with employees including employee networks to understand the issues
- Ensuring that men are part of the conversation
- Providing a suite of accessible resources around the menopause including a short film
- Training for line managers, flexible working, reasonable adjustments and flexible sickness and absence policies that don't unfairly penalise women experiencing long-term menopause symptoms
- Embedding support so that line managers and employees are empowered to manage symptoms and adjustments themselves in the longer-term
- Understanding and providing support relating to premature medically-induced menopause
- Use of reasonable adjustment passports
- Setting up a buddy scheme for women to support other women experiencing the menopause
- Exploring specific cultural aspects of the menopause
- Online private menopause discussion and support groups.

### ***Further workplace action that should be taken***

Creating an organisational framework to support female employees experiencing the menopause transition means recognising that this is an equality, occupational health and people management issue. Employers therefore need to approach the menopause holistically, and integrate relevant provision across the policies and practices in all of these three areas to be effective.

Employers need to support people with menopausal symptoms in the same way they would support someone with any other health condition. Information and education about the menopause should be included as part of the organisation's inclusion and diversity training for the whole workforce, and health and wellbeing policies should signpost to the support available.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to menopause transition at work due to the unique way in which a woman can experience the range of potential symptoms, and so support and adjustments need to be tailored to suit an individual's unique needs. Therefore, a 'cafeteria approach' can be helpful - such as tailored absence policies, specialist support from an employee assistance programme and/or occupational health, flexible working arrangements, workplace adjustments based on individual need and informal support networks such as menopause cafes. Developing and communicating a strategy based on employee need and preference helps to empower the woman experiencing menopause transition to manage her symptoms

with the right organisational support in place at the right time.

We believe that practices to address menopause discrimination in the workplace can best be implemented by employers adopting a proactive and positive approach that embeds good practice organisation-wide. Policies and practices should include practical education and guidance for employees and line managers and supportive adjustments such as flexible working opportunities.

## CIPD recommendations

Our recommendations to employers include:

- Review existing policies and frameworks and look for opportunities to specifically highlight menopause issues within these or through a stand-alone policy.
- Help to break through the silence in your organisation: if you create a culture where everyone can talk openly about health issues, such as the menopause, women are much more likely to feel confident about asking for the support they need to be effective in their role.
- Identify reasonable adjustments. Small adjustments to someone's job or working pattern can help people manage their symptoms and continue to perform well in their role.
- Enable line managers to support their teams: Educate managers about the menopause, who it can affect, and how they can support colleagues going through it. The CIPD and Bupa have created dedicated guidance for line managers.<sup>3</sup>
- Get the senior leadership team on board. Make support for the menopause a key part of your strategy to attract, retain and develop female talent. Present a persuasive vision for change and a strong case for future-proofing your business.

There are **four pillars of support** organisations should focus on:

Open up  
the culture

Encourage open conversations about the menopause, provide information for people to help break down the taboo. Ensure that you involve all employees and managers in these conversations. Menopause is an organization wide issue and relevant to men as well as women.

Develop a  
supportive  
framework

This could include a specific menopause policy or guidance or support for those experiencing menopause transition. Organisations should make clear what support is available and regularly communicate this.

Manage  
health/  
absence

Organisations should treat an employee with menopause symptoms in the same way they would manage and support someone with any long-term health condition. Absence management policies should be fair and flexible enough so that they don't unfairly penalise someone who is experiencing on-going menopause symptoms.

Educate  
and train  
line  
managers

Educate and train line managers so that they understand the organisation's approach to the menopause, they are aware of menopause symptoms and the support that's available, they are comfortable having sensitive conversations with team members and making reasonable adjustments to suit the needs of individuals.

## **Any further detail or suggested policy recommendations that the APPG should consider around Menopause.**

We believe Government should focus its efforts on highlighting the menopause as a priority public policy issue, ensuring that the interests of people experiencing menopause transition are represented across government departments and raising awareness of the menopause as a workplace issue with employers.

The CIPD launched a Manifesto for the Menopause at Work<sup>4</sup> in Parliament in 2019, which called on the Government to specifically:

1. Ensure that menopause is referenced as a priority issue in its own public policy agenda on work, diversity and inclusion.
2. Nominate a Menopause Ambassador to represent the interests of women experiencing menopause transition across Government departments.
3. Support an employer-led campaign to raise awareness of the menopause as a workplace issue.

On point 3, we would welcome inclusion of the following issues in the campaign:

- Government should act to tackle the stigma surrounding the menopause at work and raise awareness across business so that it's seen as an important workplace issue.
- Government should promote the business case for employers to take action on this agenda, linking effective support on the menopause to attracting and retaining valuable female talent.
- Spell out the risks of employers not acting on this agenda, including loss of skills, higher sickness absence and labour turnover.

- Promote good practice guidance setting out how employers can create healthy and inclusive cultures to support employees experiencing the menopause.

**Information on how medical professionals and the NHS deal with Menopause in terms of treatment and the development of treatment. What specific policy change would better help the NHS treat women going through Menopause?**

The core focus of our response relates to the improvement of policy and practice in employment, but we need change across all aspects of society to achieve the necessary shift in attitudes and support for women experiencing the menopause. This includes the medical profession, for example the training and education of GPs so that women can access appropriate understanding, advice and treatment. In terms of the latter, it would be very helpful if Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) was exempt from NHS prescription charges in England, as is already the case in Wales and Scotland.





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## **References**

1. GRIFFITHS, A., MACLENNAN, S. and WONG, Y. (2010) Women's experience working through the menopause. Research Report. Nottingham: University of Nottingham and the British Occupational Health Research Foundation.
2. [Menopause-guide\\_tcm18-55426.pdf \(cipd.co.uk\)](#)
3. [The menopause at work: guidance for line managers | CIPD guides](#)
4. [CIPD Manifesto for the Menopause at Work. \(2019\) https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/news-articles/manifesto-menopause-work#gref](https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/news-articles/manifesto-menopause-work#gref)

### **Network Rail puts the menopause centre stage to enhance gender equality and workforce capability**

*Janet Trowse, Head of HR, and Karen Venn, then Diversity and Inclusion Project Manager, outline how their 'menopause project' is rooted in Network Rail's HR business strategy to boost the recruitment and retention of valuable female talent.*

Network Rail views the menopause as a serious and pressing business issue. Operating in a predominantly male industry, it is firmly positioned as part of the company's strategic target to increase its female workforce from around 17% to 20% by 2020. *'Skills shortages are only going to intensify and we need to ensure we attract and retain valuable female talent,'* says Karen, Diversity and Inclusion Project Manager. *'The menopause can have a significant impact on women's health and well-being and their ability to balance work with other demands and it's vital we support them.'*

By working together on the project to raise awareness and develop organizational support for the menopause, Janet and Karen bring together the strategic side of HR and diversity and inclusion, a combination that helps to integrate their work across the business. Both are passionate about the menopause as an issue that needs serious focus, but they are clear it cannot be viewed primarily from a philanthropic perspective if it is going to receive sustained corporate attention. As Karen explains: *'We presented a persuasive vision for change, but securing the leadership's commitment required a robust business case based on enhancing talent attraction and retention, safety and well-being and organisational performance.'* Presenting compelling workforce data and the need to retain female employees in the 40–60-year age band was a vital part of making the business case concrete and tangible to Network Rail.

*'It was also important to set the wider context,'* says Janet. *'We view the menopause as part of a Zeitgeist in terms of gender equality, linked to other key workplace issues about women's economic participation such as the gender pay gap, increased awareness around sexual harassment and equal pay claim tribunal wins.'* She is quick to add that the menopause is not just about women, however, but an issue also affecting men and the organisation as a whole.

Janet and Karen emphasise the importance of gaining strong senior sponsorship and applying a robust project methodology to their work on the menopause. *'Deliver first and capture the imagination of those who hold the purse strings,'* they advise. The project started off as 'budget neutral'; this meant investing a lot of their own time and showing the impact of their investment to encourage future commitment from the board. From the outset the project had a clear 'exit strategy', with the ultimate aim being to embed support and awareness around the menopause so effectively that line managers and employees would be empowered to manage it themselves in the long term.

At an early stage, the project leaders 'put out feelers' to gauge the level of interest, by using the intranet to post communications about the menopause. Every comment



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they received was positive and indicated a need for further information. Encouraged, the team produced a suite of accessible resources aiming for maximum reach and engagement, including a short film developed with Deborah Garlick of Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace. Downloadable on a smartphone, some male employees have shown the film to their female partners at home. A launch event on the menopause at Network Rail attracted a lot of interest and was a big success. And the company's Safety Central intranet site attracted 1,200 visits within the first eight weeks.

The project was underpinned by a strong partnership ethos. *'We were keen to work with partners inside and outside the organisation to increase the reach and impact of our work and make it sustainable,'* says Janet. As well as benefitting from the expert input of Henpicked, they collaborated with their HR advice and guidance and employee assistance providers as well as external organisations such as ENEI and Severn Trent. The team say it was vital to invest time in engaging employees on the issue, and they held several focus groups and connected with employee networks inside Network Rail. Dr Richard Peters, Chief Medical Officer, and Loraine Martins MBE, Director Diversity and Inclusion, provided sponsorship and guidance.

Network Rail's project to build awareness and support for women going through the menopause has had a significant impact across the organisation, and the climate has opened up considerably around the issue. The project leaders have learned a lot from their work, which they are keen to share with other organisations.

One learning point is that engagement with employees is vital, but to handle with care.

As Janet says: *'First of all, don't assume every woman wants to talk about the issue, but it's also important that the conversation isn't completely dominated by women's personal stories and focuses upon the business case for an inclusive workplace and the information and organisational support available.'* In a similar vein, Karen advises to balance the challenges associated with the menopause with the positive benefits of employment such as the attraction, selection, promotion and retention of women.

Another issue raised as part of the employee engagement piece was having the right level of sensitivity around gender-neutral language. Resisting the 'obvious stereotype' and having male employees on board is seen as one of the key success factors of the project, particularly in view of the strong male gender workforce profile.

Finally, both project leaders emphasise that approaching the project with the same rigour and methodology as any other business imperative has been the defining reason for its success so far. As Janet comments: *'At the centre of the project has been its focus as part of our people strategy and the need to future-proof our business – essentially it's about how we attract, retain and develop the very best talent.'*