

Government launches landmark gender pay gap and menopause action plans to help women thrive at work

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Action plans supporting women to succeed at work launched by Minister for Women and Equalities ahead of International Women's Day 2026.

- Employer guidance published today [Wednesday 4 March], showing government and businesses working collaboratively to support women at work
- Action plans to break down barriers to opportunity and help put more money back in women's pockets, improving the overall cost of living

Women are to benefit from employers taking robust action on the gender pay gap and menopause support, as the Minister for Women and Equalities commits to ensuring women can thrive at work this International Women's Day.

Employers with 250 or more employees will be encouraged to publish the steps they are taking to reduce their gender pay gap and support employees through menopause from April.

The government and businesses will work hand-in-hand to share best practice and motivate others to follow their lead voluntarily.

This comes as we build a fairer Britain where women and girls can prosper by tackling the cost of living, which can fall disproportionately on women and families.

Alongside working with businesses to reduce the gender pay gap, energy bills are set to fall by £117 in April due to the Chancellor's actions at the Budget. We are also expanding our free childcare offer, freezing rail fares and keeping prescription costs under £10 to provide certainty for household finances.

Bridget Phillipson MP, the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities, said:

This International Women's Day, we are celebrating all that women bring to our proud nation, as well as committing to giving back to them.

That's why I am delighted to formally launch employer action plans, which are part of our commitment to ensure women can thrive at work and tackle the gender pay gap.

Too many women are still not paid fairly, held back at work due to inconsistencies in support or find common sense adjustments for their health needs overlooked or dismissed. We're acting to empower women at work and work with business so we all benefit from unleashing women's talents.

Mary Macleod, Chair of the Women's Business Council, said:

We have come a long way in the fight for women's equality, but sadly we continue to face challenges at different stages of our lives and careers.

I am really pleased to be leading the Women's Business Council as we work with the government on the introduction of action plans to break down barriers and support women's economic empowerment.

These measures have the power to not only increase the number of women in the workforce, but to increase productivity and innovation. Because equality isn't just the right thing to do - it is also a vital driver for economic growth.

Government Menopause Employment Ambassador, Mariella Frostrup, said:

Menopause affects millions of women at the height of their careers; which is detrimental to the economy, businesses and the talented women.

These action plans are a huge step in the right direction. When employers take practical, meaningful steps to support women through menopause, they are not just doing the right thing — they are protecting their own workforce.

This International Women's Day I urge every large employer to put employer action plans in place. No woman should have to leave a job she loves because of a natural stage of life.

Penny East, Chief Executive at Fawcett Society said:

Employer action plans are a welcome step in the right direction and, alongside pay gap reporting, should mark a shift from transparency to action. Large employers must not simply publish data; they must now take action to improve workplace cultures and practices.

Over the next year, while the plans remain voluntary, we will continue to work with government to ensure the final compulsory framework includes stronger pay transparency measures and clear accountability. This is a rare opportunity to strengthen women's participation in the workforce, and the plans must therefore be ambitious, measurable and enforceable.

Real progress will happen when employers are required to not only report inequality, but to take decisive action to tackle it.

Hana Searson, Director of Talent, Culture & Capability at BT said:

We welcome the government's announcement on introducing employer action plans and its clear focus on accelerating progress on the gender pay gap and improving menopause support through practical employer action. At BT, we see first-hand how targeted, employer-led action can make a real difference; not just to women's experiences at work, but to engagement, retention and long-term performance for organisations as a whole. Supporting women to thrive through key life stages, and

removing structural barriers to progression, helps ensure talent isn't lost and potential isn't wasted.

Tackling the barriers women continue to face at work is not only the right thing to do, it is a business imperative. Organisations that create fair, supportive and inclusive environments are better able to attract diverse talent, make better decisions and deliver sustainable growth.

Menopause affects over half of the population, with symptoms often lasting for years or even decades. 1 in 10 women who worked during the menopause have left a job due to their symptoms. This government is taking the impact of the menopause seriously by introducing action plans to break down barriers and encourage conversations about women's health in the workplace.

Action plans for employers are part of the Employment Rights Act 2025, a landmark piece of legislation which ensures women can stay and progress in the workforce. Additional protections will be put in place including from sexual harassment in the workplace and enhancing the rights of pregnant workers and women returning from maternity leave.

Collaboration with employers is key which is why the government will work with employers across the country to harness the talent of women in their workforce, through expert groups, such as the Women's Business Council and the Invest in Women Taskforce.

Related links

- Creating an action plan: guidance for employers
- Action plans: list of actions
- Employment Rights Act 2025: factsheets

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-landmark-gender-pay-gap-and-menopause-action-plans-to-help-women-thrive-at-work>