

While some employers may not be able to designate a special room for staff to use for breastfeeding or expressing milk, they can take other practical steps to accommodate their employees, McCormack says.

"Employers should take into account other spaces such as a private office, first aid or meeting room," she says.

McCormack stresses that toilets are not a suitable option, and encourages employers to consider flexible hours of work, working from

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home, or an alternative site with suitable facilities.

The CEO of Mercy Health Group, Stephen Cornelissen, says establishing breastfeeding support as normal in the work environment also has flow-on effects by contributing to a breastfeeding-friendly culture in society more broadly. "Supporting breastfeeding employees is quite simple and inexpensive but makes an enormous difference to working mothers," he says.

McCormack adds that more employers need to adapt and embrace the needs of mothers who wish to breastfeed for longer.

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Tracy Mellor
Managing director
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Fast fact

Over 60% of 2,500 new graduates surveyed by Indeed said they wanted to work for an employer that would put money towards their student debts. Only about 3% of US employers offered loan assistance in 2015.

■ Q&A

TIME FOR A BENEFITS REVIEW?

● How often would you suggest employers undertake a review of their benefits offerings?

Treat benefit reviews like health check-ups. Do one every year, even if it's just a quick chat with your doctor. Ask yourself the following questions:

- » Does my benefit strategy still support the business in the right way?
- » Are my current benefit offerings still 'healthy' – are they competitive, compliant, and cost-effective?
- » Are my benefits understood and getting the appropriate ROI and VOI (value on investment)?

Depending on the responses, you may need to bring them back to 'health'.

Every two or three years do a more in-depth, structured review, like a comprehensive medical exam. At Reward Gateway we just went through this process: conducted an assessment of each and every benefit, checking them against our 'health standards', which were our new benefit principles.

● When making a decision about what's on offer, how should HR professionals decide which rewards are right for their organisation?

It depends on your rewards strategy and the principles you've put in place. Are you using rewards to attract talent, engage staff and/or retain employees? If it's attraction, you'll need to not only provide a comprehensive rewards package but one that will stand out from your competitors. To improve engagement, consider those that draw employees back to them like a discount program, or create that 'feel good factor' like a recognition program. To achieve increased retention, it may be creating something 'sticky' like an employee share program.

● If something has to be changed (eg a benefit needs to be dropped), how should this be communicated to employees?

Change should always be done in a thoughtful and strategic way and only after you've understood the impact. To really engage with your employees, they deserve to know not only what was changed and how it will impact them, but also why the decision was made.

● What do you see as being the biggest failure when it comes to withdrawing a benefit?

Line managers have a critical role to play. They have a unique perspective; they aren't as 'close' to benefits as HR are, so may bring a view that we may not have considered.

One of the biggest failures I've seen in withdrawing benefits is not being honest about why you're doing it. If you're removing or changing a benefit solely based on cost, your employees will know that it's all about the money – so just say it as it is and don't pretend otherwise.

Picture yourself on stage. Can you explain it? Can you justify it? Can you do it in an open and honest way, not covering up any of the truth or messages? If you can do this, and communicate the change effectively, you have a much better chance of keeping your employees engaged.

Remember, withdrawing a benefit is a huge decision and should not be taken lightly. It's important to consider the impact of the change both in the short and long term, and ask yourself if it's worth it.