

Workplace Values Survey 2025

The rise of 'Work Ghosting'



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Short on time?

Here's a quick summary.

- **Stress and disengagement:** The UK has one of Europe's least engaged and most emotionally burdened workforces. 65% of UK employees want to leave their jobs by 2027, with over two-thirds of workers reporting moderate to constant workplace stress.
- **The flexibility gap:** Nearly one in four UK workers (23%) have no flexible working options, despite it being a top career priority.
- **Generational divide:** Gen X reports the lowest job satisfaction (67%) and the highest discomfort discussing mental health (30%), Millennials face the highest overall workplace stress (70%), while Gen Z are the most mobile (50% considering a move within six months).
- **Ownership opportunity:** 60% of employees say an [employee share scheme](#) would motivate them - but 40% don't understand what these schemes involve.
- **New workplace trend:** Vestd's survey identifies a new workplace trend Vestd are terming "Work Ghosting", and explores how UK employers can address disengagement before it becomes irreversible.

The Workplace Values Survey

Introduction

To uncover what's really driving UK employees, beyond the industry reports and trending hashtags, we surveyed 500 full-time workers across five different industries.

Our research dives deep to identify the specific triggers, the generational differences, and the actionable insights that can reverse the precise moments where employees begin to mentally disengage.

Our findings reveal that while job satisfaction remains relatively high on the surface, deeper currents of stress, unmet benefit expectations, and misaligned values are creating a time bomb of disengagement.

Understanding and tackling these dynamics is crucial for employers aiming to retain not just talent in seats, but minds and hearts fully engaged.

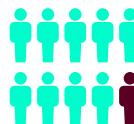
By identifying what keeps employees motivated and where critical improvements can be made, organisations can take proactive steps to prevent employees from “Ghosting” their workplaces before it becomes an irreversible cultural shift.

Staying out of necessity, not out of choice

Just [10%](#) of workers in Britain are engaged, with nine in 10 either not engaged or actively disengaged in their work, falling significantly behind the European average of 13%.

Research shows that this stagnation is costing the British economy an estimated [£293.5 billion](#) annually in lost productivity, yet unlike in previous periods of economic downturn, Brits are not dramatically quitting en masse.

The labour market instead saw job vacancies fall to [718,000](#) in July 2025, the lowest levels since May post-pandemic, yet the unemployment rate remains stable at 4.7%. This disconnect reveals a workforce that's staying put, not out of choice, but out of necessity.



9 in 10 UK employees are switched off about work 



What REALLY matters to employees

The big shift

Work isn't just about the 9-5 anymore. A person's career has become a reflection of their priorities, values, and lifestyle. Career decisions are driven by a complex matrix of factors, with Brits increasingly weighing what they earn against what they gain in balance, wellbeing, and growth opportunities.

Our research reveals that while 77% of respondents report being "satisfied" with their current roles (30% very satisfied, 47% somewhat satisfied), yet this satisfaction is masking deeper issues.

When we examine stress levels, we found that over 67% of employees experience frequent, moderate, or constant stress at work - with just seven in 100 reporting feeling 'rarely stressed' at work (7%).

When asked which factor was most important to employees when applying for a job, the top three were:

- 01 **Salary** (ranked #1 with the lowest mean score of 2.5)
- 02 **Flexibility and Job Security** (tied #2 with a mean score of 3.5)
- 03 **Employee Benefits** (placed #3 with a mean score of 3.7)

However, the most telling insight comes from what's changed over the past 12 months. When asked what has become more important to them personally, employees said:

- 01 **Financial Security:** 33%
- 02 **Work-Life Balance:** 32%
- 03 **Mental Health and Wellbeing:** 25%
- 04 **Career progression and opportunity:** 9%

The top career priorities for 2026

The big shift represents more than changing preferences. It signals that employees are rapidly prioritising fundamental security and wellbeing over traditional career advancement, with skills development and promotion falling far below for most.

Below, you'll see a breakdown of employees' top career priorities moving forward:

Rank	Priority	Answers
#1	Better work-life balance	30%
#2	Financial security	26%
#3	Job security	17%
#4	Skills development	9%
#5	Promotion	9%
#6	Changing employer or industry	5%
#7	None	3%
#8	Other	1%

The warning signs of disengagement

The Hidden Mobility Crisis

While over a third of respondents reported 'not currently looking' for new jobs (35%), this isn't a vote of confidence for businesses. In fact, our mobility data reveals that almost two-thirds of full-time UK employees (65%) want to leave their current roles by 2027:

- 18% within three months
- 19% within six months
- 20% within the next year

65% of employees are considering leaving their current roles soon.

A further 8% expect to leave by more than a year from now, a clear indication that the majority of the workplace is mentally checked out of their current workplaces.

When we asked what would motivate employees to apply for new jobs, the responses were even more telling:

- 01 **Higher Salary** (65% of respondents)
- 02 **Improved Work-Life Balance** (56%)
- 03 **Career Progression** (34%)
- 04 **Better Employee Benefits Package** (32%)
- 05 **Better Company Culture** (27%)
- 06 **Training and Development** (19%)
- 07 **Career Change** (14%)
- 08 **All of the Above** (5%)



This shows that even among 'satisfied' employees, there's an underlying desire for better compensation and work-life integration that their current roles are not providing.



Burnout in plain sight

Notably, stress appears to be a driving force behind Work Ghosting. While many employees report satisfaction with their roles, the underlying stress tells a different story.

93% of UK workers report varying intensities of stress at work, with only 7% “rarely” experiencing stress. 25% are “occasionally” stressed, while 32% are “moderately” stressed. 28% of respondents reported feeling “frequently” stressed, while 7% are “constantly” stressed.

When combined, this suggests that over a third of employees experience frequent or constant stress at work, creating high-risk environments for [workplace burnout](#).

Primary stress factors impacting work-life balance:

- 01 **Heavy Workload** (22% of respondents)
- 02 **Poor Leadership** (19%)
- 03 **Lack of Flexible Working Options** (17%)
- 04 **Financial Pressures** (15%)
- 05 **Personal Life Commitments** (13%)
- 06 **Workplace Culture** (8%)

With 14% reporting that “nothing is affecting my work-life balance”, this means 86% of UK workers can identify specific factors negatively impacting their work-life balance.

Alongside high stress levels, our data reveals a concerning disconnect in workplace mental health support, where only 53% of the workforce feel “comfortable” or “very comfortable” discussing and raising mental health issues in the workplace.

This means that one quarter of employees do not feel comfortable discussing these issues at work. This silence around stress creates conditions ripe for Work Ghosting, and may be the underlying reason why employees are mentally disengaging from work.

Different ages, different priorities

Not all workers are chasing the same goals. Our data shows that priorities vary sharply by age and career stage, influencing how different generations approach and engage with their workplace.

What is most striking across all generations is the disconnect between stated satisfaction and underlying stress. While 77% claim satisfaction, 67% experience moderate to constant stress and 65% are planning their exit strategies.

This is **Work Ghosting** in action: employees maintaining professional facades while mentally preparing their departure, creating a productivity crisis hiding in plain sight.



High satisfaction coupled with high stress is the hallmark of Work Ghosting.



Gen Z (born 1997–2012)

Wellbeing and growth take centre stage

Gen Z accounts for just an estimated 12% of the UK workforce, yet they're already making their mark and rewriting the rules of the workplace.

For this generation, a job isn't just about a paycheck; it's about purpose, growth, and maintaining their mental health.

- 91% of Gen Z report satisfaction with their current roles (39% “very satisfied”).
- 70% cite higher pay as their primary career motivator, followed by improved work-life balance (55%).
- Over one-third of Gen Z experience frequent or constant stress despite high satisfaction.

Gen Z employees are grateful for employment but are increasingly unwilling to sacrifice their wellbeing for workplace compensation and expectations that feel outdated or unreasonable.

Heavy workloads (26%) and financial pressures (17%) were cited as the biggest stress points for Gen Z, followed by a lack of flexible working options for 15% of respondents.

As a result, mobility is high. While 27% aren't actively seeking a new role, 50% of Gen Z are considering a move within the next six months. The driving factors reveal what's missing from their current positions, with respondents citing their top priorities as:

- 01 **Higher Salary** (70% of respondents)
- 02 **Improved Work-Life Balance** (55%)
- 03 **Better Benefits Packages** (44%)

This comes as work-life balance (31%) and mental health and wellbeing (30%) have surged as top career needs over the past 12 months, even as these needs remain largely unmet in their current roles.

 50% of Gen Z are eyeing new opportunities over the next 6 months

Ownership matters more, too, as over 71% of Gen Z say having an employee share scheme would increase their motivation at work, although over a third have no idea what one is (31%).



Millennials (born 1981–1996)

Balancing pay, perks, and lifestyle

Millennials currently represent roughly 39% of employees across the UK. Now, in their prime career years, they face a unique squeeze.

They're dealing with peak financial decisions and pressures, from mortgages and childcare to ageing parents, all while trying to maintain the work-life integration they've long advocated for.

The Millennial stress crisis:

- Over 70% of millennials report frequent workplace stress
- Financial security is the top priority (overtaking career growth)
- One in seven are actively unhappy with their current benefits packages.
- One in five millennials report dissatisfaction or neutrality with their current job (20%), showing fragility in overall contentment within the workforce.

Looking ahead to 2026, work-life balance (30%) edges out financial rewards (26%) as the top career priority, but workload (26%) and personal commitments (15%) remain the biggest strains.

Career progression still matters (46% would move roles for it), but it is now secondary to pay and balance. As a result, millennials are the generation caught between ambition and exhaustion, creating the perfect conditions for Work Ghosting.

“ 7 in 10 millennials say workplace stress is a regular thing.

Gen X (born 1966–1980)

Security, stability, and strategic flexibility.

Around 35% of the UK workforce aren't satisfied, but neither are they shopping around...

Generation X (aged 43-58) approaches workplace disengagement differently. Rather than dramatic exits or vocal dissatisfaction, they perfect the art of strategic disengagement - doing exactly what's required, nothing more.

Gen X workplace characteristics:

- Lowest job satisfaction among all generations (67% satisfied vs 77% overall average)
- 30% feel uncomfortable discussing mental health - the highest out of all age groups
- Heavy workloads (22%), followed by financial pressures (18%) and poor leadership (17%) are Gen X's top workplace stressors.

Our survey shows that Gen X are staying put (31% not actively looking) while also being the least engaged of the UK workforce. Their focus on financial security (35%) and work-life balance (32%) over career progression (9%) signals a generation that is moving away from climbing the career ladder to simply surviving it.

This leaves Generation X as the highest risk for Work Ghosting. While they remain physically present in roles, their retreat from ambition and openness makes them the hardest to identify and re-engage, creating a hidden cost for employers.

“ Gen X are the least engaged at work, but the least likely to leave.

Structural drivers

The flexibility gap

According to research, almost half of UK businesses want staff back in office on a full-time basis, with companies like HSBC and Boots main drivers for a return to pre-pandemic arrangements.

Yet, flexibility emerged as the second most important factor for Brits applying for jobs (tied with job security), while a lack of flexible working options was cited as the second biggest factor impacting respondents' work-life balance (17%).

Currently, flexible working is varied for UK employees:

- 47% have [hybrid working](#) (mix of remote and in-office)
- 30% have flexible start and end times
- Almost one in five work fully remote (18%)
- 17% have a four-day working week

However, almost one in four Brits have no flexible working options whatsoever (23%), while flexibility ranks as the joint-second most important job factor.

While 56% of employees would apply for new jobs seeking “improved work-life balance”, and one in three (30%) cite “better work-life balance” as their top career priority for 2026, many remain in roles that don’t provide the flexibility they crave.

This mismatch could be a primary driver of Work Ghosting, as employees mentally disengage from organisations that fail to meet their basic flexibility expectations.

Flexible hours matter, yet almost 25% of UK workers don’t have any.



Benefits under the microscope

Our research also reveals a fundamental shift in what employees value from their benefits packages, with traditional perks giving way to support for financial security and wellbeing.

When asked how important the benefits package is when applying for a job, 99% of UK workers agreed it was important to some extent; 30% of workers view it as 'very important'; but a larger proportion agree it is 'important' (40%), and 26% view it as fairly or slightly important.

How satisfied are UK workers with their current benefits package?

- 63% of UK workers are satisfied with their employee benefit package overall (23% "very satisfied", 40% "somewhat satisfied")
- 21% are neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with their current benefits
- Over one in six are actively unsatisfied with what's offered (11% "unsatisfied" and 5% "very unsatisfied")

However, the gap between importance and satisfaction is clear, suggesting that many employees have accepted roles with benefits that don't fully meet their needs, another factor contributing to workplace disengagement.



Most valued employee benefits according to workers

The results in the table below clearly show employees now prioritise direct financial benefits above all else.

Rank	Employee benefits	Score
#1	Bonus Scheme	3.4
#2	Performance-Based Rewards	3.5
#3	Mental Health and Wellbeing Perks	3.8
#4	Employee Share Schemes	4.0
#5	Retail Discounts	4.3
#6	Training and Development Fund	4.3
#7	Parental Leave Policies	4.3

Both bonus schemes and performance-based rewards topped the rankings, reflecting the broader trend toward financial security we identified earlier.

Mental health and wellbeing perks placed third on the overall ranking, aligning with the wider shift in priority towards work-life balance.

Findings from our [Employee Retention Report](#) revealed that employees have an average tenure rate of just 3.7 years, highlighting that industries with traditionally better employee benefits tended towards higher rates of tenure.

Unlocking motivation with share schemes

One of the most significant findings from the Workplace Values Survey centres on employee share schemes. Emerging as a benefit that could dramatically improve engagement and motivation, it is clear that share schemes remain largely misunderstood across the UK workforce.

The share scheme opportunity for employers:

- 60% of UK workers would feel more motivated if they had shares in their company.
- However, almost two in five don't know what a share scheme is (37%).
- 26% are unsure whether shares would motivate them.

This represents a massive untapped opportunity for employers.

The data shows a clear demand:

- Nearly two-thirds of workers believe company ownership would increase their motivation.

Yet over one-third lack a basic understanding of how share schemes work.

When we ranked workplace benefits by importance, employee share schemes received mixed rankings (mean score of 4.0), placing them in the middle tier.

However, this likely reflects the knowledge gap rather than genuine disinterest, as evidenced by bonus schemes and performance-based rewards being the two most important benefits for UK workers out of the mixture of financial and wellbeing benefits listed.

Share schemes represent more than financial benefit; they create psychological ownership and alignment between employee and company success.



For a workforce increasingly seeking purpose and connection to their work, ownership opportunities could be the key to reversing Work Ghosting trends and keeping [high-growth teams motivated](#).

Share schemes are also applicable to businesses of every size, from startups to scaleups, SMEs to an Enterprise level, with [EMI schemes](#), [growth shares](#), and [unapproved share options](#).

“ It's striking that so many employees see the motivational power of company ownership, yet still don't fully understand share schemes. Education is key! If people truly understand how ownership works, companies can unlock engagement, retention, and performance like never before.

Our own data shows that 93% of customers say Vestd helped them grow, and 95% report better retention once a scheme is in place. Making equity rewards visible through Vestd's dashboards turns abstract share schemes into tangible motivation.

Ifty Nasir
Founder & CEO of [Vestd](#)



Sentiment by sector

Banking & Financial Services

The banking and financial services industry leads in benefits satisfaction (74% satisfied) and share scheme awareness (79%), yet workers experience higher stress levels, with 38% frequently or constantly stressed.

This comes as heavy workloads (23%) and financial pressures (19%) were cited as the main factors impacting employees' work-life balance. As a result, 69% of banking and financial workers are actively considering leaving, with 43% of the workforce planning moves within the next six months.

This comes as our [Employee Benefits Index](#) ranked the banking industry specifically as falling behind on its employee benefits offering, underscoring the need for competitive benefits that match employees' expectations.

Computer Software

Tech workers are prioritising mental health above all else (38% citing it as most important over the last 12 months), with the highest demand for wellbeing perks. While 89% report satisfaction with their jobs, 56% would leave for a better work-life balance, with 27% viewing it as a top career priority for 2026.

Notably, 75% are either actively looking or planning to leave within the year, the highest mobility rate across all industries surveyed.



Construction

For construction workers, 31% have zero flexible working options, and only 33% have hybrid arrangements. As a career traditionally expected to be on-site full-time, this is not unexpected, but it underlines the importance of aligned, attractive benefits to keep the workforce engaged.

However, with 45% of workers either neutral or dissatisfied with their current employee benefits, some work needs to be done. This comes as performance-based rewards (3.3), bonus scheme (3.5) and mental health and wellbeing perks (3.6) were ranked as the top three most important benefits for workers, with better work-life balance (31%) and financial security (22%) cited as the top career priorities for 2026.

Retail

The retail sector has the clearest signs of Work Ghosting: lowest benefit satisfaction (60% satisfied), the highest proportion of workers with no flexible working (39%), and 72% planning to leave within a year.

Interestingly, mental health discussions remain taboo, with 28% of workers finding it uncomfortable to raise, despite a better work-life balance being cited as the top priority for next year (37%) and one of the primary drivers for applying to a new job (58%).

With 58% stating that share schemes would motivate them, there's a clear opportunity for the retail sector to improve retention of talent by aligning with employees' needs, particularly as 42% of workers cite low awareness or knowledge of share schemes.



Action steps

Don't let your company become a ghost town!

The choice facing UK employers is stark: evolve to meet employees where they are, or watch your workforce mentally disengage.

Work Ghosting isn't a temporary trend but a fundamental shift in how employees relate to work when their needs aren't being met. The good news? Work Ghosting can be addressed and managed.

Organisations that take proactive steps to address the root causes can not only [prevent disengagement](#) but also actively increase employee commitment and performance:

Rebalance benefits toward wellbeing

Flexibility and work-life balance have clearly risen to the top of workers' priorities for this year, and into the next. As such, employers should look to shift from token perks towards [financial security benefits](#), like bonus schemes, fair pay, and equity.

Equally, introducing wellbeing benefits that address mental health and flexible working directly will go a long way to improving engagement and morale.

Our data has revealed a troubling silence around mental health in the workplace, and one that needs to be addressed to prevent problems escalating.



Businesses need to train managers to recognise and address stress in their teams, creating a regular check-in process that goes beyond work tasks.

As part of this, establishing clear workforce policies around workload and stress management, combined with making mental health resources visible and accessible, can go a long way to improving workers' comfort level in identifying and flagging issues.

Here's all of those tips as a checklist:

Prioritise flexibility and work-life balance: focus on meaningful support rather than token perks.

Offer broader financial benefits, such as fair pay, bonus schemes, and equity.

Introduce wellbeing benefits: address mental health and flexible working directly.

Break the silence on mental health: create an environment where staff feel comfortable speaking up.

Train managers to recognise and address stress: implement regular check-ins that go beyond tasks.

Establish clear policies on workload and stress management: set expectations and guidelines for staff wellbeing.

Make mental health resources visible and accessible: ensure employees know where and how to get support.



Equity in action

With 60% of employees interested in share schemes, but 37% lacking knowledge of how they work, businesses have a clear opportunity to close the gap and boost engagement.

Worthwhile steps to follow:

Introduce the right scheme for your business size: From tax-efficient EMI option schemes for SMEs to growth shares and unapproved share options for scaleups and larger firms, there's a model to suit every company.

Educate and communicate: Awareness is the missing link. Employers who explain how [share options](#) align employee success with company growth see stronger engagement and retention.

Position equity as a workplace benefit: Employees value [ownership](#) on par with performance values. Framing equity as part of a benefits package can transform it from a financial perk into reinforcing purpose, trust, inclusion, and long-term commitment.

Methodology

We conducted a survey of 500 full-time employees across the UK in August 2025 via Pollfish. All data has been stratified to ensure representative distribution across the UK workforce.

Our analysis combined a mixture of question types covering job satisfaction, stress levels, mental health comfort, work-life balance factors, career priorities, mobility intentions, flexible working arrangements, benefits preferences, and share scheme awareness.

Mean score indicates the average ranking each item received.

Because “1” is the highest ranking, the item with the lowest mean is the one that was ranked most highly.

Full survey findings are available upon request. All data is accurate as of October 2025.

Vestd in their values

Our survey shows a gap between what employees value and what many companies offer. Vestd helps you bridge it with share schemes that motivate, retain, and empower your people.

Since 2014, we've helped businesses share ownership the smart way. Our platform provides clear, accessible dashboards that demystify share ownership, making it tangible and motivating for employees - and a million times easier for you to manage!

[See it in action](#)

Consultations are free, with no obligation to sign up.



Curious? [Grab our Complete Guide to Share Schemes!](#)





Vestd is the platform of choice for UK SMEs issuing shares and options. We help businesses create, execute and manage shares & options schemes simply and affordably.

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