THE WORKS SEARCH

BENEFITS GUIDE 2026

UK Corporate Communications Professionals

With over half of corporate communications professionals eyeing the door, we take a closer look at company benefits to see how priorities and expectations differ across generations.

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Foreword

Agency leaders don't realise that they are not really competing against other agencies when it comes to retention and hiring, but against in-house comms teams. The appeal of in-house roles is incredible, and it's costly for leaders to ignore it, especially when half of corporate communications professionals have one eye on the door."

Sarah Leembruggen, Managing Director, The Works Search

About The Works Search

The Works Search is a specialist recruitment consultancy dedicated to corporate communications, corporate affairs, and financial communications. We partner with both in-house teams and agencies across the UK to place high-performing professionals who shape reputation, influence stakeholders, and drive business success. Our work spans senior and mid-level appointments, supporting organisations from established corporates to high-growth businesses.

About this report

Alongside the 17th edition of The Works Search Annual Salary Guide, we are pleased to share our Benefits Guide – exploring company benefits and the evolving priorities shaping today's workforce across generations.

Drawing on responses from 245 corporate communications professionals across the UK, this report explores company benefits, what professionals receive and want, the factors shaping career moves and what influences employer choice.

At a time when comms agency margins are being squeezed, and in-house communications budgets are under pressure, understanding employee benefits has rarely mattered more.

This year, we have partnered with Opinium Research and Financial Narrative to broaden our reach and bring in an even richer set of perspectives.

Three questions sit at the heart of this report:

1. What benefits are professionals currently receiving?
2. What benefits do they most wish their employer offered?
3. Given that 57% are actively considering a job move in 2026, which benefits are most likely to make them stay — or leave?

Respondent profile

245
Survey respondents

139
In-house professionals

106
Agency professionals

Gender breakdown

61% Female

39% Male

Generation breakdown

21% **Gen Z**
1–10 years' experience

43% **Millennials**
11–20 years' experience

36% **Gen X & Boomers**
21+ years' experience

The retention challenge

57%

are considering a job move in 2026

That's 139 out of 245 professionals actively eyeing the door

"The main reason I'm looking is they've asked for five days a week in the office. I've got children and I don't live in London, so it's completely unrealistic - I have to put my family first."

Millennial, Agency Associate Director

By sector

52%
In-house professionals considering a move

63%
Agency professionals considering a move

By generation

59%
Gen Z
(1-10 yrs' experience)

53%
Millennials
(11-20 yrs' experience)

60%
Gen X / Boomers
(21+ yrs' experience)

Benefits provided: In-house vs Agency

In-house	
Health insurance	90%
Hybrid/remote working	85%
Paid parental leave	78%
Enhanced pension	78%
Paid sick leave (enhanced)	75%
Life insurance & disability	69%
Mental health support	67%
Volunteer time off	60%
Flexible working hours	48%
Dental cash plan	45%
Gym/wellness discounts	42%
Equity/stock options	39%
Non-profit donation match	27%
Training/professional development	23%
One-on-one mentoring	19%
Childcare assistance	16%
Legal services	14%
Unlimited holiday/extra paid time off	9%
Managed investment/savings	9%

Agency	
Hybrid/remote working	88%
Health insurance	86%
Paid parental leave	68%
Enhanced pension	59%
Paid sick leave (enhanced)	56%
Life insurance & disability	51%
Mental health support	50%
Flexible working hours	42%
Volunteer time off	37%
Dental cash plan	35%
Gym/wellness discounts	30%
One-on-one mentoring	24%
Equity/stock options	11%
Non-profit donation match	11%
Training/professional development.	10%
Unlimited holiday/extra paid time off	8%
Childcare assistance	7%
Legal services	3%
Managed investment/savings	3%

Key insights: In-house benefits

01 **Healthcare and hybrid working are universally offered – now the baseline expectation**

More high-value benefits on offer overall, apart from one-to-one mentoring. Having these as standard means the competitive conversation has moved on to what sits beneath them.

02 **A significant uplift for agency professionals moving in-house**

Enhanced pension, paid sick leave and life insurance are all substantially more prevalent in-house, creating a meaningful and immediate improvement in the overall benefits package.

03 **Mental health support and volunteer time off reflect increasingly values-led organisations**

In-house employers are more likely to provide both – signalling a stronger focus on employee wellbeing and purpose, areas that continue to influence attraction and retention.

04 **Culture, flexibility, and career trajectory must all be in place to retain talent**

Even with a stronger benefits package, more than half of in-house professionals are weighing their options. Benefits alone are not sufficient – retention depends on the broader employee experience.

“I’m not leaving for a title bump – I’m leaving because I want an employer who actually looks after my health, not just my output. Moving in-house will give me proper medical cover and mental health support. I want to have a life, not just a laptop.”

Millennial, Agency Director

Key insights: Agency benefits

01 **Hybrid flexibility is an agency's strongest benefit card for now**

Agencies lead on hybrid/remote working at 88% vs 85% in-house. A genuine edge but a fragile one, with firms in banking and private equity calling people back to the office. One-to-one mentoring is another area where agencies outperform.

02 **The financial safety-net gap is widening and professionals know it**

Enhanced pension (78% vs 59%), paid sick leave (75% vs 56%), life insurance (69% vs 51%) and parental leave (78% vs 68%) are all substantially more prevalent in-house. These are valued protections that professionals notice immediately.

03 **Mental health provision is improving, but still 17% behind in-house**

50% of agencies now provide mental health support, which reflects real progress. But the gap remains significant given that agency life is typically faster-paced and more pressured. Closing it would have a disproportionate impact on wellbeing and retention.

04 **63% of agency professionals are considering a move**

With nearly two-thirds of agency professionals weighing up a job change, the case for addressing the benefits deficit is urgent. Equity plans, mentoring, and professional development remain underutilised despite their strong impact on retention.

"Five days in the office is the deal-breaker. I'm happy to work hard, but I won't go back to pretending I don't have a family and a commute. The flexibility is worth more to me than another few thousand on the base."

Gen X, Agency Director

What matters most when choosing an employer

Company benefits play a role in securing the best talent, but they are far from the only factor

Decision criteria	In-house	Agency
Salary/bonus	88%	89%
Corporate culture	71%	63%
Flexibility/hybrid working	71%	60%
Quality of team	50%	64%
Growth/career path	50%	53%
Leadership/mentorship	45%	40%
Benefits	44%	43%
Social activities	8%	5%

01 **Salary is king – but equal across both sectors**

Compensation tops the list for both (88% in-house, 89% agency). It is a baseline expectation, not a differentiator. The competitive battle for talent is won or lost based on everything below it.

02 **Culture and flexibility are in-house's most powerful pull**

In-house professionals rate both significantly more highly. They correlate directly with lower attrition intention: 52% in-house vs 63% of agency professionals considering a move.

03 **Quality of team is the agency's most distinctive edge**

Agency and in-house professionals value benefits similarly, yet the stronger in-house offering risks widening the agency retention gap.

04 **Benefits are valued equally - but received very differently**

Both sectors rate benefits at 43-44%, yet in-house professionals receive substantially more. This awareness gap is a slow-burning retention risk for agencies.

Should company benefits be the same for every generation?

We took a closer look at the generations as they are all interested in moving roles in 2026

59%

Considering a move in 2026

Gen Z

1-10 years' experience

53%

Considering a move in 2026

Millennials

11- 20 years' experience

60%

Considering a move in 2026

Gen X & Boomers

21+ years' experience

Gen Z wish list

59% are considering a move in 2026

1. More holiday allowance / time off
2. Gym / wellness benefits
3. Flexible / hybrid working
4. Healthcare
5. Dental insurance / optical
6. Bonus / equity
7. Childcare / parental leave
8. Higher salary
9. Car allowance / electric vehicle scheme
10. Better pension

Insights

Gen Z are early in their careers – prioritising freedom, flexibility and benefits which will give them money or save them money. More time off tops the list, closely followed by gym/wellness benefits and flexibility. While pensions barely register now, employers who begin building financial benefits early will earn long-term loyalty.

What they said

“More holiday. More time off. Early summer Fridays would be a start.”

“Travel costs – I spend a fortune getting to the office.”

“Gym membership or some kind of wellness budget.”

“Private health cover, even basic.”

“Just more flexibility on when I work, not just where.”

“Dental. Why is dental always missing?”

“Remote working – still fighting for this.”

“Bonuses or some kind of equity. I want to feel like I have a stake in it.”

Millennial wish list

53% are considering a move in 2026

1. More holiday allowance / time off
2. Childcare / parental leave
3. Car allowance / electric vehicle scheme
4. Healthcare
5. Flexible working
6. Better pension
7. Bonus / equity
8. Gym / wellness
9. Higher salary
10. Dental / optical

Insights

Millennials are in the thick of it – building careers, starting families, and managing mortgages. Childcare stands out strongly, while car allowance schemes emerge as a practical family necessity. Pensions start to matter, but career and family support dominate the wish list.

What they said

"More holiday. Unlimited would be the dream but I'd settle for more than 25 days."

"Private health. I've got a family now; NHS wait times are impossible."

"Car allowance or EV scheme – we have kids now; we need a car."

"Pension contributions – not just the legal minimum, something that actually builds."

"Better maternity leave – statutory just doesn't cut it anymore."

"I want to feel supported when I start a family. Enhanced maternity pay and childcare support make all the difference."

Gen X & Boomer wish list

60% are considering a move in 2026

1. More holiday allowance / time off
2. Flexible / hybrid working
3. Bonus / equity / shares
4. Better pension
5. Healthcare
6. Wellness benefits
7. Higher salary / pay
8. Car allowance / electric vehicle scheme
9. Dental / optical
10. Childcare / parental leave

Insights

The most experienced professionals are among the most mobile. With 60% considering a move, closely matched by Gen Z at 59%, this likely reflects a shortage of senior roles rather than active dissatisfaction. Their wish list is shaped by decades in the industry: more leave, real flexibility, stronger pensions and equity. Frustration with the rollback of hybrid working is particularly pronounced in this group.

What they said

"Fully remote working – we did it in Covid, why are we going backwards now?"

"Better employer pension contributions – they only pay the minimum."

"More flexibility and less restrictive hybrid working."

"Access to equity or share options at a senior level."

How benefits wish lists have evolved

Three findings from our Annual Salary Guide 2025 sit alongside this report

01

Hybrid working and private health are now baseline expectations – not differentiators

Our 2025 Salary Guide found that both benefits are now considered standard by employers across the sector. Candidates expect them as a starting point, not a selling point. What sets employers apart is the benefits on offer beyond the basics.

02

The pension gap between in-house and agency is real, persistent, and widening in impact

In-house employer pension contributions remain significantly stronger than those offered by agencies. As this report shows, an enhanced pension is one of the benefits professionals most wish their employers offered, highlighting a structural gap that agencies have yet to address.

03

Professionals leave for leadership and progression – not just pay

Uninspiring leadership and lack of progression outrank pay dissatisfaction as the primary reasons professionals move roles. Benefits matter, but they operate within the broader employee experience. A strong package does not compensate for poor leadership or a lack of career trajectory.

Key takeaways for employers

Four conclusions every communications employer may want to act on:

01 In-house leads on financial protection

Pension, sick pay, life insurance, mental health and equity are all significantly more prevalent in-house – driving a 63% rate of job move consideration for agency professionals.

We recognise matching in-house packages is not always realistic. Agency margins are under pressure. The more useful question: which two or three benefits would make the biggest difference to your specific team?

For some, that will be enhanced parental leave; for others, a better pension or private health. Targeting the gaps that matter most is more likely to move the dial than attempting full parity.

02 Culture and flexibility win at every level

Once professionals are established, corporate culture and flexibility outrank almost everything except salary. Agencies that invest in these, not just in benefits, build the most durable retention advantage.

03 The generational wish list shifts dramatically

Gen Z want freedom and wellness. Millennials want car allowance schemes and health cover. Gen X and Boomers want sabbaticals, proper flexible working and equity. One benefits package will never serve all three.

04 57% are considering a move – the clock is ticking

With over half the market actively considering a change in 2026, the employers who will win are those who listen to what their people actually want.

About our partners

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