



Emerging data driving benefits design change 2025-26

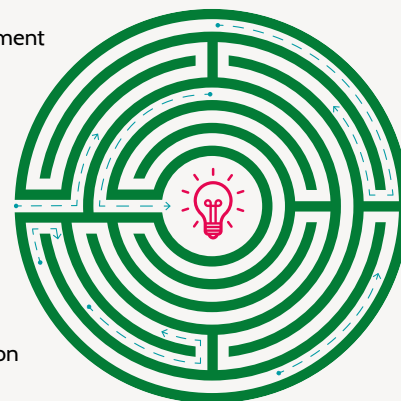
Data gaps are threatening benefits strategy success

REBA's *Benefits Design Research 2025*, in partnership with Howden, reveals the key benefits data points that 360 top companies - including BAE Systems, Channel 4, Diageo, Suez and Wincanton – find most compelling when evidencing programme performance or seeking approval for change or innovation.

From missing data and unusable formats to quality and interpretation issues, these challenges are hindering decision-making and jeopardising benefit project approvals. With health-related benefits dominating changes, employers risk a double whammy if approvals aren't secured.

This jeopardises not only employee engagement and wellbeing but the wider business objectives they are often aligned with, such as reducing absenteeism and enhancing productivity. Employers should act now or risk being left behind.

This briefing provides a snapshot of the findings, or dive into the full report for benchmarking data, key approval drivers, strategies to overcome data barriers, and actionable steps to upskill the reward function for future-ready decisions.



219

Respondents have more than 1,000 employees

1.8m

Employees represented in the research

360

Employer respondents

About the research

Using REBA's extensive membership, the research team conducted an online survey in January 2025 to produce the full 28-page *Benefits Design Research 2025*. REBA's robust methodology uncovered clear future trends and decision-making patterns among the 360 respondents, representing 1.8 million employees.

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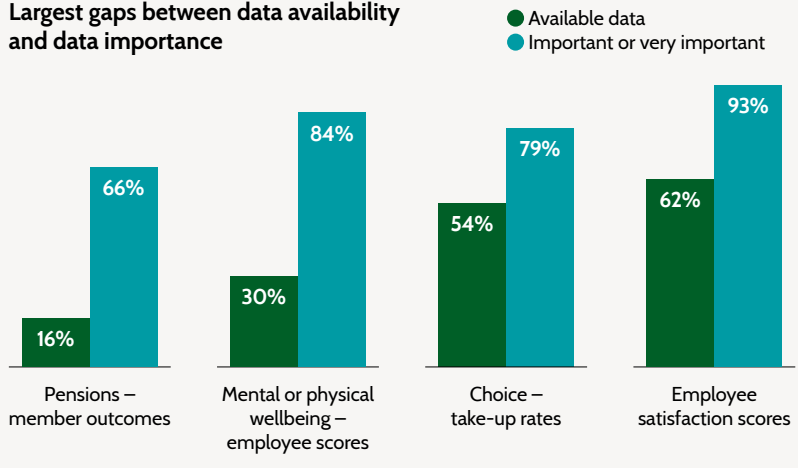
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Key findings

Quality data valued by employers remains out of reach

There are significant gaps in the availability of important data. This is particularly obvious for pensions data, with relatively few respondents having data linked to member outcomes. Employers also struggle with employee satisfaction, mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing scores. Choice has the smallest gap, but this remains significant when considering the move towards more personalised benefits.

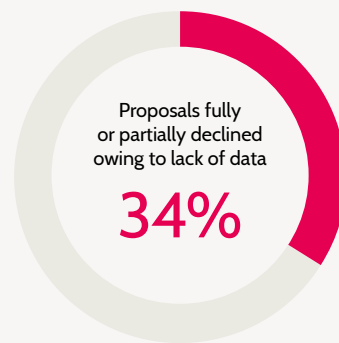
Largest gaps between data availability and data importance



Incomplete data obstructs one-third of benefits transformation efforts

Today's reward and benefits professionals need robust, quality data to ensure that proposed changes to benefits programmes achieve internal approval. Nearly a fifth (19%) have had choice programmes, such as flexible benefits, either partially or fully declined because of insufficient data, rather than as a result of budget constraints or anecdotal sentiment.

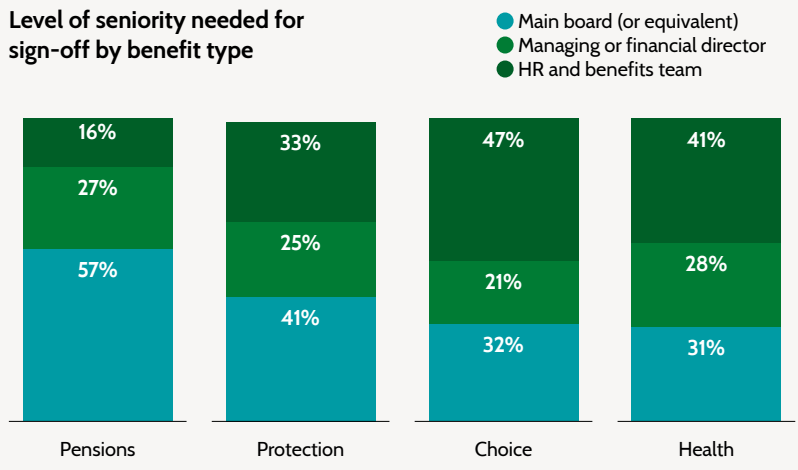
Impact of lack of data on benefits change programmes



Higher costs come with stricter approval processes

Benefits that need higher levels of investment or that carry greater future risk to the business require more senior sign-off. In most cases, pensions changes need board-level approval, with a sizeable minority going to the managing director or finance director. In contrast, wellbeing benefits largely remain with the chief people officer or internal benefits team for sign-off.

Level of seniority needed for sign-off by benefit type

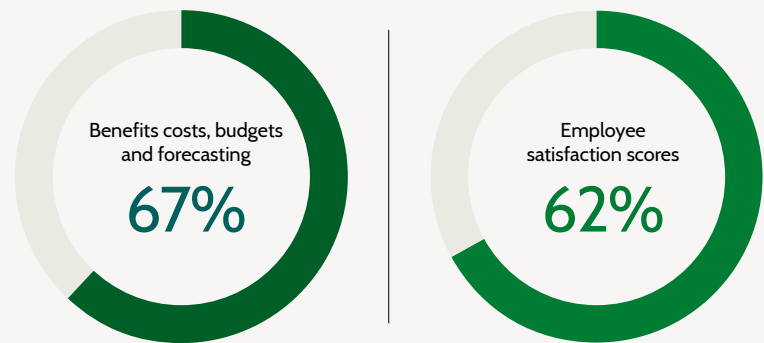


Key findings

Cost and employee satisfaction shape benefit success

Benefits decision-makers prioritise measuring cost to business and employee satisfaction when assessing benefits programme performance. When reporting to leadership, these data points are crucial to more employers than any other measurements, such as claims data or take-up rates.

Leading measures used to demonstrate benefits programme performance

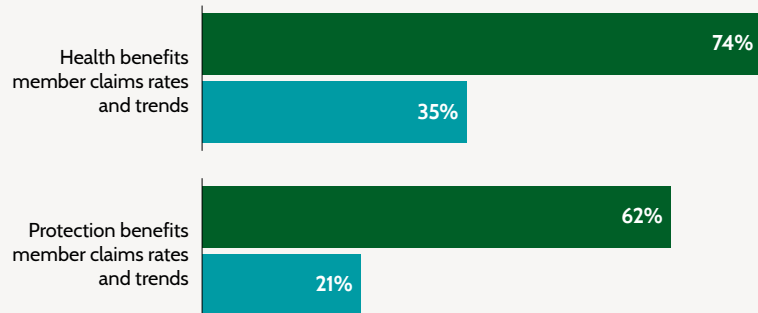


Critical health and risk insights aren't reaching leadership teams

It is unclear exactly which factors are holding benefits professionals back from reporting potential performance insights to senior leaders. However, it will take collaborative pressure between employers, providers and consultants to achieve the quality of data and insights needed to better engage senior leaders.

Performance data available versus what is reported to leadership

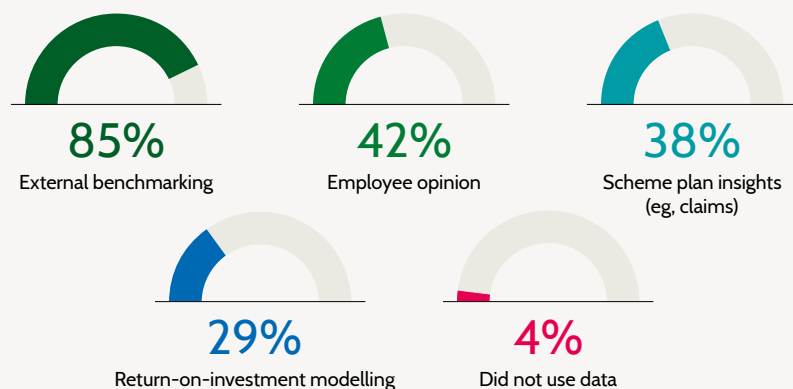
● Data currently available
● Programme performance data reported to senior leaders



Pensions decisions driven by external benchmarking

Most employers rely on external benchmarking with competitors to gain approval for pension changes, more so than for any other benefit. From sector-specific norms on employer contribution levels, through to regulation setting a minimum level, employers are used to looking externally to sense-check changes to this expensive and complex core benefit.

Data used the most for pension-change approvals



Recommended actions

From Howden Employee Benefits

1

Define the outcomes you are trying to achieve

Whether you call it a strategy, a plan or governance, write down what outcomes you want to achieve through your investment in benefits and wellbeing. Once you have them, write down the data points associated with those goals. And, as with any robust set of goals or objectives, be SMART, especially starting with the S – be 'specific'.

2

Start by tracking costs and employee satisfaction

Once you have your plan, it is clear that the most common and important data points, which most reward professionals are measuring today, are costs and employee satisfaction. Tracking your spend year-on-year – including why it's changing, together with what your employees think and feel about your benefits – are the table stakes for what you should be regularly reporting to your stakeholders.

3

Don't forget the detail linked to your biggest areas of spend

Below those two initial data points, there are many more to measure in order to understand the impact, challenges and successes of individual aspects of your benefits programme. Retirement outcomes are one of the least measured data points, yet a good pension is one of if not the most valued benefit. The same goes for health – what do your claims tell you about the needs of your workforce and what wellbeing interventions you should be considering?

4

Don't wait for an issue to engage your stakeholders

As with any programme of work insight – from sales to operations – your benefits programme performance should be regularly reported up to chief people officer level and even the board. It is clear from the research that too few reward professionals are engaging budget-holders frequently. If you are asking them to make major decisions – without feeling like they are close to both the objectives and performance of your benefits – then the task is futile.

5

Find the right partner who can help fill your data, tools and skills gap

It is clear from the research that the biggest barriers to data maturity lie within the reward function, with a lack of data skills, tools and data – especially external 'benchmarking' data – to govern programmes in-house. Find a partner you can work with – one with a tried-and-tested formula for benefits strategy – who can help you to quickly and robustly build your capability and bring the additional insights you need, from outside your business, into your decision-making.

About Howden

Today's diverse workforce has different motivations and lifestyles; there's no one-size-fits-all solution. A good benefits strategy begins by balancing the needs of the business, its people and its budget. It's about digging into the detail and creating a plan that suits your aspirations, then finding the most cost-effective ways to achieve them.

At Howden, we're energising the world of employee benefits. We offer a different level of service because we're a different kind of business. With employee ownership at our heart, our people are personally invested in delivering exceptional results, ensuring that your success is our success.

**Find out how, together,
we can transform your
employee benefits strategy**

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About REBA

The Reward & Employee Benefits Association (REBA) is a thriving community of HR professionals dedicated to pursuing best practice in reward and benefits. Synonymous with excellence, REBA informs and empowers its members to grow their networks, advance their knowledge, source and connect with market-leading vendors, and be prepared for what's coming over the horizon.

REBA's research taps into its diverse network of 4,700+ members and 27,000+ HR contacts to provide objective insights into the reward, benefits and people risk strategies that a broad range of organisations are implementing throughout the UK and internationally.

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