

HCM

Earned Wage Access (EWA) 2025-2026 research

Understand the business
case for On-Demand Pay

www.iris.co.uk

 IRIS

Foreword:

Earned Wage Access (EWA), also known as On-Demand Pay, allows employees to withdraw a portion of their already-earned wages before their scheduled payday, rather than waiting for the traditional monthly pay cycle.

EWA has been branded as a disruptor to the long-standing tradition of the monthly payday, offering workers greater control over their finances.



Stephanie Coward, Managing Director for HCM at IRIS Software Group, says: ***“For over a century, many Brits have lived by the rhythm of the monthly payday.***

“It’s so ingrained that few of us ever question it.

“But technology is revolutionising every aspect of how we manage money, from instant payments to real-time banking.

“The workplace is the final frontier.

“This isn’t just about paying people differently; it’s about using technology to give workers the financial flexibility that matches the reality of modern life.”

In a bid to better understand the overarching sentiment behind On-Demand Pay, we’ve **conducted a survey of 1,000 workers**, gauging their views on traditional pay cycles and whether there’s truly a demand for EWA.

This report presents a general view of the UK workforce, surveying workers of all ages across the country.

The respondents have painted a clear picture of financial hardship, current constraints and an appetite for more flexibility.

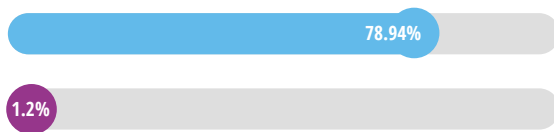
I’ve broken these insights down into defined themes to provide businesses with a clear view of how they can better support employees.

Research snapshot



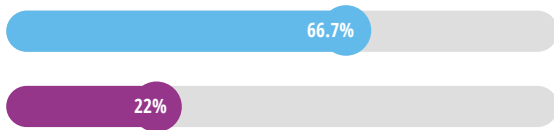
Strong financial confidence

Our research found that ● **78.94%** of respondents feel confident managing their money, with only ● **1.2%** saying they're 'very unconfident', suggesting the workforce is generally financially literate and self-assured.



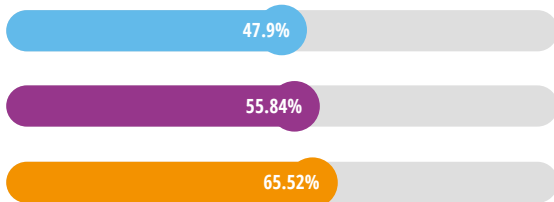
Earned Wage Access is in demand

Two-thirds (● **66.7%**) of respondents say they would use Earned Wage Access if available, with ● **22%** opting for weekly usage.



EWA can boost employer brand

Almost half (● **47.9%**) of respondents said that EWA makes a job more attractive, with the number skyrocketing to ● **55.84%** for those aged 16-24 and ● **65.52%** for 25-34.



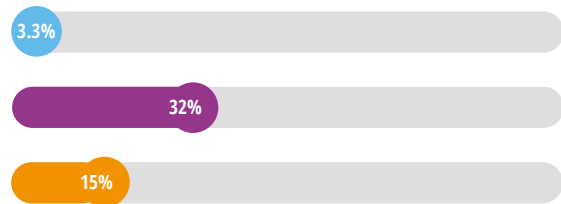
Struggles with saving

Over half (● **55.49%**) agree it's challenging to be consistent with saving money, despite high confidence in money management.



Little reliance on employers

When facing financial difficulty, research found that only ● **3.3%** would turn to their employer, with the vast majority relying on partners (● **32%**) or family (● **15%**).



Responsibility lies with the employee

Over half of our respondents (● **57.1%**) say financial management is the employee's responsibility, not the employer's, suggesting EWA should be framed as optional and empowering.



Regular debt usage

Despite ● **78.94%** of employees expressing high financial confidence, they rely on debt (credit cards, buy now pay later, overdrafts or loans) an average of **7.24** times per year to bridge gaps before payday.



Part one: employee finances

In this section, I've unpacked the financial realities faced by today's workforce.

The data reveals a workforce that is largely confident in their financial management but still grappling with significant hurdles, such as inconsistent saving habits, reliance on debt and cost-of-living pressures.

These insights not only highlight areas where employees are thriving but also uncover opportunities for businesses to step in and provide meaningful support.

Financial confidence

When asked how confident respondents were with managing their finances, we received a largely positive sentiment.

The majority (**78.94%**) stated that they feel confident in managing their finances.

Interestingly, the age group 25-34 stands out as the most financially assured, with **89.27%** of them reporting confidence, suggesting that millennials may feel more in control of their financial management compared to other age groups.

Commentary:

High levels of financial confidence among workers are reassuring.

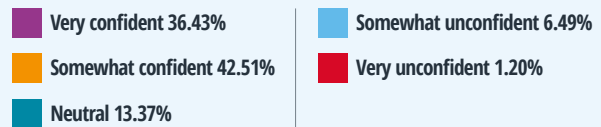
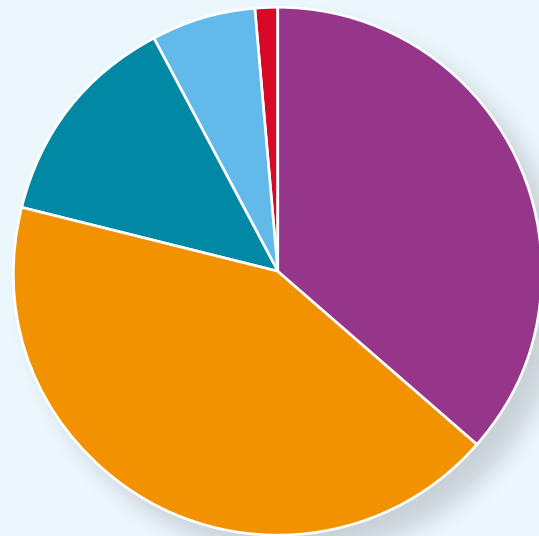
It indicates a workforce that is generally capable of managing its money effectively.

However, the data also highlights opportunities for improvement.

While the majority feel confident, the **7.68%** who are unconfident and the **13.37%** who are neutral may benefit from additional financial education or support.

Additionally, even among the confident, Earned Wage Access is still a relatively new concept, and businesses may need to provide clear communication and training to ensure employees understand how to use it effectively.

How confident do you feel managing your finances?





Where are workers finding support?

When asked who they'd turn to if they were struggling with their finances, many respondents highlighted reliance on personal relationships.

The most common choice was partner/spouse at **32.04%**, followed by extended family at **14.67%**.

Commentary:

The low percentage of respondents (**3.29%**) who would turn to their employer for financial support highlights a significant opportunity for businesses to step in and support their employees as part of a benefits package.

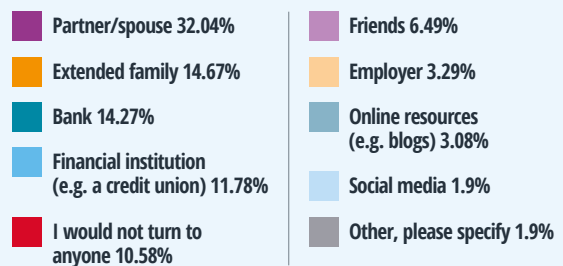
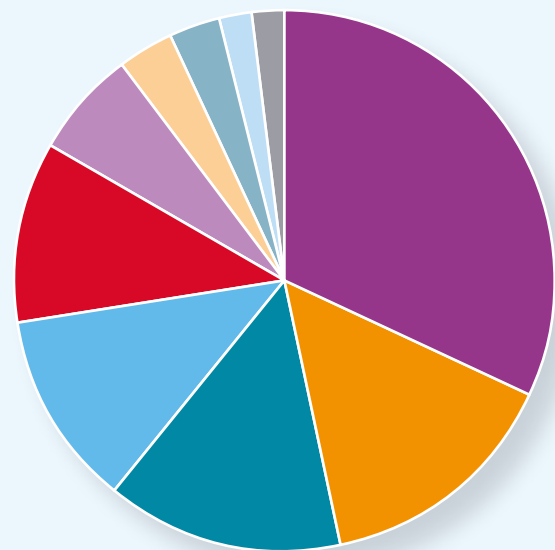
Offering greater financial support could help build trust, improve employee wellbeing and differentiate businesses in a competitive job market.

I'd like to also flag that **10.58%** of respondents said they'd not turn to anyone.

It's incredibly concerning that a segment of the workforce may feel isolated or lack access to financial support.

This further highlights the business case for employers to create a supportive environment and offer additional assistance.

Who would you most likely turn to if you felt like you were struggling to control your finances?



To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "My employer actively supports my financial wellbeing."

Strongly agree 16.27%

16.27%

Somewhat agree 30.94%

30.94%

Neither agree nor disagree 27.64%

27.64%

Somewhat disagree 11.28%

11.28%

Strongly disagree 13.87%

13.87%

Does your employer provide you with access to financial wellbeing advice and support?

Yes, a lot of support 20.66%

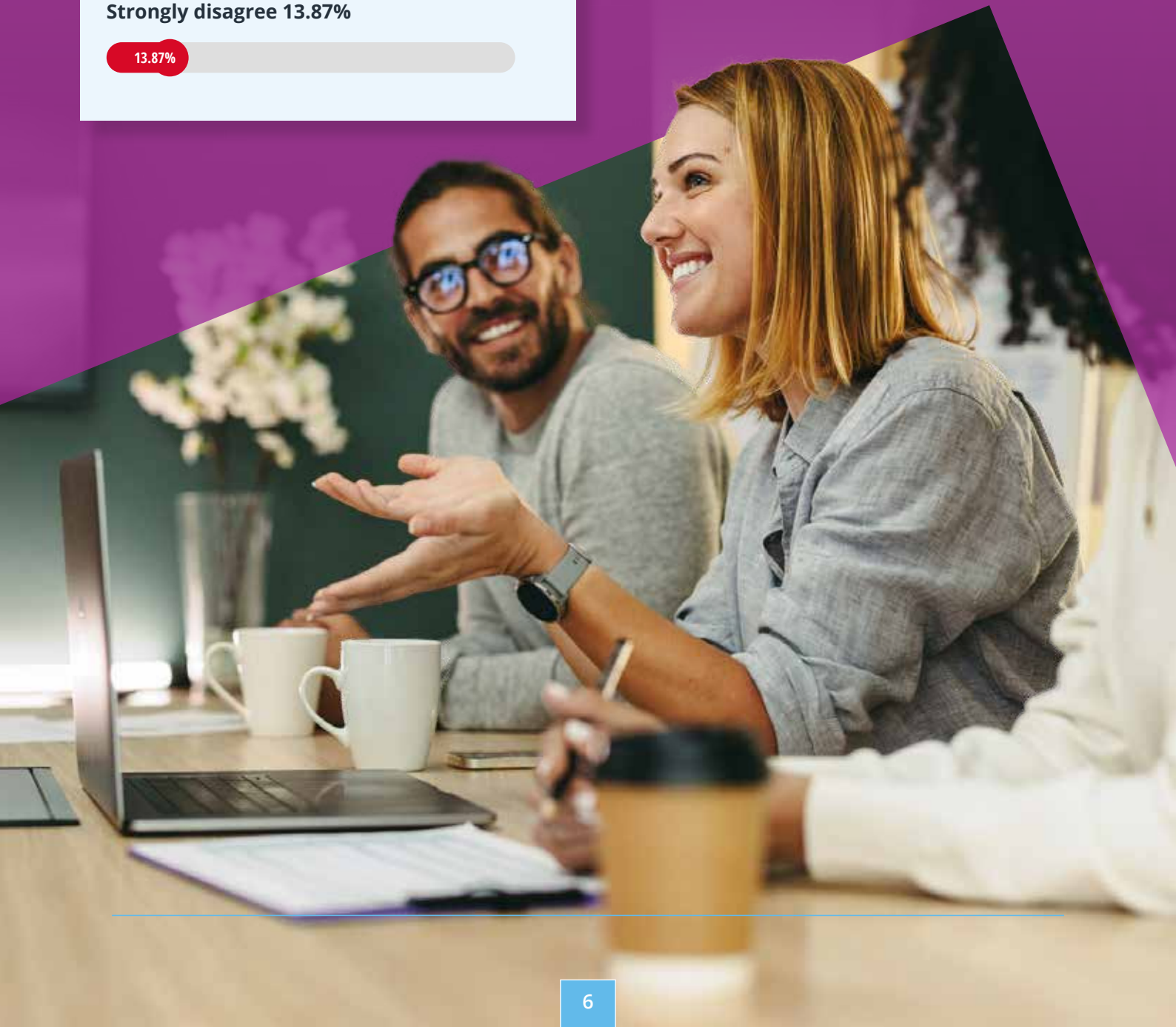
20.66%

Yes, some support 40.02%

40.22%

No support provided 39.32%

39.32%





Struggling with saving

The survey revealed that a significant portion (**55.49%**) of respondents are struggling to save regularly.

Demographic insights help to paint the picture further, highlighting that younger respondents are struggling even more – those aged 16-24 (**66.23%**) and 35-44 (**63.64%**).

In contrast, we found that those aged 55+ are less likely to face saving challenges, with only **43.42%** agreeing and a notable **39.91%** disagreeing with the statement.

Commentary:

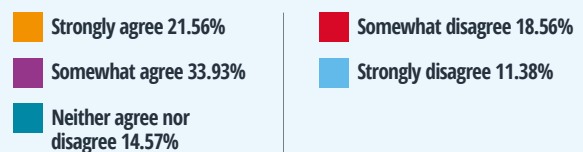
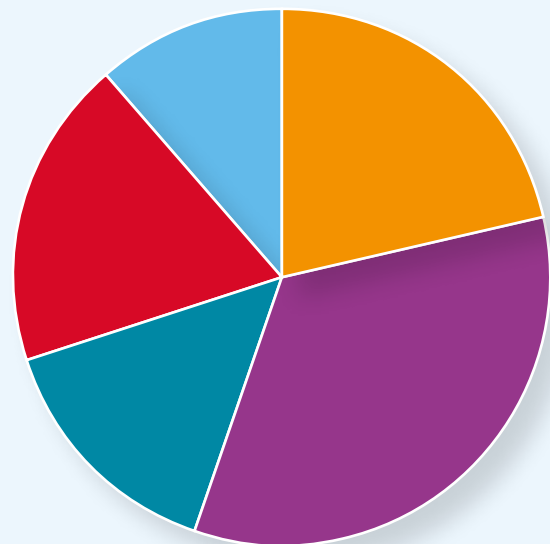
The data highlights a widespread challenge with consistent saving.

Younger employees (16-24) typically struggle with lower income levels and student debt, while those in their prime working years (35-44) likely face greater financial pressure, such as mortgages and raising a family.

However, older employees (55+) are more financially stable, possibly due to having fewer financial obligations or more established savings habits.

This data underscores the importance of offering financial support that addresses the various challenges faced by different age groups.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I find being consistent with savings hard.”



The rising cost of living

Research from **Lancaster University** has found that real-terms pay has increased for 23 months in a row, with those in low-paid employment having received a **6.7%** increase in the National Living Wage from April 2025.

However, looking more closely reveals a significantly more challenging picture.

The reality is that a legacy of more than a decade of stagnating pay, together with the recent cost-of-living crisis that saw inflation peak at **11.1%**, has left many across the country significantly worse off and continuing to struggle to make ends meet.

Our survey results reflect this financial crisis, with over half (**52.1%**) of respondents agreeing that accessing their salary on demand would significantly help them manage the ever-rising cost of living.

Commentary:

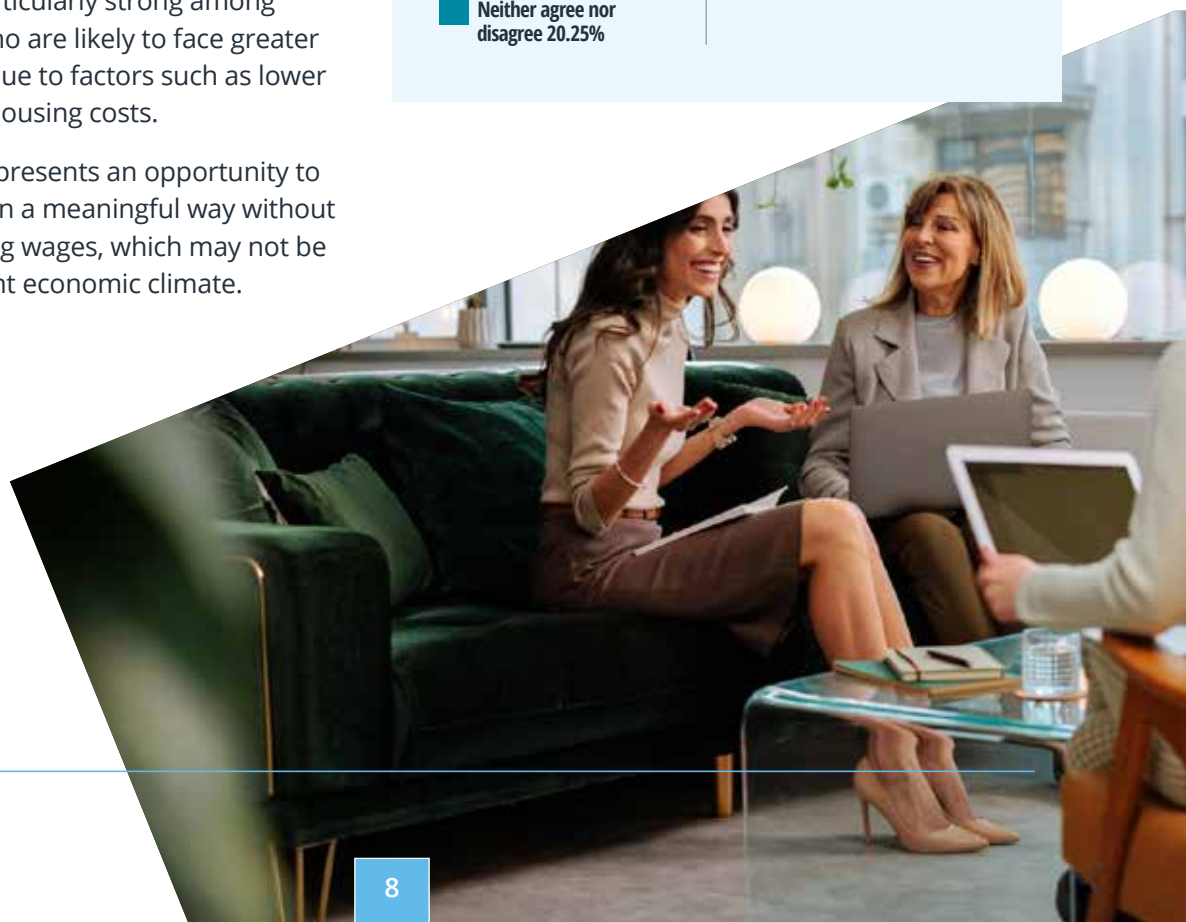
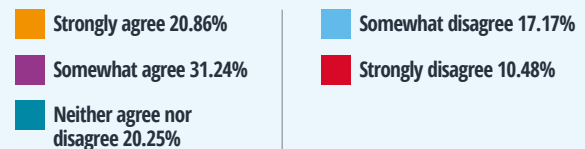
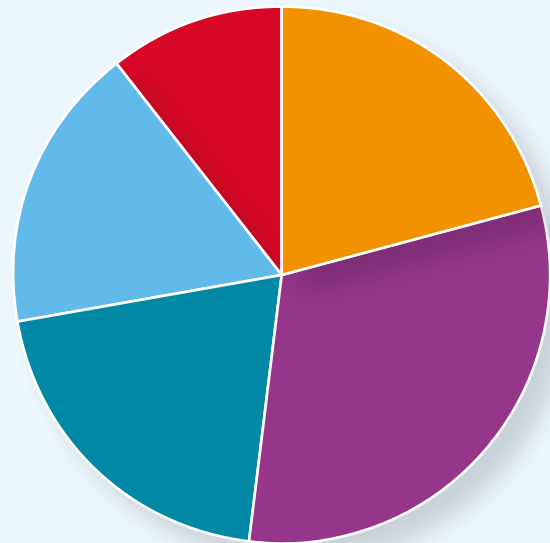
The data highlights the ongoing financial strain caused by the cost-of-living crisis, with over half of respondents expressing that flexible access to their salary could help them better manage their finances.

This sentiment is particularly strong among younger workers, who are likely to face greater financial pressures due to factors such as lower incomes and rising housing costs.

For businesses, this presents an opportunity to support employees in a meaningful way without necessarily increasing wages, which may not be feasible in the current economic climate.

Earned Wage Access can provide immediate financial relief by allowing employees to access their earned wages before payday if they've unexpected bills to pay.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Accessing my salary when it suits me would help me to manage the impact of the cost of living."





Regular debt

The survey results reveal that the majority of respondents (**69.76%**) have relied on debt (cards, buy now pay later, overdrafts or loans) at least once in the past year to cover expenses before payday.

Looking at the demographic insights, this becomes increasingly concerning, as the 25-34 age group is struggling even more, with **82.76%** of them having used debt in the past year.

Commentary:

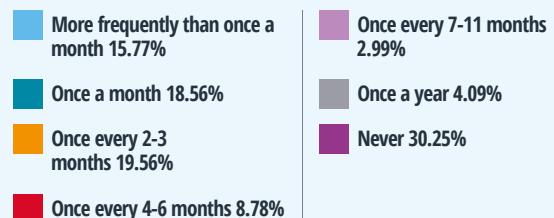
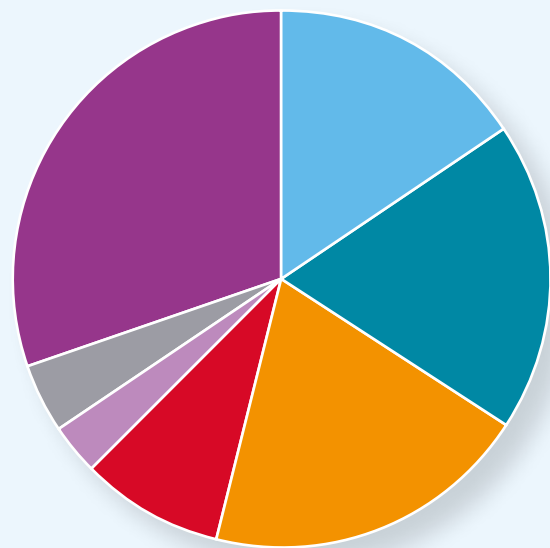
This reliance on credit options such as credit cards, buy now pay later schemes, overdrafts or loans can perpetuate a cycle of financial stress, particularly if high-interest rates or fees are involved.

Currently, if the next pay cycle is too far away, unexpected bills can force people into expensive borrowing options, with payday loans exceeding **1,000%** APRs.

However, financial stress isn't just an issue for employees to deal with.

With it impacting productivity, mental health and staff retention, pressure is on businesses to act and support their people if they want to truly thrive.

In the last 12 months, how many times have you used debt, if at all (credit cards, buy now pay later, overdrafts or loans) to bridge the gap before payday?



Part two: Earned Wage Access

As the workplace evolves, so do employee expectations.

Earned Wage Access is emerging as a powerful tool for businesses to meet these modern demands.

In this section, I've explored the rising desire for flexible pay, from its role in attracting top talent to its ability to facilitate greater financial control.

Becoming an attractive employer

The survey revealed that nearly half (47.9%) of respondents would find an employer offering EWA more attractive.

This percentage jumps to 65.52% for workers aged 25-34, 56.71% for those aged 35-44 and 55.84% for the 16-24 group.

Commentary:

The data underscores the potential of Earned Wage Access (EWA) as a differentiator in the current competitive job market.

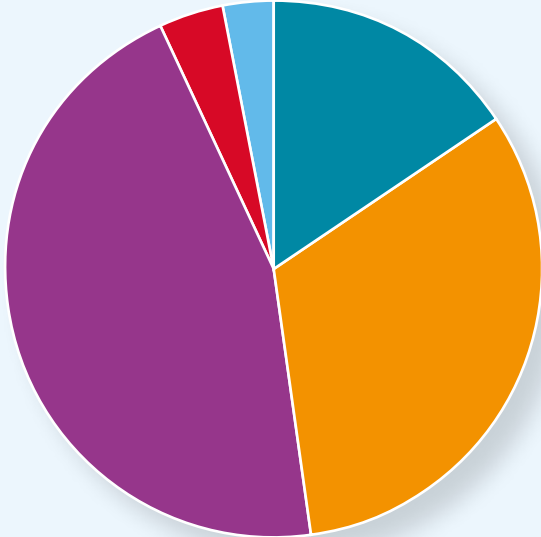
With nearly half of respondents viewing EWA as an attractive benefit, those offering this option could gain a significant edge in attracting and retaining talent.



The appeal of EWA is especially strong among younger workers – it offers a great tool for securing the next generation of talent entering the workforce, as well as those earlier on in their careers.

These findings align with broader trends showing that younger generations value flexibility in the workplace.

If another employer offered Earned Wage Access and your current employer did not, how much more attractive would that make the other employer to you?



- Much more attractive 15.57%
- Slightly more attractive 32.34%
- No difference 45.41%
- Slightly less attractive 3.79%
- Much less attractive 2.89%

Meeting modern expectations

On a similar note, our survey also revealed a notable demand for Earned Wage Access, with nearly half (**45.41%**) of respondents agreeing that they should have this option.

However, where this insight became truly interesting was the demographic data, as the percentage of workers agreeing that they should have access to EWA skyrockets to **62.07%** for those aged 25-34.

This is an enormous contrast when compared to those aged 55+ where only **21.93%** agreed, and 45-54, which was **37.07%**.

Commentary:

The data indicates a significant demand for EWA among younger workers.

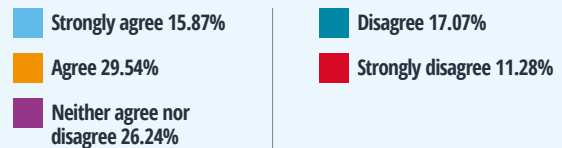
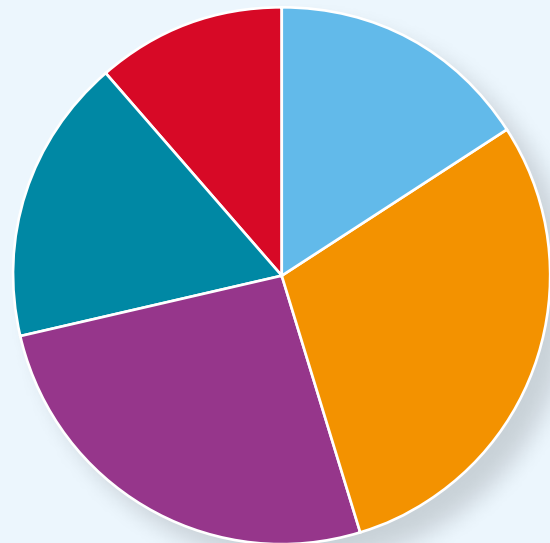
This generational trend is likely driven by financial circumstances as younger employees are often less established in their careers, have lower savings and face greater financial pressures.

For these workers, EWA offers a practical solution for reducing reliance on high-interest credit options.

Once again, the resistance among older employees (55+) is worth noting – this group is likely more financially stable, with established savings and less need for flexible pay options.

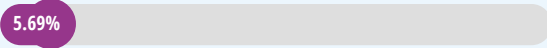
However, their resistance should not deter businesses from offering EWA, as it remains a valuable benefit for a significant portion of the workforce.

In the last 12 months, how many times have you used debt, if at all (credit cards, buy now pay later, overdrafts or loans) to bridge the gap before payday?

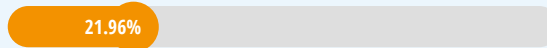


If you had the option to access your pay at any time, do you think you'd use it more than once a month?

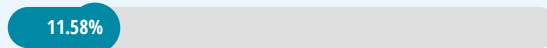
Yes, daily 5.69%



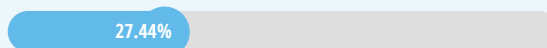
Yes, weekly 21.96%



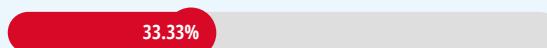
Yes, fortnightly 11.58%



Yes, only occasionally when needed 27.44%



No, I'd only access it once a month 33.33%



If you were to access your pay as you earned it, rather than receiving it on a set monthly date, what would you use it for? (Select all that apply)

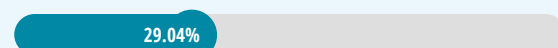
To help cover the cost of unexpected bills. 41.52%



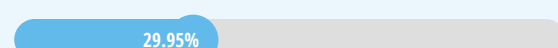
To help cover daily expenses (e.g. groceries) 39.92%



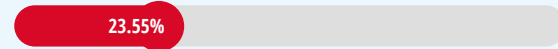
To be less reliant on debt (credit cards, overdrafts, buy now pay later, loans) 29.04%



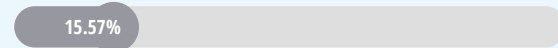
Savings 25.95%



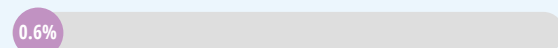
To help cover high-expenditure months (e.g. birthdays, holidays) 23.55%



Would not do anything 15.57%



Other, please specify 0.60%



Putting people in control

Workers are seeking greater control over their finances.

Over half (**51.20%**) of respondents believe On-Demand Pay would enhance their financial control

Commentary:

The data highlights the potential positives that EWA could have on employees' sense of financial control.

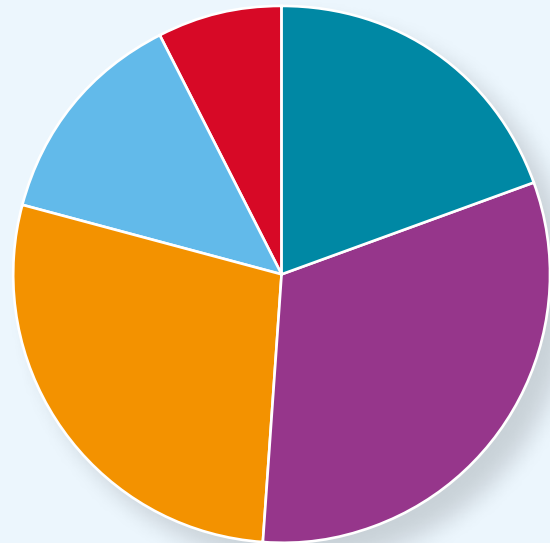
These findings align with the broader appeal of EWA as a flexible pay option that enables workers to manage their earnings in a way that suits their needs.

However, the **20.76%** who feel EWA would make them less in control of their finances must be addressed.

This group may have concerns about the potential risks of accessing pay early, such as overspending or struggling to budget effectively.

While EWA has broad appeal, businesses need to address the concerns, providing education, support and resources.

Would having access to your pay at any time make you feel more or less in control of your finances?



Significantly more in control 19.56%

Slightly more in control 31.64%

Neither more nor less in control 28.04%

Slightly less in control 13.27%

Significantly less in control 7.49%



In what ways do you think it would give you less control? (Select all that apply)

*Respondents who feel that having access to their pay at any time would make them feel less in control

The risk of overspending 71.63%



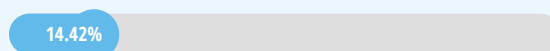
Changing the routine of monthly budgeting 59.62%



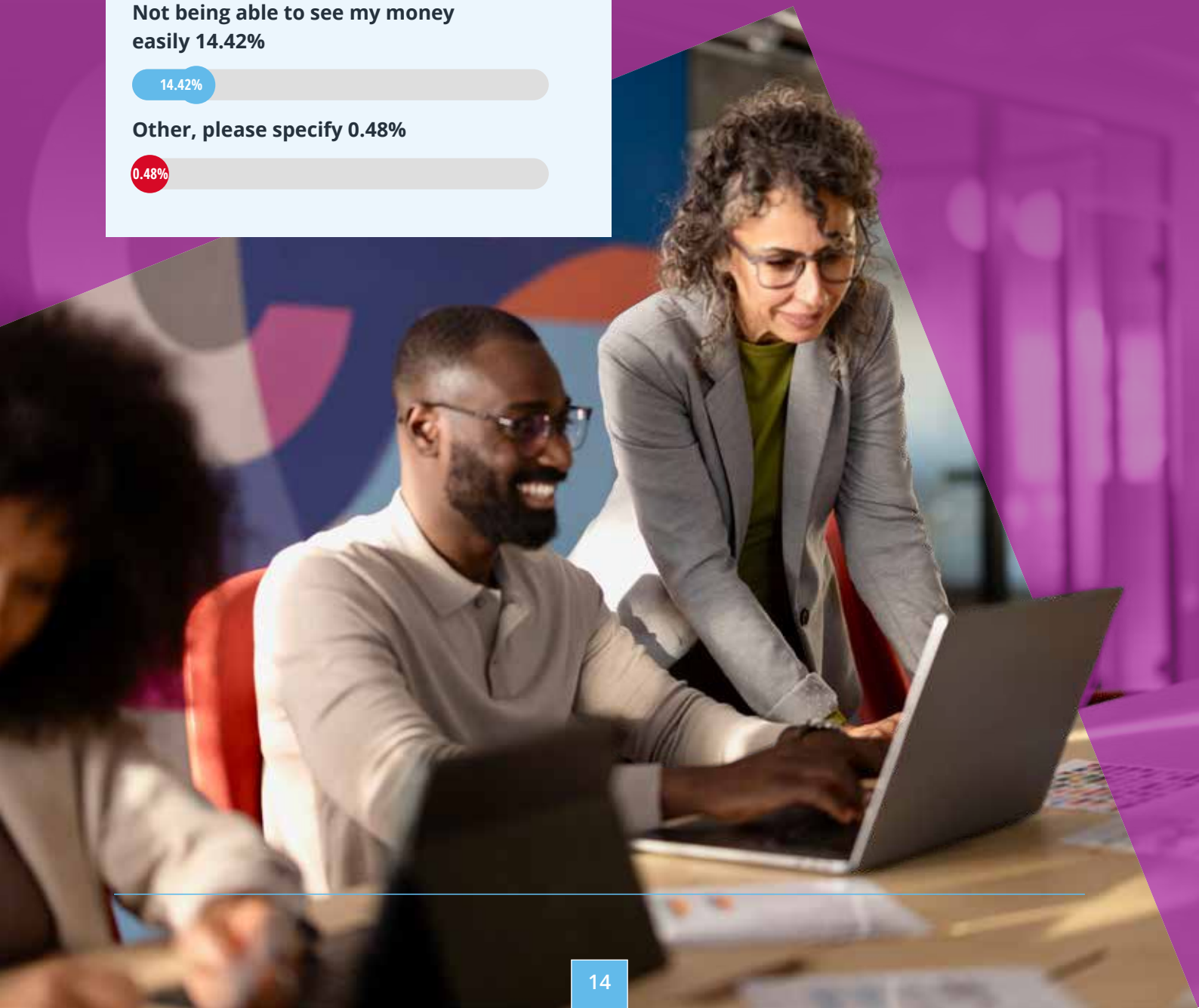
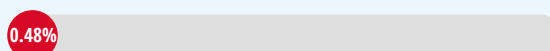
Being out of sync with monthly bill cycles 56.25%



Not being able to see my money easily 14.42%



Other, please specify 0.48%



Part three: financial responsibility

3

Financial responsibility in the workplace is a nuanced topic, with opinions divided on where accountability lies when money problems arise, especially with EWA.

This section explores the balance between employee autonomy and employer support, shedding light on how businesses can navigate this complex dynamic.

Accountability

When it comes to accountability and who the financial responsibility sits with in the event of money problems, the majority (57.09%) of respondents feel it is down to employees to manage their own money, while 22.95% believe employers should take responsibility.

However, demographic insights highlight a generational divide in attitudes.

Younger respondents, particularly those aged 18-24 (32.47%) and 25-34 (34.87%), are more likely to believe employers should take responsibility.

In contrast, older respondents, those aged 55+ (70.18%) and 45-54 (64.88%), overwhelmingly feel it's the employee's responsibility.

Commentary:

Our findings emphasise the importance of pairing Earned Wage Access with financial education and support.

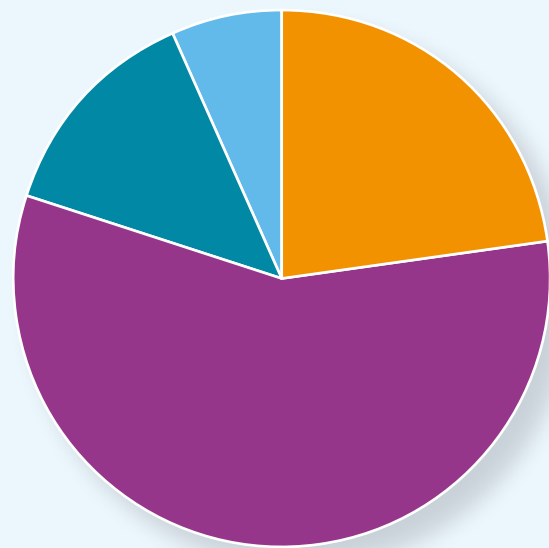
By offering financial training and resources alongside EWA, employers can empower staff to manage their finances effectively while mitigating potential risks.

You must ensure employees understand that EWA is a tool to provide financial flexibility, not a replacement for sound financial management.

For those looking to take this a step further, regularly monitor how employees are using EWA and gather feedback to identify any challenges.

Use this data to refine your financial wellness programmes and provide additional support where needed.

If employers make wages available to their workers as they earn, how fair is it to hold the employers responsible if they then run into money problems?



Yes, employers should take responsibility 22.95%	Both share responsibility 13.37%
No, it's down to the employees to manage their own money 57.09%	Not sure- 6.59%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "If I had access to Earned Wage Access, I would want my employer to provide more financial wellbeing advice and support."

Strongly agree 21.36%

21.36%

Somewhat agree 37.62%

37.62%

Neither agree nor disagree 28.04%

28.04%

Somewhat disagree 6.69%

6.69%

Strongly disagree 6.29%

6.29%

If employers make wages available to their workers as they earn, what safeguards, if any, should employers have to ensure that employees use it responsibly? (Select all that apply)

They should provide ongoing advice on financial wellbeing 42.71%

42.71%

They should provide guidance on its responsible use 40.42%

40.42%

They don't need to provide safeguards 25.45%

25.45%

They should be selective on which employees it's provided to 18.86%

18.86%

Other, please specify 0.60%

0.60%

Safeguarding workers

Our data highlights the importance of offering support to ensure employees use EWA responsibly.

The majority of respondents believe employers have a role to play in providing financial education and guidance, with **42.71%** advocating for ongoing financial wellbeing advice and **40.42%** calling for specific guidance on responsible EWA usage.

For businesses, this highlights the need to balance accessibility with education.



Reserve the right to withdraw

When asked whether employers should be able to withdraw EWA due to financial concerns, many respondents agreed.

The majority lean towards giving employers some level of control, with over **60%** agreeing that the option to withdraw should be available.

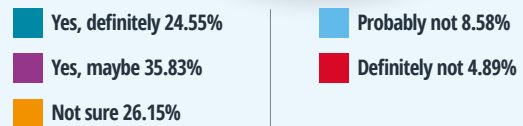
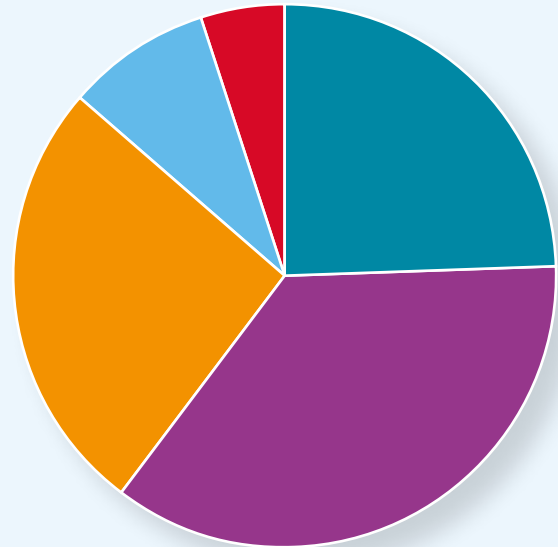
Commentary:

Our findings highlight a delicate balance between flexibility and oversight when it comes to Earned Wage Access.

While a majority (**60.38%**) support the idea of employers having the right to withdraw EWA, the **26.15%** who are unsure and the **13.47%** who oppose this idea suggest that employees value flexibility and autonomy in managing their finances.

Businesses must approach this issue carefully, ensuring that any decisions to withdraw EWA are based on clear, transparent criteria and are accompanied by support for those impacted.

Should employers reserve the right to withdraw Earned Wage Access and revert to a monthly salary if they are concerned about an employee's financial wellbeing





Offering meaningful benefits

The findings suggest that EWA could become a meaningful differentiator in competitive talent markets.

The long-standing tradition of the monthly payday – a workplace convention dating back over 100 years – is ripe for disruption as employees seek greater financial control.



Our Senior L&D Advisor, **Vanessa Myatt**, further explained the correlation between offering meaningful benefits and being an attractive employer, saying: **“Too often, benefits are lumped into**

the ‘cost centre’ bucket.

“But in reality, they’re one of your most powerful tools for building trust, loyalty and wellbeing.

“When done right, benefits don’t just reward, but they should also reassure.

“They say to your team, ‘we’ve got you’, and that kind of emotional security drives deeper engagement and longer tenure.

“The organisations that thrive are those that treat benefits as part of the employee-experience ecosystem.

“When your people feel supported, they give more, stay longer and speak highly of your business.”

How Earned Wage Access works

To offer On-Demand Pay, you need an Earned Wage Access platform that syncs with your current payroll software.

Once implemented, employees complete their shifts as normal, accumulating earnings.

Employees can then access their funds – often up to **50%** of their accumulated pay – almost immediately or within a few hours via a mobile app or online platform.

When payday arrives, the advanced amount is subtracted from their regular salary, along with any applicable fees.

Benefits for employers

- **Enhanced employee retention:** On-Demand Pay programs can reduce employee turnover by providing financial stability and reducing stress
- **Attract and engage top talent:** offering On-Demand Pay as a benefit can make your company more attractive to prospective employees, and incentivise existing employees to take on extra shifts and overtime
- **Reduced absenteeism:** financial stress often leads to absenteeism, but On-Demand Pay helps mitigate this by providing immediate financial relief

Benefits for employees

- **Financial flexibility:** On-Demand Pay provides employees with immediate access to funds, helping them manage unexpected expenses with money they have already worked hard to earn
- **Reduced financial stress:** access to earned wages can alleviate the stress associated with waiting for the next payday, as employees can respond to financial demands as and when they arise
- **No high-interest debt:** unlike payday loans, On-Demand Pay is not debt and does not involve high-interest rates or hidden fees



Partnering with Level Financial Technology

IRIS has partnered with leading On-Demand Pay provider [Level Financial Technology](#) to bring the feature to our payroll and HR software users.

Via this partnership, data is seamlessly synced between IRIS and Level to automate Earned Wage Access for staff.

Financial Wellbeing Toolkit

Level's platform includes a range of salary-linked services that empower staff to instantly access, save and budget from their earned wages.

- **Payroll savings:** staff can automate savings directly from their paycheck into a high-interest bank account
- **Financial coaching:** a personal finance coach in every employee's pocket. Trained only on official government advice
- **Budgeting tools:** open Banking-powered budgeting tools that bring earnings and spending together in one place – crunching the numbers to keep staff on track

Fully Automated

Level and IRIS' strategic partnership includes best-in-class technical integrations and deep collaboration between their teams. The result is the UK's most automated and seamless On-Demand Pay experience.

- Automated data flows
- Automated reconciliation process
- No impact on employer's cashflow
- No impact on employer's payroll process

[Learn More](#)





Reshaping the role of payroll

Historically, payroll has been viewed as a necessary administrative function.

But as technology advances, eliminating labour-intensive manual tasks, an exciting opportunity arises to be more strategic.

The focus of payroll is now turning to areas such as supporting employee financial wellbeing, in which Earned Wage Access plays a vital role.

The future is bright and holds immense potential for payroll professionals to lead, innovate and thrive.



Learn more about our payroll offerings here!