



dti

**FLEXIBLE WORKING
THE BUSINESS CASE**

50 success stories

The DTI drives our ambition of 'prosperity for all' by working to create the best environment for business success in the UK. We help people and companies become more productive by promoting enterprise, innovation and creativity.

We champion UK business at home and abroad. We invest heavily in world-class science and technology. We protect the rights of working people and consumers. And we stand up for fair and open markets in the UK, Europe and the world.



Foreword

Many factors combine to make a truly great company. However, at the centre of any outstanding organisation, whatever its size, you will find its most valuable and important asset - people.

Over the last decade there has been a revolution in the workplace. Now that women make up almost half the workforce, the relationship between work and family life has altered dramatically and the world of work must catch up.

Allowing people to work in a sensible way that allows them to balance earning a living with looking after their children is not only good for families and children, it is good for business too.

This booklet brings together 50 enlightened British organisations, both large and small, from across a wide range of sectors that have enjoyed real business benefits as a result of their modern approach to work-life balance.

Over the following pages you will see how flexible working has helped businesses to improve their customer service performance, reduce staff stress and absenteeism and save thousands of pounds in recruitment costs because their staff are happier.

And size is not a problem. SMEs make up half the case studies in this booklet, proving that family friendly working in smaller organisations can benefit staff, customers and business alike.

Although there are many excellent examples of businesses operating modern flexible workplaces, there are still too many organisations where an old-fashioned long hours culture still prevails. And this costs us dearly. Despite working the longest hours in Europe, our productivity levels are one of the lowest and stress related sickness costs British business around £12billion every year. If we left it to best practice alone, it would take 20 years for the culture to change fundamentally. We cannot wait this long.

That is why, from 6 April 2003, we are introducing the largest ever package of family friendly measures. These new rights will give parents with young and disabled children more choice and support to help them balance their responsibilities in a way that is good for both businesses and families.

I hope these 50 examples – a snapshot of a much larger number – prove the business benefits that flexible working can bring, and that they help inspire other organisations to follow suit.

Patricia Hewitt
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Introduction

What's happening in April 2003?

The Employment Act 2002 introduces new employment legislation specifically to help working parents. From 6 April 2003 parents with young and disabled children will have more choice and more support than ever before to balance childcare and work in ways that benefits everyone: employers, employees and their children.

Key measures

Parents with children aged under the age of 6, and disabled children aged under 18, will have the legal right to get their employers to seriously consider requests to work flexibly.

Maternity pay will be increased to £100 a week. New mothers will have 6 months paid leave and can take another 6 months unpaid leave.

For the first time ever, new fathers will have the right to two weeks paid paternity leave at £100 a week.

Parents who adopt will also get new rights, similar to maternity and paternity pay and leave.

The process for maternity, paternity and adoption leave will be simplified to make it easier for companies to handle applications.

The Government will also reimburse around 60% of UK companies, many of them SMEs, for all the maternity, paternity and adoption leave they pay out.

These new rights, together with existing rights to parental leave and time off for dependents, will provide parents with more choice to balance work and family life, whilst being beneficial to business performance.

For more information on flexible working and the new rights call the national helpline on 08457 47 47 47 or visit:

www.dti.gov.uk/workingparents

Half the case studies in this booklet showcase flexible working within SMEs. The SME stamp means that the company featured is a small or medium sized enterprise (SME) with less than 250 employees. Work-life balance and flexible working are relevant issues for companies of all sizes, including SMEs.



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manufacturing



“ Stress related sick leave costs British industry £12 billion every year.”

Health & Safety Executive and
Confederation of British Industry

manufacturing

Acme Whistles

Simon Topman T: 0121 554 2124 E: simon@acmewhistles.co.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: West Midlands
Employees: 50



The waiting list is constantly growing of people wanting to join Acme Whistles in Birmingham, attracted by the company's positive approach to work-life balance issues. In a very tight labour market, where recruitment is difficult, Acme is saving on advertising costs – some £3000 over the last 12 months - as the reputation for flexible working spreads. Staff retention is excellent, and many wait to retire rather than leave to go to another job, again saving valuable recruitment money.

Chief Executive Simon Topman is convinced that the company's flexible working practices are critical to this high level of staff retention and recruitment, and offers different packages to meet individual staff requirements.

The workforce is ethnically diverse with many more women than men, and the work-life balance policies reflect this mix. Hours can be adjusted to fit in with family commitments, and flexible job routines have been introduced, both within and across departments, to make sure all work and hours are covered. This has led to an increase in the skills base and so widened the company pool of resources.

“ Acme has found that flexible working practices can not only help to fulfil the workforce expectations, but play a vital role in the retention and recruitment of staff.”

Simon Topman, Chief Executive

Automated Packaging Systems (APS)

Paul Hayden T: 01684 891400 E: paul.hayden@autobag.co.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: West Midlands
Employees: 94



Offering a package of work-life benefits has helped Automated Packaging Systems to attract and retain staff in an area of high employment. It has also reduced absenteeism.

Among the benefits for employees are 'banked hours', where staff members can store up hours which can then be taken off to meet domestic or other commitments, or simply to take a holiday. Other policies include flexible working hours, provision of childcare information, help with childcare transport and time off for care of dependents.

One beneficiary is a single parent who was able to take five months off to care for her son who was receiving treatment for cancer. "I was able give my son the full-time care that he needed without feeling any pressure to come into work or even having to consider leaving," she says.

The whole philosophy at APS – from top management to the factory floor – is to organise around high performing teams. Everyone knows what they have to deliver – it is up to the teams to decide when and how they deliver it. With an absenteeism rate of 1.5% in 2001 (down from 1.9% in 2000), high rates of staff retention and year on year growth in the company's turnover, it is clearly a philosophy that works.

“ Recruitment is becoming easier and costing us less. We now have the employment agencies calling us because they have people asking if we have vacancies. ”

Paul Hayden, Marketing and Commercial Manager

BP plc

Marien Hansen T: 020 7496 5686 E: hansenme@bp.com

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 18,000

Helping employees to balance their career and home life responsibilities is a top priority for BP. The oil company aims to create an environment that values its staff, who number more than 18,000 in the UK and 100,000 worldwide.

"Workchoices" was launched in September 2002 with the aim of promoting more widely the benefits offered by BP to all employees UK wide. The Workchoices website provides easy access to support tools for both managers and employees. Work-life balance programmes and initiatives include managing flexible working workshops, a generous maternity package, paid paternity and adoption leave, enhanced parental leave, career breaks and employee support workshops including sessions for "fathers" and parenting education courses at some sites. Employees also have the option to work from home or work a compressed week.

The workshops for fathers are extremely well attended with around 20 participating at each session. Approximately 100 men have attended over the past 2 years. BP believes that the desire for better work-life balance is not simply about women with children or reducing the number of hours worked, but something that everyone can embrace, irrespective of age or gender.

BP recognises that managers play a critical role in the success of implementing innovative working practices. It therefore provides them with additional support and training in managing the more complex array of working patterns.

“ Offering a wide range of supportive work/life and flexible working practices enables employees to make choices about the way they work which suit both the business needs and personal lifestyles. ”

Marion Hansen, HR Adviser, BP plc

Bristol Myers Squibb

Sara Long T: 01895 628471 E: sara.long@bms.com

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: North West
Employees: 1700

Flexible working has had a positive impact on employee loyalty and improved performance at Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS). Importantly, a significant reduction in field-based staff turnover has been seen since the launch of their flexible working program in 2000. Previously, people who wanted to work only in term-time, for example, would have moved to a competitor, now they are staying with BMS.

“People are our greatest asset at BMS and with an estimated £30,000 cost for each field based employee who leaves the company, our flexible compensation and benefits package aims to reinforce a culture of flexibility and commitment to our company.”

Recent initiatives include a standard request process for flexible working, paid adoption leave, a childcare and eldercare helpline service, reduced hours and term-time working for field-based employees, work-life resources online and a career break pilot scheme.

Employee reaction has been very positive, and the re-packaging of existing benefits into the work-life framework has shown staff – both actual and potential – the benefits of working for the company.

“ Since the integration of work-life practices into the overall compensation and benefits package, we’ve seen a boost in recruitment and retention. ”

Alison Maitland, Compensation and Benefits Director

Dutton Engineering

Andrew Reed E: andrew@dutton-eng.co.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: South East
Employees: 50



Changing to annualised hours has maximised efficiency at steel manufacturer Dutton Engineering. Its 50 staff are contracted to work 1770 hours a year, with a reserve of 160 hours to cover sickness, medical appointments, rework and peak production.

Working hours are determined by customer demand, with the only requirement that teams deliver products to the customer on time and to high quality. As long as the core hours are maintained, operatives can take an afternoon off to spend with their family. Because of this improved work-life balance, employees feel valued and trusted, paying dividends for the company in terms of a more contented workforce.

“The difference in performance has been incredible,” says founder Ken Lewis. “Efficiency leapt up beyond all our expectations. Our teams are now not only facing in the same direction; they are focused correctly and all pulling together... We can now compete with anyone worldwide.”

“ 98% of the most successful organisations in the world work in teams. They provide an effective framework within which to introduce flexible working patterns. ”

Andrew Reed, Managing Director

Farrelly Facilities & Engineering

Becky Farrelly T: 0121 382 9988 E: becky@farrellyfacilities.co.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: West Midlands
Employees: 50



Farrelly Facilities & Engineering Ltd has managed to dramatically cut working hours at the same time as doubling turnover and tripling profits through the introduction of work-life balance policies.

The construction company has undergone a complete culture change, improving staff recruitment and retention and fostering a highly co-operative environment. Multi-skilling has also increased as the staff learn other jobs to fill any gaps if people need time off for other commitments.

Traditionally, people in the construction industry worked 50 to 60 hours a week, and Farrelly Facilities & Engineering Ltd was no different until the owners decided in 1998 to change the company ethos. Now, most employees at Farrelly Facilities & Engineering Ltd work 37 hours a week and the business is much more successful. And people who need time off, for whatever reason, can ask for it, and colleagues will support them.

Director Gerry Farrelly believes that business performance is all about creating a positive environment. If staff are treated well, customers are treated well. Client feedback is “fantastic” and time and money are no longer wasted on complaints – now it is rare to even get a complaint, while prior to the change, the company received “dozens”. With better planning and communication there are simply fewer problems.

“ Over a two-year period after we made the culture change, our turnover doubled and profits tripled. ”
Gerry Farrelly, Director

Fox's Biscuits

Steve Boyd T: 01924 444333 E: steve.boyd@foxs-biscuits.co.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: Yorkshire and Humberside
Employees: 1799

The diverse shift patterns available at Fox's Biscuits enable the company to attract a wide pool of employees – parents, students and those who choose to work evenings and nights. This means productivity levels can be kept to the maximum and this helps efficiency and profitability.

Some 80 different shift patterns are in operation and can be decided locally. These variations are easy to accommodate as most differ in length by only five to ten minutes from the standard core shifts.

The flexibility helps in recruitment of staff. As a major local employer, around 30% of staff have partners or relatives who also work there. Parents can work different shifts and share the childcare. One popular shift is 9am to 4pm, which allows parents to take and collect children from school.

Flexible working also contributes to excellent retention rates, ensuring a stable, long-service culture with low turnover and absenteeism. Over 300 employees have service of 10 years or more.

In addition, the company increases its appeal as an employer by offering various support networks such as nursery, holiday club, pre-retirement and counselling, together with benefits such as parental leave without restriction and unpaid emergency leave.

“ Staff turnover and absenteeism are both low, and most employees return to work after maternity leave, so the company retains their skills and experience. ”
Steve Boyd, Personnel Manager

GlaxoSmithKline

Martin Swain T: 01753 502208 E: martin.a.swain@gsk.com

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: South East
Employees: 212 (Slough)

By introducing work-life balance policies at its Slough factory, GlaxoSmithKline has boosted staff morale, reduced unauthorised absenteeism and increased individual initiative and proactivity amongst its workforce.

GlaxoSmithKline asked employees to come up with their own thoughts on improving their work-life balance. All ideas were considered as long as there were no negative impacts on safety, quality, production or cost.

Shift workers can now 'swap' shifts to allow more flexibility within existing shift patterns and office staff benefit from the introduction of consolidated time, with a set number of flexible hours. As the workforce gradually take more ownership and responsibility for the way they deliver their work, the new 'give and take' culture is proving a notable success.

“ Staff morale is high as employees take more ownership and responsibility for the way they deliver their work. ”

Martin Swain, Human Resources Manager

Innocent

Ailana Kamelmacher T: 020 8600 3958 E: ailana@innocentdrinks.co.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: South East
Employees: 27



Fruit smoothies company, Innocent, attributes its success to allowing each member of staff to work in the way that suits them best.

Set up in 1998, Innocent now employs 27 people and sells its drinks in 3,000 outlets throughout the UK, Ireland and Paris. The company has won several awards including the Shell Live Wire Award for Best London Entrepreneurs and the National Business Award for Best Investor in People from SMEs 2002, and is the fastest growing food and drinks company in the UK.

Because the company believes that individuals work optimally in different ways, it allows them to design their own work-life balance.

In practice, this means that people who like getting up at the crack of dawn get in early and leave early, while others choose to come in a bit later and stay later, without any need for a formal flexitime system. Staff are also encouraged to work from home on days when they need some peace and quiet.

They are also enabled to pursue other interests, which means that Innocent retains skilled people rather than loses them. For example, the company's youngest employee works four days a week to allow him to do a college design course on Fridays. Another employee wanted to go travelling, so Innocent gave him 6 weeks off in order to fulfil his ambition. People are also given time off for hobbies and the company offers a hobby fund, workplace yoga and free fruit in the office.

“ The success of Innocent is down to the performance of each individual within the company. ”

Richard Reed, Managing Director

Listawood

Arthur Allen T: 01485 529100 E: arthur.allen@listawood.com

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: East of England
Employees: 200



Mouse mat manufacturer Listawood finds that people even turn down better paid jobs to join the company because of its attitude to work-life balance.

Managing Director, Arthur Allen, says: "It makes a difference to our customers. Staff who feel valued in turn value and nurture our customers."

Arthur and his wife started the company in 1987 with one employee. They now have 200 staff, and as parents they understand the need for flexible working.

As flexible working has evolved, the only important rule is mutual support. Staff come and go without management intervention, and the spirit of give and take gets things done. Employees at all levels are paid for the hours they work, and extra hours are banked and can be taken later.

Flexible working means that Listawood can increase production. The company has made a huge investment in two digital presses and thanks to flexible working, when the company is busy these machines are run on a double shift and the team decides how to staff the shifts while sharing the burden among the members.

As the company has developed it has continued its flexible and family-friendly policies, starting a twilight shift so parents could work in the evenings. It soon gained a reputation among local parents and the company has largely expanded through taking on mothers returning to work.

“ Whenever there is a rush job, everyone will find a way of making it happen. And it makes a difference to our customers. Staff who feel valued in turn value and nurture our customers. ”

Arthur Allen, Managing Director

MTM Products

Ian Greenaway T: 01246 572601 E: ian@mtmlabels.co.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: West Midlands
Employees: 31



In 1996, small business MTM products needed a culture change to turn the struggling company around. Management recognised employees as valuable assets, and the key to this culture change.

By focusing on flexible working patterns which suited both individuals and the business, involving employees in the decision-making and trusting them to deliver, the company has built a new ethos of cooperation.

This has allowed it not only to trade profitably once again, but also to become a top performer within its sector. It has extended the working day at its key plant, staff turnover is negligible and absenteeism is an average of only two days a year.

Employees benefit through more choice to balance their working hours with their commitments, or simply working a shorter week. Twenty five different working patterns are now offered to the company's 31 staff.

Mel Fowler, for example, left MTM Products on maternity leave in September 2002 and recently returned part-time, working 3 days a week from 8.30 am until 1.30 pm which allows her to drop off her son Joshua at her sister's in the morning and pick up her partner from work later in the afternoon. Julie Taylor recently increased her hours to full time but is able to change her hours during school holidays.

“ If people are allowed to work the hours or working patterns that balance their work and home lives, in our experience they are likely to contribute more to the business. ”

Ian Greenaway, Managing Director

Perfecta

Larissa Roberts T: 01179 868800 E: Larissa@perfecta.ltd.uk

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: South West
Employees: 40



Food company Perfecta recognised that in an area of full employment it had to offer attractive terms and conditions and a super-flexible approach to work-life balance in order to attract good staff. The family firm consulted extensively with its 40 employees before drawing up a package of work-life balance initiatives.

One particularly successful initiative has been the establishment of a pool of packers who work when it fits in with their family and other commitments, helping with other production activities as well as packing.

By emphasising flexibility and the possibility of job-sharing, the company successfully recruited a laboratory technician who needed to meet childcare commitments – working 30 hours a week enabled her to join the company but still maintain her work-life balance.

Other work-life benefits introduced in response to staff feedback include paternity leave and a company-funded nurse who visits every two months.

“ By enabling staff to work various hours and days around their other responsibilities, the number of available packers has more than doubled. ”

Dr Peter Roberts, Owner

Unilever UK

Linda Emery T: 01932 263000 E: linda.emery@unilever.com

Sector: Manufacturing
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 13,000

Nine out of ten women return to employment at Unilever UK following maternity leave since the company introduced an enhanced maternity package and career break scheme in 1990. This is a dramatic increase in numbers from 1988 when only 6% of female managers had childcare responsibilities.

Since then a wide range of other flexible working practices has been established, largely in response to employee requests. These include part-time working and reduced hours, term-time working, additional unpaid leave, jobsharing, flexitime and homeworking.

Employee assistance programmes are also available - an occupational health service operates at each site, and some have crèche and childcare support. Staff helplines providing services such as counselling are also provided.

“The feedback is generally very positive,” says Linda Emery, Diversity Manager. “You need senior management commitment and need to be aware of any barriers to delivery, such as a long hours culture”.

One major example of success was when two very highly qualified and skilled senior personnel submitted a proposal to jobshare. Traditionally, Unilever had not considered part-time roles appropriate to senior posts. However, management supported this solution as neither woman would have returned to work without the jobshare option.

“ The jobshare arrangement works perfectly, the role is covered for the full five-day week and the organisation has saved approximately £30,000 in the recruitment and training of external applicants. ”

Linda Emery, Diversity Manager



communications



“ It costs an average of £3,460 to replace an employee and an average of £5,700 to replace a manager. ”

CIPD Labour Turnover Survey 2002

communications

BAA

Stephen Golden T: 020 8745 2751 E: stephen_golden@baa.com

Sector: Communications

Location: Nationwide

Employees: 12,500

BAA recognises that people have changing responsibilities in and out of work, and values the contributions made by its people whether in caring, community or non-work related activities.

During 2002/3 a project group made up of staff and Trade Union Representatives from across the business, led by Bhavana Desai, Group Retail Finance Director, worked on promoting work-life balance across the BAA group. The result is a new work-life balance policy, which will be sent to all staff during April 2003.

The focus of the policy is to make people aware of the various options that are available to them to help balance home and work commitments. It gives examples of flexible working options and states their right to discuss flexible working options with their manager. Each case will be considered fully and take into account the business need and operational requirements, but will aim to meet the needs of staff wherever possible.

Applications to work part-time can generally be approved in all work areas. Such arrangements can take various forms, mixing office and home-based working, or jobsharing as the business needs dictate.

“ Adopting flexible working reduces the need for BAA office space, reduces total and rush hour car journeys and enables us to offer services to our business partners over a longer period of the day. ”

Stephen Golden, Group Equal Opportunities Manager

Sector: Communications
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 108,000

Work life balance initiatives have saved BT hundreds of thousands of pounds in recruitment, retention and development costs and over £200m in accommodation spend.

BT's 'Achieving the Balance' portfolio gives employees greater choice and flexibility in the way they work. Flexitime, part-time and homeworking are just some of the patterns enjoyed by BT people allowing them the freedom to balance their personal and professional lives.

Loyalty and productivity are greatly increased with over 50% of people feeling more fulfilled at work and the same proportion reporting the same or improved efficiency. Team performances are enhanced by more flexible resource planning and increased motivation.

“ Increased flexibility has enabled BT to recruit more effectively and our retention rate has improved with some employees turning down offers of more highly paid employment in favour of the flexibility we offer. ”

Caroline Waters, Director People Networks

Sector: Communications
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 5,000

Flexibility in working practices is proving a key competitive tool in continuing to attract and retain high calibre employees at Cable & Wireless.

The flexible working arrangements meet both the business requirement to provide quality customer service and the employee need for work-life balance. They include variable hours, part-time working, job sharing and teleworking. Over 120 of the company's 5,000 UK employees work part-time, and a further 300 work in call centres on our premises.

Cable & Wireless has found many practical ways to support flexible working, such as increased use of audio and video conferencing to avoid unnecessary travel. Teleworkers can use hot desk facilities when in the office, and all can use the company intranet to gain fast access to information on policies and support on flexible working issues.

In addition, employees can take a sabbatical of up to six months, which increases their experience and brings a wider perspective when returning to work.

A telephone helpline saves employees research time in finding out information on work-life balance issues, such as legal matters, social security benefits, child and elder care support and personal problems.

“ Flexibility in the way we work provides a key competitive tool in continuing to attract and retain high calibre employees. ”

Ian Muir Vice President, Group HR Policy

Sector: Communications
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 20,000

IBM is convinced of both the moral and business imperative to address work-life balance issues, and it has the research to prove it. Early UK results of its recent global work-life survey show that work-life balance is closely linked to staff retention. It also demonstrates that good work-life balance leads to greater employee satisfaction.

This is not just a women's issue. Dependant care responsibilities are significant for both sexes, and a higher proportion of male respondents than women say that they will be assuming eldercare responsibilities in the next five years. The survey also finds that finding work-life balance becomes increasingly difficult at management and executive levels.

As part of its strategy, the company will conduct further research into the areas of dependant care needs, and flexible working practices and culture. A Global Work-Life fund has been established to support work-life projects, which currently include a daycare centre, eldercare schemes and children's summer camps.

“ Survey results indicate that good work-life balance results in increased employee satisfaction. As we seek to become the 'employer of choice' in the marketplace, creating a high degree of satisfaction within our workforce will be key to retaining the people with the skills we need. ”

Gill Yourston, UK Diversity Specialist, Employee Relations

Sector: Communications
Location: Northern Ireland
Employees: 120



Since implementing a range of work-life balance policies, the Irish News has reduced labour turnover by 20% – a significant saving on advertising and recruitment costs, and on training.

The organisation offers a package of policies including paid emergency leave, job-sharing, compressed working week and employment breaks. It also has enhanced maternity benefit and paid paternity leave.

The company is delighted that the chance to balance home commitments such as looking after children, has been welcomed by both men and women in the company.

The Irish News believes that its 120 staff work at their best when they can balance work with other aspects of their lives. Staff can apply for work-life balance policies but have to suggest solutions to any problems that may arise for the company. It is very much seen as a joint problem-solving exercise.

“ Sometimes it takes creative thinking but the end result is holding on to a trained member of staff. As a result there is full management support for this initiative. ”

Yvonne O'Rourke, Personnel Manager

Northbrook Technology of Northern Ireland Ltd

Rose Kelly T: 028 9034 6540 E: rkelb@allstate.com

Sector: Communications
Location: Northern Ireland
Employees: 650

Staff retention at Northbrook Technology Ltd was at an all-time high in 2002, with the company saving money on its significant training costs. The annual staff survey showed that this success was largely due to the company's work-life balance policies.

Staff are invited to produce a plan for flexible working showing how both they and the company will benefit. Examples include flexible working hours, part time working, shorter working weeks, split shifts and career breaks.

The software development company believes that supporting flexibility in the workplace has helped its 650 employees to focus more on their work. It has also enhanced productivity and led to higher quality work.

There is often very little cost to the company in adopting working practices which afford a better work-life balance for employees, and in many cases no cost implications at all.

The introduction of more flexible working options has also allowed the company to recruit from a wider pool of potential employees. Initially, the company did not think that part-time working would suit the business but it has been a very successful initiative and the company has now doubled its quota of part-time employees.

“ Employees are the company's single greatest asset and there is a strong case for work-life balance and flexibility from a business perspective. ”

Bro McFerran, Managing Director

P&O Ferries

Peter Ambrose T: 01304 863940 E: peter.ambrose@poferries.com

Sector: Communications
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 6,500

When P&O European Ferries and Stena Line merged in 1998 as a result of additional competition following the opening of the Channel Tunnel, the company recognised that it had to offer an attractive package if it were to retain staff members and attract the quality of recruits it wanted.

This was all the more pressing as the unemployment situation in the South East had much improved, making the right people harder to find.

A flexible approach, embodied in work-life balance strategies such as part-time working and job-sharing, was seen as one way of becoming a popular employer.

The company believes in encouraging flexible policies where these help meet operational aims and aid recruitment. All requests for flexible working are considered “positively” and weighed against the business need.

Factors such as experience saved through staff retention, improvements in administrative efficiency through job redesign, response times, continuity, accountability, reporting, cost and availability of safety drills are all taken into account. Whatever their decision, managers must be able to justify their opinion with facts and figures.

“ We have 60 staff members, including officers, working part-time in the fleet, who would probably have left if we'd been inflexible. That's a lot of expertise to lose and we would have incurred considerable costs in recruiting and training replacements. ”

Peter Ambrose, HR Manager





Barclays Bank

Moya Welsh T: 020 7699 4114

Sector: Finance

Location: Nationwide

Employees: 57,000

“People policies” at Barclays Bank are based on a simple premise: staff who are happy and feel valued are more likely to stay.

The bank recognises that its ability to compete as a global financial services organisation depends upon its willingness to attract, retain and develop the very best employees. This means that policies have to be in place to support employees in balancing work and home commitments.

Two-thirds of the 57,000 workforce across the UK are women, but the bank recognises that caring is not just a woman’s issue. All employees can apply for paid carer leave, responsibility breaks, and career breaks. All employees can also request flexible working arrangements not just those with young children. New fathers are eligible for 2 weeks paid paternity leave, and the provisions for maternity and adoption pay are well in excess of the statutory minimum. In addition, couples who both work for Barclays can swap maternity leave between them – for example, the mother may return to work early and her partner take any remaining leave. All parents with children under fourteen are also eligible for parental leave.

Barclays’ buddying scheme offers everyone who is going on maternity or adoption leave a ‘buddy’ who will have experienced maternity leave themselves and will be able to offer practical support during the leave and at the time the individual returns to work. These policies mean that Barclays retains key staff, with 80% of the women taking maternity breaks returning to full or part time work.

“ The goal of becoming an employer of choice needed to extend to all people policies, and particularly those that impact on the life and families of employees. ”

Anne Woolcott, HR Policy Manager

“ 84% of managers said their flexible working arrangements were cost effective. ”

Workplace Employment Relations Survey

finance

Cogent Investment Operations Ltd

Liz Raczi T: 020 7477 5617 E: liz.raczi@cogent.com

Sector: Finance
Location: South East
Employees: 808

City investment operations firm Cogent has improved service delivery, with the office covered for longer and staff more motivated and committed to their jobs. The change has come with the introduction of a range of flexible working options to allow staff to improve their work-life balance.

HR Director, Kevin Cripps, says: "Most businesses are continually looking for ways of improving productivity, extending their operating hours and improving efficiency. A review of the way we manage our work demand and resources gave us a great opportunity to recommend new working practices. By being creative, investigating changes to the structure of work within teams and the amount of productivity required, we came up with a whole host of flexible working opportunities for our staff."

Head of Corporate Actions and Income, Ian Barnard, was voted Best Boss in 2002 by the charity, Parents at Work. "The flexible hours staff work mean that the office is open for longer, providing our clients with a better service by having the right number of staff here when we need them. We have introduced annualised hours schemes (9-day fortnights) as well as part-time, remote and home working. The extra time off is particularly welcomed by those staff with children."

He adds: "One manager told me that every time he gets a call from a recruitment consultant trying to tempt him to other jobs, the first thing he asks is 'can you offer as much time off as Cogent?'"

“ We are proud of the approach we have taken and the positive outcomes that have resulted. Employees see work-life balance as an added-value approach to their relationship with the business. ”

Kevin Cripps, HR Director

Domestic and General

Sharon Watson T: 020 8946 7777 E: sharon.watson@domgen.com

Sector: Finance
Location: East Midlands
Employees: 550

All call centres face problems of staff retention and sickness absence, but appliance breakdown insurance and outsource provider Domestic and General was determined to become a 'first choice employer'.

The answer lay in implementing an assortment of contracts, such as term-time, student and weekend contracts, together with measures to boost the number of part-time workers.

It also made a commitment to staff development and in-house training by focusing on the development of team leaders, with detailed 360° appraisals and a three-day workshop. The delegates set up self-help groups to share feedback and best practice going forwards.

The company's adoption of work-life balance policies has increased its ability to recruit. Press coverage has been very positive and the diversified contracts have been so successful that many are over subscribed and the proportion of staff employed in this way has increased from 26 percent in 2000 to 33 percent in 2002.

“ The average length of service has increased... and we are beginning to see a reduction in labour turnover and increases in productivity from what was already a strong position. ”

Ruth Ebborn Robinson, Human Resources Manager

Jan Jones T: 0207 991 9692 E: janjones@hsbc.com

Sector: Finance
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 48,000

Family-friendly initiatives at HSBC, in particular the childcare programme, have proved highly successful by supporting the business through retention of skilled staff.

The programme has been operating since 1998, and provides some 850 nursery places, 300 of them on the bank's premises. Most of the nursery facilities are joint ventures with either the public or private sectors, with the bank buying a guaranteed number of places. Dedicated childcare managers allocate these places to achieve maximum business benefit.

The bank supports the childcare programme with other work-life balance initiatives such as part-time and flexible working, job sharing, paternity and family leave. It also offers all UK-based employees access to Open Line, an in-house confidential advice, research and referral helpline which assists employees in effectively managing the challenging dual demands of home and work responsibilities.

“ Providing a childcare programme has contributed considerably to reducing the number of women who leave after having a baby, from 70% to 15% in 13 years at HSBC. This represents a massive budget saving – the average service of a maternity leaver is 11 years and the cost to the bank of replacing each one is estimated at around a year's salary. ”

Jan Jones, Diversity Manager

John Morgan T: 01737 375353 E: john.morgan@group.landg.com

Sector: Finance
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 8,000 (in the UK)

Legal & General is actively committed to equal opportunities, with three women board members and a significant number of women in senior management. It recognises the need to persuade women with young children to keep their career going forwards, and offers flexible and part-time work to encourage them to stay in the workforce.

A tenth of the workforce works part-time, including many maternity returners, building their hours around the needs of the individual and the business. Staff are now counted as full-time equivalents rather than on the individual headcount to foster management acceptance of part-time working.

Although formal flexitime was introduced at the company in 1970, by the mid-90s it was found to be too restrictive. The company then introduced proper flexible working which enhances the work-life balance of its employees. The scheme is based on the individual, their team and the manager agreeing the hours needed to get the work done. This can be regular hours at one extreme, or leaving when the work is completed at the other.

In practice, it means that the needs of individuals can be met, as long as the team can do the work. A staff opinion survey showed 51% were satisfied with the company's family-friendly approaches. 61% were satisfied with the flexible working approach.

“ Legal & General believe that the flexibility of our employees has been key to our success as it gives benefits to both individuals and the company, enabling fast reaction to events. ”

Geoff Tucker, Head of Remuneration

Littlejohn Frazer

Clare Tanner T: 020 7369 4505 E: ctanner@littlejohnfrazer.com

Sector: Finance
Location: South East
Employees: 151



In a very competitive recruitment market, accountancy firm Littlejohn Frazer wanted to enhance its image as an employer to secure more high calibre staff.

The answer was to extend the flexible working options already available within the firm. It was also important to publicise the fact that flexible working was available to everyone – not just the parents of young children.

Commitment to greater flexible working practices for all comes from board level; the Chairman himself works one day a week from home, enabling him to see more of his children and to get a huge amount of concentrated work done.

A process has now been put in place for requesting flexible working and a more open attitude to its benefits for all is spreading throughout the company, which is fast developing a reputation as a good place to work.

“ The business logic is impeccable. In a business like ours, the importance of people can't be overstated. Anything which helps us maintain and improve the quality of that resource is good for business. ”

David Roberts, Chairman

Lloyds TSB

Helen Thompson T: 0207 356 1262 E: helen.thompson3@lloydstsb.co.uk

Sector: Finance
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 76,000

Lloyds TSB has been running its Work Options scheme since 1999. Some 34% of the workforce work flexibly. Of those on a Work Option, 16% are men, and 18% are managers.

A range of factors has influenced the work-life balance agenda, including customer expectations, requiring increasingly innovative and flexible delivery channels, and intensive competition in recruiting and retaining quality staff. Productivity and motivation can be increased, and absenteeism and stress can be reduced, through effective work-life balance strategies.

Options introduced by Lloyds TSB include reduced hours, job sharing, variable hours, compressed working and teleworking. Any employee can put forward the business case for flexible working to their line manager, and a solution will be found that works for both the bank and the employee. The reason for requesting flexible working is not relevant to the decision-making process – applications will be accepted unless there is a clear business detriment. Since the organisation estimates that it costs between £48,000 and £50,000 to replace a senior employee, it's clearly a business strategy that works.

Individuals and applicants are encouraged to think creatively about how they wish to work and team-based applications to work flexibly have been particularly successful, such as the 12-strong manpower and information team who work a compressed nine-day fortnight. The benefits have been tangible. The level of service given to HR business partners is better than ever, which means they work better in their business units, which ultimately has a good impact on the organisation as a whole.

“ Traditionally, work-life balance and, in particular, flexible working policies can be seen to be to do with women and parents so we are pleased it's being taken up by men and managers. ”

Sally Evans, Senior Manager, Equality & Diversity

Moore and Smalley

David Gill T: 01772 821021 E: dkg@moore-and-smalley.co.uk

Sector: Finance
Location: North West
Employees: 120



Pilot projects in flexitime and 'Location Independent Working' have greatly enhanced client service, reduced absence and increased staff motivation and loyalty at accountants Moore and Smalley.

Flexitime has been introduced in the Tax Department, with core hours 10am to 12pm and 2pm to 4pm. Extra hours worked during busy periods can be carried forward for days off.

Business benefits are already identifiable – staff are happy to work additional hours when necessary. The daily working span has increased, offering client service outside normal working hours, and doctor and dentist appointments are now taken in flexitime, reducing lost hours to the firm.

Offering Location Independent Working required investment in laptop computers and a switchboard allowing calls to be transferred seamlessly to any off-site location. This has improved efficiency and client service, as well as staff satisfaction.

Work-life balance initiatives are now set to have wider application throughout the firm. Over the period of the pilots, staff turnover in terms of voluntary leavers halved from an average of 15% to 7.5%. The proportion of lost days due to short-term absence and sickness fell from 3.5% to 2.3%.

“ Everyone has liked the flexitime scheme and there have been no drawbacks for the staff, the firm or the clients. At the same time, we are not seeing the same degree of short-term sickness and other absences. ”

David Gill, Partner

Royal Bank of Scotland Group

Caroline McClellan T: 0131 523 5031 E: caroline.mcclellan@rbs.co.uk

Sector: Finance
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 110,000

Reduced staff turnover, increased retention of key skills and experience and raised employee commitment and motivation are just some of the business benefits achieved by the work-life balance policies adopted by the Royal Bank of Scotland Group. They have also helped to develop a diverse workforce.

Allowing its staff the leeway to vary working practices also makes the business more flexible, staffed by people who feel valued and focused.

The majority of the group's 110,000 staff are women, and a third of these choose to work part-time. Other employees favour compressed hours, term-time working, or other flexible arrangements.

For example, Jane McWhannell & Viv Darvell have been working on a job share arrangement for the last 10 years and manage the Group's staff club & noticeboard facilities.

Jane says: "This is a great working arrangement and provides both of us with flexibility in the job and in our personal lives. It has worked well for me as my children are growing up, providing me with the opportunity to attend events such as sports day. I have been delighted that the Group has been so supportive of this working arrangement."

“ Whilst we have an agreed working pattern, the Group has put its trust in Viv and I to manage this between ourselves. Our working arrangement is proven and works well – the teamwork, compatibility and consistency in both partners has enabled us to meet our objectives in terms of our work as well as our own lives. ”

Jane McWhannell, Assistant Manager Staff Club

Royal & SunAlliance

Margaret Shaughnessy T: 0161 235 3170 E: margaret.shaughnessy@notes.royalsun.com

Sector: Finance
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 20,000

Flexible working hours have enabled insurer Royal & SunAlliance to be better able to respond to customer demand for “on call” access to sales, underwriting and claims services outside traditional core working hours. The desire of some employees to start early and finish early, or start late and finish late as they attend to other responsibilities, dovetails perfectly with the needs of the business to provide access during extended hours.

The company believes that this mutual benefit creates a healthy working environment in which its highly diverse workforce is motivated and focused, leading to more productivity and improved customer satisfaction. It also contributes positively to staff recruitment and retention.

All employees, including management, are able to apply for a change in their working patterns. As well as flexible hours, this could involve part-time working, jobsharing, a compressed working week or term-time working. All will be considered subject to meeting the organisation’s commercial and operational requirements.

“ We need to help employees to balance their home and work lives effectively if we are to recruit and retain skilled people.

Margaret Shaughnessy, People Risks Manager ”

Yorkshire Building Society

Susan Hibbert T: 01274 472940 E: sahibbert@ybs.co.uk

Sector: Finance
Location: Yorkshire and Humberside
Employees: 2,000

Staff turnover has been dramatically reduced at the Yorkshire Building Society since it adopted flexible working practices to improve the work-life balance of its 2,000 employees.

Policies such as jobsharing, flexitime, working from home and compressed hours have yielded tangible dividends, including a much higher return rate after maternity leave – from 60% to 82% in just two years.

The Society has been able to retain experienced staff who without flexible working would have been forced to leave. Examples include an employee who needed to share caring responsibilities for her sick mother. She was able to go part-time. Another took a year’s career break following the birth of her third child. When she returns, her second child will have started school and so childcare will be much easier.

Compressed hours such as the nine-day fortnight have also proved popular, with colleagues covering for each other’s workloads and making up the hours during the week. For example, a branch manager has Wednesday afternoons off to pursue her degree in Business Studies.

“ In one year the annual cost of stress-related absence dropped from £120,000 to £105,000. ”

Susan Hibbert, HR Projects Manager



hospitality & retail



Asda

Kerry Holden T: 0113 241 8627

Sector: Hospitality and retail

Location: Nationwide

Employees: 120,000

Supermarkets are a people business, and Asda is convinced that introducing innovative work-life balance policies has enabled it to improve staff motivation and customer service at its 258 stores.

The practices have also had a very positive effect on reducing absenteeism and staff turnover.

Asda's 120,000 employees have a wide range of flexible working practices on offer. Childcare leave allows parents to stop work for a short period during the summer holidays, returning in term-time with continuous service and maintained benefits.

Asda is also doing its bit to attract more women into general store management - these positions are available on a job share basis to enable people to manage their work and home commitments.

Meanwhile, a shift swapping scheme enables colleagues to be absent from work for specific family or domestic reasons, and students can even swap the store they work at if studying away from home. Or they can choose to take study leave if going away to college, returning to work in the holidays.

The over-50s are catered for too. They are able to take up to three months unpaid leave regardless of job, contracted hours or length of employment, but maintaining continuous service. Asda believes that all these measures play an important part in retaining a loyal, motivated workforce dedicated to customer service.

“ Every single one of our flexible working policies comes from our colleagues themselves. They show we're serious about listening to colleagues and that we really mean it when we say it's our people who make the difference in our business. ”

David Smith, People Director

“ If just 10% of non-working mothers returned to work after maternity leave, employers could save up to £39 million each year in recruitment costs alone. ”

DTI Green Paper
“Work & Parents - Competitiveness and Choice”,
December 2000

hospitality & retail

Beardmore Conference Hotel

Carol Hampson T: 0141951600 E: hampson@hci.co.uk

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Scotland
Employees: 79



Recruitment and retention of staff are major issues for the hospitality industry, but Beardmore Conference Hotel has devised a number of ways to attract the staff it needs, including many policies geared to work-life balance.

Competition with other employers in the area is tough, but Beardmore's flexible approach to accommodating individuals' needs within the demands of the business has enabled it to attract and retain the right calibre of people.

Flexible working also helps cater for busy periods. For example, non-managerial staff work annualised hours. This means that if the hotel is particularly busy one week, staff are prepared to stay longer until the work is done. In return, they can leave earlier if the hotel is not so busy. Sometimes it may entail employees working very hard for a four-month stretch in the summer, but shorter hours in winter.

Family-friendly policies also help to increase staff loyalty – time off for dependents, career breaks, and term-time only working are all acceptable as long as the job can be done. Training is also encouraged, as any form of learning benefits the company in terms of increased staff self-esteem, motivation and commitment.

“ In an area where competition with other employers is tough, we need to stand out from the crowd. Our flexible benefits package has helped us recruit some excellent people – and they have stayed with us too! ”

Carol Hampson, HR Advisor

Bettys & Taylors

Jane Pike T: 01423 814000 E: jane.pike@bettysandtaylors.co.uk

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Yorkshire and Humberside
Employees: 850

Tea room company Bettys & Taylors has one of the lowest staff turnovers in the industry – just 3% within the group's core business - thanks to its work-life balance policies. Offering family-friendly working patterns is key to retaining a satisfied workforce, and also acts as a recruitment tool to enhance the company's image as a good employer.

Flexible working has helped with shift rotas too. As individuals choose to work different hours, there is no problem covering the weekend or evening shifts. Management hours have also decreased.

Family-friendly policies include maternity and paternity leave, parental leave, and time off for emergencies. The company also offers a diverse range of free training opportunities, which are not just task-related but aim to enthuse participants.

The need for flexibility is considered on an individual level to accommodate the needs of both the business and employee. For example, the company supported a worker in accounts while she gained additional qualifications, and later allowed her a three-month sabbatical to travel. Since her return she has taken on greater responsibilities and is a very loyal and committed member of staff, who has now been there for 12 years.

“ We have a more loyal, committed and motivated staff. They make the business successful and help us to become a popular employer – 3% staff turnover speaks for itself! ”

Jane Pike, HR Director

Botanic Inns

Cathy Donnelly T: 028 9050 9700 E: cathydonnelly@botanicinns.com

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Northern Ireland
Employees: 550

The hospitality industry has notorious difficulty in attracting and retaining staff but Botanic Inns, a chain of bars in Belfast, Northern Ireland, has been particularly resourceful in using work-life balance policies to help make it a popular employer.

Valuing staff is fundamental to the company's work life balance policies. Staff representatives poll employees on an annual basis on their perceptions about the company's commitment to them as individuals.

Botanic Inns has designed a competitive benefits package, which takes into consideration the challenges facing employees in today's society. These benefits include enhanced maternity and paternity provisions, plus flexible working options including compressed working weeks, term time working, flexitime, part time and teleworking. The company also offers an Employee Assistance Programme – 24 hour/365 day counselling service offering assistance from debt management to relationship problems.

A pilot has been launched in one of the company's bars, which employs 37 people, to highlight the benefits of flexible working and related work-life balance policies. The launch began with an amnesty on "duvet days" and it was identified that 42 working days were lost last year for reasons such as childcare and personal reasons.

Cathy Donnelly, Head of HR says "The benefits of the company's commitment to work-life balance can be clearly seen in the falling labour turnover statistics over the last number of years."

“ Productivity has increased for those staff members involved in flexible working – absence has decreased amongst this group of employees. Our employees are confident about coming forward and asking about flexible working. ”

Cathy Donnelly, Head of Human Resources

Castle Green Hotel

Julie Chapman T: 01539 734000 E: reception@castlegreen.co.uk

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: North East
Employees: 105



Flexible working has reduced staff turnover at Castle Green Hotel from 64% to 40% in just two years, in an industry where it can be as much as 100%. This is all the more remarkable in a tough labour market, with less than 1% unemployment in the area, and in an industry providing 24 hour customer service.

There are now more job applicants from other industries, many of them drawn by Castle Green's reputation as a good employer. The hotel has saved on recruitment and training costs, as well as satisfying regular customers who like to see familiar faces. Absenteeism is very low, with sickness accounting for 0.5% of payroll, compared to a national average of 4%.

Part of the recruitment policy is to attract people with children – the hotel feels that parents often tend to be more responsible about work than young, single people. For example, in the housekeeping department the fact that hours can be fitted around the school day is promoted as a way of attracting people.

Regardless of the reason, be it child or dependant care, study or simply leisure, individuals can arrange flexible hours or job share, while parents are eligible for enhanced maternity and paternity leave.

“ All three women (one senior manager and two assistant managers) taking maternity leave in 2002 returned to work. They are all very effective and highly valued members of staff. Replacing them would have meant £9,000 in recruitment costs. ”

Julie Chapman, Personnel Manager

Evergreen

Jane James T: 01902 758812

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: West Midlands
Employees: 8



Jane James decided to take a holistic approach to the management of her hairdressing salon by evaluating the individual needs of her eight female staff as well as the requirements of the business.

This led to the introduction of flexible working practices, which have been consistently improving the teamwork and communication between the staff ever since. There is also very little time taken off for sickness.

Initiatives include offering flexible start and finishing times to fit in with school hours and holidays, alternate Saturday working to coincide with partners' shift work, and time off for childrens' events such as sports days.

“ Without offering flexible working arrangements I wouldn't have a business. I am a mother too. To make it all work, a strong team effort is vital and we are all willing to cover for each other when needed. ”

Jane James, Owner

McCormacks (Music) Ltd

John Wiggins T: 0141 332 6644 E: info@mccormacks-music.com

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Scotland
Employees: 31



A complete culture change at Glasgow-based musical instrument retailer McCormacks has brought about remarkable results in the last five years. Revenue has doubled and profitability increased. Director and General Manager, John Wiggins, says this is down to the introduction of work-life balance policies, together with other measures of valuing staff such as sharing information, a flatter organisational structure and pay bonuses.

The company offers its employees flexitime, part-time working, jobshare, emergency leave and voluntary reduced time. John calls this a “compassionate approach to managing people” while recognising the business benefits of improved recruitment and retention of quality staff.

Bert Whitehead had worked with McCormacks for 36 years when he was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. After seven weeks off work, he returned and the company allowed him to work three alternate days a week.

The company benefited by not losing a valuable and experienced member of staff. Bert says “ It's working out really well, and I'm hoping to get back to full time.”

“ Work life balance practices are not totally altruistic – you get improved performance if you treat people with respect and flexibility. ”

John Wiggins, Director and General Manager

Marks and Spencer

Alison Houston T: 020 7935 4422 E: Alison.Houston@marks-and-spencer.com

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 75,000

As a household name, Marks and Spencer ensures it is seen as a popular employer across the country by offering a wide range of choices in working patterns to help its staff to find a healthy work-life balance.

The retailer has developed an extensive range of work-life balance initiatives that make a major contribution to the morale and loyalty of its 75,000 staff across 294 stores. These include benefits such as flexible working, home and part-time working, jobshare, educational sponsorship, secondments, career leave and flexible retirement options.

Parents are able to take time off to attend appointments during pregnancy and IVF treatment, and are eligible for additional maternity leave, paternity leave, company maternity pay and adoption leave. Time off is also available for foster carers.

Nearly 80% of the workforce is female, and mothers going back to work following maternity leave have a range of options, including gradual return and term-time working. A "child break" scheme is in place for those who do not wish to start work again immediately. Similar support is provided for those with other caring responsibilities.

Through flexible working, Marks and Spencer has seen the benefit of retaining talented staff and developing them within the organisation.

“ Our work life balance policies have given significant commercial benefit to the organisation. This has been measured in the number of staff that we are able to retain after maternity leave or a dependency break, and we save on the costs of recruitment and retraining. ”

Alison Houston, Head of HR Corporate Governance

Park Hotel Tenby

Liz Howells T: 01834 843791

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Wales
Employees: 24



In an industry where businesses have to compete to attract enthusiastic and committed employees, the Park Hotel in Tenby, West Wales, has had to work hard to retain staff. But because of flexible working patterns, joint owner Liz Howells has maintained a loyal core of staff, some of whose children and children's children also work there.

She believes that having happy staff helps the business to be successful through the knock-on effect for hotel guests who are treated well and as a result, make repeat bookings.

Rates of pay at the Park Hotel are competitive, but staff are additionally attracted by the hotel's family-friendly working patterns, adapting to the needs of the individual and the business. Staff have also been trained to work in groups and across different areas so that they can swap around to fill gaps if anyone is unable to come to work.

Liz Howells holds a breakfast meeting for all staff between 10am and 11am each day, so that problems such as childcare arrangements can be sorted out, with staff offering to swap shifts or babysit for each other.

She says: "The bonus for me is that problems get ironed out. Everyone helps each other".

“ If we treat staff well there is a significant knock-on effect for the guests, which in turn has had an enormous impact on repeat bookings and the continued success of the business. ”

Liz Howells, Joint Owner

Peebles Hydro Hotel and Leisure Complex

Lorna Smith T: 01721 720602 E: peebleshydro@ukonline.co.uk

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Scotland
Employees: 162



Flexible working was originally introduced at Peebles Hydro hotel and leisure complex some 15 years ago to ease recruitment difficulties. It met with great success, retaining effective staff who otherwise might have left, and at the same time attracting local people who in different circumstances would not have been able to join the labour market.

Since then, other work-life balance policies have been added which have consolidated the hotel's reputation as an excellent place to work. These include part-time working, special shift arrangements, compressed working hours, use of the health facilities and limited access to the on-site crèche.

Staff are more satisfied at work, which in turn leads to better job performance. Head Housekeeper, Heather Waters, says: "Flexitime helps to keep good workers and to keep a good team which works well together. When extra effort is required in busy times, everyone works together to get through."

“ Flexibility leads to more satisfied staff which in turn leads to better job performance. ”
Heather Waters, Head Housekeeper

Sainsbury's

Nicola Martin E: nicola.martin@sainsburys.co.uk

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: Nationwide
Employees: 146,000

The Sainsbury's business operates 24 hours a day, 364 days a year. Flexible working is therefore essential to business success, with some 70% of colleagues working part time and numerous examples of flexible working at all levels of the organisation.

In order to beat the competition, Sainsbury's must be a leader in attracting and then retaining talented people. Flexible working is therefore vital, as today's workers demand that they are able to balance both their home and work commitments. Sainsbury's continually encourages its stores, depots and the business centre to develop working solutions that enable colleagues to plan their daily lives, alongside solutions that ensure that sufficient people are available to meet the demands of customers.

Sainsbury's offers a range of work-life benefits including career breaks, job sharing, dual store contracts, leave for fertility treatment and time off for emergencies.

Sainsbury's believes it is important for staff to take the lead in shaping their work-life balance. Anyone is able to suggest to their line manager a working pattern that would suit them, and as long as there is a strong business case and it fits in with colleagues, it will seriously considered.

Lorna Aitken, a checkout assistant, loves her flexible working arrangements: "It's great – I've been able to get a qualification and earn a living at the same time."

“ Finding, recruiting and the training an employee is expensive. Losing that investment, together with accumulated experience, is a costly and often unnecessary waste. ”
Glyn House, Employment Brand Manager.

Secrets

Steve Winder T: 07932 034308

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: East of England
Employees: 44



Hairdressing and beauty business Secrets has gained a reputation for being an excellent employer through its incorporation of work-life balance principles into its training, management skills and business systems development.

Secrets is implementing leading edge policies in the management of time, stress and absence. Annual training plans have been introduced for the 44 staff, alongside regular appraisal and development discussions.

Recruitment and retention are key issues in this industry. The majority of the 44 staff are female, including working mothers and women returning to work after a break. Flexible hours, and different arrangements between school holidays and term-time, allow employees to meet domestic commitments, as well as social engagements.

With fewer young recruits than in the past, a sympathetic response to the priorities of older employees is important in attracting and keeping a skilled workforce. But the needs of youngsters are not neglected – they often leave early on Fridays and Saturdays to get ready for nights out.

“ The last couple of years have really confirmed my beliefs about the importance of finding a personal balance between work and the other aspects of your life. We are showing that you can do that and still run a profitable business. ”

Steve Winder, Managing Director

Wilts Wholesale Electrical Co Ltd

Kate Carroll E: kate.carroll.wilts@talk21.com

Sector: Hospitality and retail
Location: South West
Employees: 485

Opening on a Saturday morning has brought clear business and employee benefits for Wilts Wholesale Electrical. Sales have increased by 10% and staff are happier because they can take time off during the week. Labour turnover has been reduced to less than half the industry average and short-term frequent absences have also been drastically cut. The industry average for labour turnover is 56% – at Wilts it stands at 23%.

The company, a family-run business with 485 employees and 47 branches across the South West, piloted the idea in its Bath store. By opening on a Saturday, the company widened its customer base, adding personal shoppers to its business client-base and increasing its level of service.

Staff also enjoyed the flexibility of time off in the week – they could take their children out in the afternoons or do jobs that were difficult on weekends, such as getting the car fixed.

The company is assessing the full impact of the pilot project before rolling it out to the rest of the company. Meanwhile, flexible working has been introduced at head office and staff turnover has dropped from 22% to 4% – just three resignations in 2001 as compared to 15 the year before.

“ The project also had an indirect influence over our working culture. One benefit I did not anticipate at the start was the improved attitude from both staff and management with regards to change and ‘thinking outside of the box’. ”

Ruth Pryor, HR Manager



business services



Aricot Vert Design

Sector: Business Services

Location: South East

Employees: 18



Graphic design company Aricot Vert has reaped the rewards of a flexible culture in creativity, high morale and productivity. It has been able to recruit the right people, staff turnover is low, and absenteeism non-existent.

Managing Director Lin Arigho sets a positive example. A mother of three, married to a Royal Navy Officer who is often away for long periods, she demonstrates how it is possible to successfully balance both family and business responsibilities.

Lin finds that the flexible culture brings greater creativity to team-working, and has had no problems managing flexible workers. On the contrary, she says "the more accommodating you are, the more people will put themselves out for you". The benefit to the business is less money and resources are spent on recruitment because retention is higher, a more motivated team where their work fits harmoniously with their home commitments and a team of people who really do want to work for Aricot Vert. Lin says "We have also recruited higher calibre of people, that we couldn't have afforded if we had been offering a full-time position."

A variety of working patterns is tailored to suit each individual's personal circumstances. For example, one employee works 9am to 3pm, another 1pm to 5.30pm, and another mornings only. Work flows have peaks and troughs, which can sometimes mean longer hours, balanced with time off.

“ I would rather have the right people working flexible hours than the wrong people working rigidly set hours. ”

Lin Arigho, Managing Director

“ For 77% of parents surveyed with children aged under the age of 6, flexible hours and work-life balance were decisive factors in job selection. ”

reed.co.uk survey January 2003

business services

Base Connections

Julia Scott T: 01483 596501 E: julia@baseconnections.co.uk

Sector: Business Services
Location: South East
Employees: 60



People are the major asset in call centre operations, and telemarketing company Base Connections has been able to recruit the right calibre of staff – and retain them – by offering flexible working patterns.

These allow the company to keep staff turnover well below the industry average, 22% over the last 3 years, and encourage employees to work for the company for longer.

“It also provides the customers with what they want – motivated staff who are keen to work,” says Director Annetta Snider.

Over 80% of the 60 employees work flexible hours, ranging from part-time and term-time work to reduced hours in school holidays. Study leave, emergency leave and childcare vouchers are among other benefits.

New recruits are asked what hours and working patterns they wish to follow and this forms their contract of employment, which can be varied according to need. One staff member, for example, initially worked three full days while her child was at nursery. She swapped to mornings only when the child went to school, and later to work school and term hours only. “The staff we employ are our unique selling point. The company has been able to get the right people because we offer flexible working,” says Annetta Snider, Director

“ Staff turnover has been reduced and is currently at 13%, compared to the call centre average of 60%. We are also able to retain our staff for longer periods. ”

Annetta Snider, Managing Director

Bindman and Partners

David Harris T: 0207 833 4433 E: d.harris@bindmans.com

Sector: Business Services
Location: South East
Employees: 60



As a firm of solicitors with a large criminal department, Bindman and Partners are accessible 24 hours a day. Additionally the firm has variations in the workload.

Flexible working has assisted the firm in meeting these demands. Some partners in the firm work four days a week whilst some solicitors are available during the night.

The firm has for some time provided 2 weeks' paid paternity leave and paid sick leave for immediate dependents such as employees' children.

On occasion, support staff are also allowed a degree of flexibility in contracted starting and finishing times to provide a better service to fee earning employees.

The firm also employs casual hourly paid staff to cope with peaks of work.

The firm says flexible working is mutually beneficial, with part-time contracts for solicitors and administration staff suiting its pattern of work and allowing staff to pursue other interests or manage home commitments.

“ Flexible working has been used as a mechanism to meet client needs. ”

David Harris, Chief Executive

Happy Computers

Cathy Callus T: 020 7375 7322 E: cathy@happy.co.uk

Sector: Business Services
Location: South East
Employees: 43



As its name suggests, this is a happy company with well-motivated staff and it needs to be in the fiercely competitive IT market. By offering flexible working the computer training company has ensured excellent retention rates in a sector which typically has very high employee turnover.

The company allows its 43 staff members to determine their own job description and work flexibly. Managing Director Cathy Callus says that the type of work the company handles requires staff to use their initiative and be flexible. She believes the company's attitude to work-life balance complements this way of working.

Employees are allowed to work flexible hours, for example, taking one day off a week to study or pursue a hobby. The administration staff have also been allowed to choose which jobs they want to do and put the more monotonous jobs on a rota. This has resulted in more motivated staff and because of flexible hours, the phone lines are open longer.

Cathy was awarded a special commendation for innovative management at the Parents at Work Best Boss awards 2000.

“ We need our staff to be innovative and flexible, so for us, flexible working is a win-win situation. ”
Cathy Callus, Managing Director

Market Monitor

Mary Clements T: 01844 274166 E: maryc@market-monitor.co.uk

Sector: Business Services
Location: South East
Employees: 30



Direct Marketing company Market Monitor has an open-door policy on talking about work-life issues. Its 30 employees can work flexible hours to suit their needs.

Staff are encouraged to discuss any problems and find solutions. For example, some employees work in term-time only.

One staff member had problems taking her toddler to the childminder and getting to work on time. Pushing back her starting time by just 30 minutes helped to reduce the overall stress of getting to work and improved her quality time with her child as well as her performance at work.

“ As a result of this flexible attitude, the organisation benefits from a high level of commitment and loyalty among staff and low levels of absenteeism and turnover. ”
Mary Clements, Operations Manager

The Training Exchange

Notes

Simon Pugh T: 01909 564888 E: info@thetrainingexchange.co.uk

Sector: Business Services

Location: Yorkshire and Humberside

Employees: 30




Employees at management consultancy The Training Exchange, benefit enormously from the company's commitment to work-life balance. A variety of flexible working options are on offer, including homeworking. Staff can also work part-time, different days and variable total hours per week and take time off for childcare, school runs, or hospital visits as necessary.

One very committed and enthusiastic staff member is a 21-year-old lone parent who works during school hours with time off for childcare. Without this flexibility she would not be able to work at all. Another employee is a male manager who, to ease his weekly commuting, starts late on a Monday and leaves early on a Friday. He then tends to work in the evenings during the week.

This flexible approach makes a massive difference to the business. Since it was implemented there has been a clear increase in contribution, commitment and effort from staff, as well as excellent feedback from customers.

“ If you meet staff half way with their personal needs, this makes a massive difference to the business; in return the company gets great loyalty from its staff and has more happy customers. ”

Simon Pugh, Chief Executive



Motivate your staff,
let them spend more
time with the boss.

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to speak to an advisor call **08457 47 47 47**
or visit **www.dti.gov.uk/workingparents**

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