

Top Employers for Working Families

Small and Medium Employers

2014

Top Employers for Working Families **Small and Medium Employers 2014**

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Introduction



Sarah Jackson
CEO
Working Families

The Small and Medium Employers Benchmark has, in its second year, provided some interesting insights into the way that smaller businesses are using flexibility.

I am particularly struck by the nature of the employer–employee relationship that the benchmark and case studies have shown; a relationship that is probably best described as ‘adult to adult’. These employers place a lot of trust in their people, creating cultures where finding worklife fit is absolutely normal, and not in any way an impediment to delivering high quality work. In fact, what comes across is that the quality of work is enhanced through employers and employees establishing a mature dialogue that encompasses the needs of the individual and those of the business.

One advantage that Small and Medium Employers have is a clear line of sight through the organisation: they can see what is working, and how. Therefore it is especially encouraging that the embrace of flexible working and a worklife approach is so embedded, not as an article of faith, but because they have a discernible, positive effect on the business itself. There is much to admire in these case studies, and also much to learn.

Sponsors



Daniel Gillborn
Director
Childcarescheme



Childcarescheme is proud to be partnering with Working Families to engage with Small and Medium Employers via a new and innovative benchmarking process. This process aims to highlight the importance of, recognise, and reward provision of outstanding flexible working policies as an approach to retaining the best skillsets in a business, whilst achieving the appropriate balance between work and family life.

As a small business ourselves we have worked closely with Working Families to formulate the Small and Medium Employers Benchmarking survey, reflecting our own experiences. We look forward to using the feedback and results to further enhance our service to this underrepresented sector. By engaging with the Small and Medium Employers sector with this product we believe we can have a positive impact on an audience who need support to enable them to carry on working and contributing to their employer and the local economy within which they sit.

Childcarescheme is an online, fully automated self-service employee benefit offering an easy and tax efficient childcare voucher solution to businesses across the UK. Our cutting edge technology and innovative approach to the service comes from a deep understanding of the employee benefits market, and draws on our extensive knowledge of salary sacrifice and childcare as a part of the Grass Roots Group. It delivers a fully automated, online solution that reduces administration and allows employees to conveniently manage tax and NI efficient payments to carers, whilst creating a cost neutral and, in most cases, cost positive benefit for the employer.



Mark Ursell
Managing Director
Tpoll



Tpoll is a leader in online market research specialising in cost-effective, consumer and employee insight.

Tpoll combines the latest research techniques with powerful IT systems to put insight at the centre of day to day business operations. Tpoll's approach leverages the use of the internet in everyday life to bring management teams a continuous flow of consumer and employee insight. Combined with expert research methods the insight flows through the business driving success at every level.

About the Small and Medium Employers Benchmark

The Small and Medium Employers Benchmark is now in its second year, providing an alternative route for smaller companies to evaluate and develop their worklife thinking. This benchmark asks many of the same questions, but it recognises that Small and Medium Employers might not have the same level of reporting and HR support that companies typically completing the main benchmark enjoy.

The Small and Medium Employers Benchmark has two aims: to measure what companies are doing around worklife fit and high performance working; and to prompt new thinking and ideas about what more they could be doing and how existing policies and practices might be refined or improved. Not all questions might be answerable by some small businesses as they might not be applicable; nonetheless, from the responses gathered it is possible to see what good practice looks like for the sector.

It was evident from both the benchmark and individual case studies that Small and Medium Employers had very similar motivations about using flexibility. Two things stood out: Small and Medium Employers wanted to do the 'right thing' by their employees and treat them like adults when it came to organising work; and they were very clear about the advantages that this high trust way of working conferred. Being able to see the benefits of adopting a family-friendly approach, and in some instances being able to quantify them, means that it becomes embedded in the way the organisation operates.

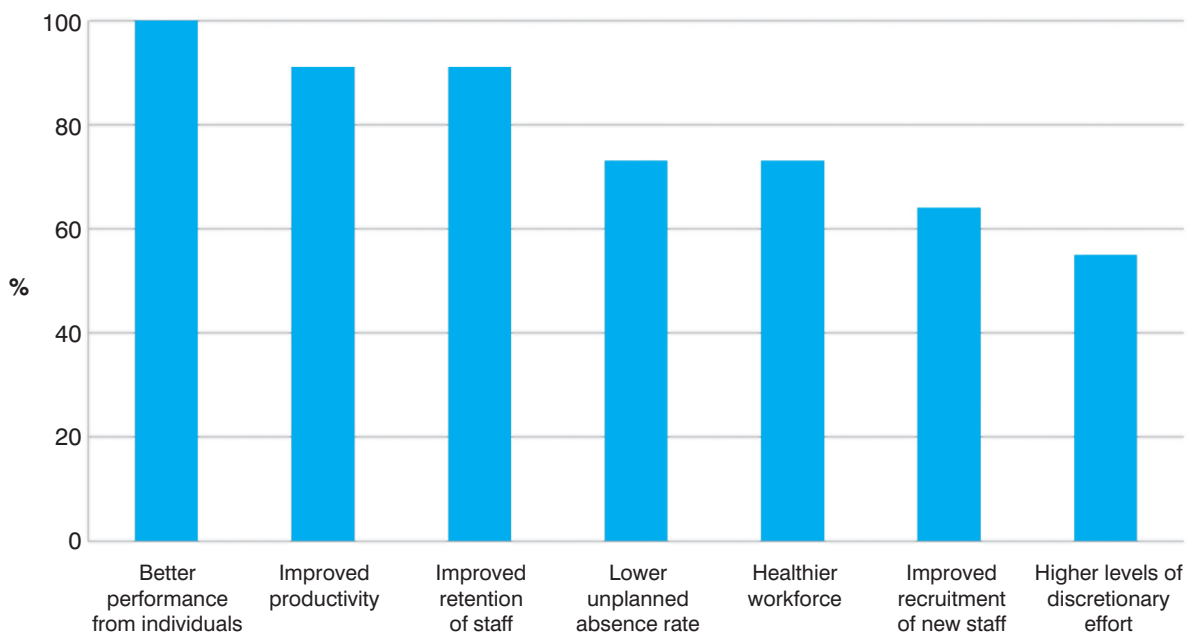
We are committed to providing equality of opportunity in employment and to developing work practices and policies that support worklife balance. We recognise that, in addition to helping balance work and personal lives, flexible working can raise staff morale, reduce absenteeism and improve our use and retention of staff.

The benchmark data showed that Small and Medium Employers had positive beliefs about flexible and family-friendly working, and were upfront about their commitment to it. Aligning worklife publicly with their values formed part of their offer as an employer of choice. Trust between colleagues was uniformly high, and the need for colleagues to balance work and family life was regarded as a normal everyday reality.

Flexible working practices in general were widely available, although term-time working, anytime working and annualised hours were less available than other types. There was some variability in beliefs around specific types of flexible working: although largely positive, a few employers were unconvinced about the benefit and effectiveness of home working. However, there was an emphasis on supportive management that meant that in some small businesses formal policies governing which working patterns were allowed were not as important as the ethos of trust and of empowering employees to negotiate appropriate working patterns.

We don't advertise flexibility as part of our 'package', but promote shared values and different ways of working that enable our staff to have a life as well as a meaningful career. We recruit people into the organisation who are a good cultural fit and also have the skills to do the job. This makes the management of a flexible environment easier. If staff understand and are on board with the values and principles of the business from the outset, they are likely to thrive.

Benefits of flexible working



There was less evidence of detailed policy provision within Small and Medium Employers than larger organisations, and this is probably because their size does not warrant it yet. A flexible approach, coupled with the starting point that worklife fit will always be available, is the primary way of delivering family-friendly working. However, there is room for some improvement on the administration and communication of flexible working: in particular regarding when parents are notified about opportunities for flexibility pre and post-maternity and paternity leave. This does not mean that they are restricting access to flexibility, which is generally very good, rather that there is a need for more consistent practice.

The following case studies show how flexibility is playing out within small and medium organisations, and demonstrate the clear connection that many are able to make between business effectiveness and success and having a worklife approach. These are solid foundations upon which to build, and, as these examples illustrate, provide a clear rationale for taking this route. Small and Medium Employers that remain sceptical about the benefits of flexible working can see here that it is a positive business benefit: small businesses that eschew flexibility are ignoring a powerful business tool and risk being left behind.

Case Studies

Brand Learning

Brand Learning is a global consultancy with unique expertise in lifting the capabilities of people and organisations to drive growth by creating better value for their customers. Founded in 2000, by Mhairi McEwan and Andy Bird with hubs in London, Singapore and New York, the team of 120 employees have worked with over 100 leading multinational organisations (including Unilever, Shell, PepsiCo and AstraZeneca) in more than 60 countries to create sustained performance change in their commercial teams.

Cathy Winsey, HR Operations Director, explains *“we have a mature culture, based on trust and positive intent, allowing people in the organisation to work flexibly to meet their work commitments but also balance family life”*. This desire to treat employees as responsible adults underpins Brand Learning’s attitude to flexible working. Flexible working can be agreed from day one of employment, there is *“no closed door agenda”* and every flexible working request is approached from the same point of view: *“is it possible to meet the individual needs and also the needs of the business”*. It is recognised that employees work hard in a high performance, competitive environment and a lot is expected of people, but with performance management focused on outcomes and achievements, rather than on time spent in the office, employees have freedom in how and where they work. *“Our clients and our people tell us that working with us feels different: we pride ourselves on being engaging, supportive partners, driven by our strongly-rooted values: Expert, Engaging, Inclusive and Inspiring Change”* says Cathy.

Brand Learning underpins its approach with policy but the main strength of their flexible working provision is the culture of the organisation. Cathy feels that having a straightforward form for applying for changes in working hours and days enables employees and their supporters (line manager) to really think through how the pattern of flexibility might work for them and what the impact on colleagues and the business might be so that the optimum approach can be agreed. As Cathy says *“people need to be mindful that this is a two-way commitment and we need to be mindful of both the individual and business”*.

Much of Brand Learning’s flexibility supports working parents. The company has an impressive track record in both encouraging parents to return to work after maternity leave, but also in retaining them through the second child and beyond. It is important to the company that flexible workers progress and employees will be promoted on merit regardless of working pattern.

Brand Learning’s directors lead the way with their own flexible working patterns and *“flexibility, fairness and maturity”* are important guidelines to follow, recognising that work and life, demands ebb and flow and there has to be give and take.

Brand Learning is keen that all employees have some sort of work flexibility to help meet home commitments and following the annual *“happiness survey”* realised that their Operations Team, due to the nature of their roles did not have opportunities for working from home. On reviewing this, the Operations Team were given four days per year in addition to holiday to work from home and meet home commitments such as deliveries or to get the boiler serviced for example. As Cathy says *“we know that flexible working is key for retention and engagement so we will continue to consider how we can be even smarter around flexibility in the future”*.

CiC Employee Assistance

CiC Employee Assistance is an employee assistance provider, specialising in trauma and critical incident management, which delivers programmes to organisations covering 450,000 employees across the globe. Their support lines are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and provide a service to all sectors from the NHS to corporate banks.

CiC's focus on flexibility has been crafted both from their need to operate round the clock but also from their base as a clinical service. Just as they operate to support organisations and their staff, CiC want to support and listen to their own employees. For Kate Nowlan, chief executive of CiC Employee Assistance, it's always been important to offer flexible working to employees, giving them the opportunity to make changes to the way they work in order to respond to short or long term events and issues in their roles and responsibilities outside of the workplace: *"From CiC's perspective we've always been open to flexible working requests from employees and consider each individual request against the same criteria, considering how it will impact on the business and how we can work with an employee to make a change in working hours or days, or incorporating more time working from home".*

Kate says her job is *"to support employees to be as creative as they like"* when it comes to flexible working. While recognising that the organisation has to function and that not all types of flexibility suit all roles, with discussion, employees and their managers work out what is best for them, the team and the organisation. Team work has been key to their flexibility success. There are three distinct teams in CiC (Clinical, Sales and Administration) but all teams support each other and staff cover for each other to get the job done.

Enabling and supporting people with childcare and eldercare responsibilities are a central feature of CiC's flexibility. There are 30 staff but at least half are part time. As Kate says *"as 74% of the workforce is female, it's been natural that some flexible working requests have been related to motherhood and childcare. But at CiC we also readily acknowledge that flexible working goes much further than helping an employee to balance childcare and other caring needs"*.

Achieving worklife balance is another aim. Many staff work from home and CiC has invested in secure technology to enable this. Account managers, for example, regularly travel and the company is keen that they work from home when they can to enable worklife balance to be achieved. Further education courses and other professional qualifications are also supported through flexibility. Kate estimates that one-third of flexible working requests relate to education and training.

CiC have established a mature relationship with staff. The work is demanding but support is there and staff work in the best way for them and for their colleagues in an environment of trust and support. As a result staff turnover is very low. As Kate says: *"In my experience, if as an employer, you can actively show you're prepared to be flexible with your employees, they're much more likely to give back to you in return and be much more engaged with their work. The impact of this on performance and productivity is obvious and something that shouldn't be underestimated."*

Digital Mums

Digital Mums was set up in 2013 in response to rising maternal unemployment and demand spotted by the founders Kathryn Tyler and Nikki Cochrane for social media outsourcing. Digital Mums supplies social media managers to small businesses and charities who need their help to get digital.

Digital Mums train out of work mums to become social media managers. They match them with a business where they then work part time hours from home around their other commitments.

Last September Digital Mums took five mums through their bespoke training programme as a pilot and then matched them with businesses. The training was based on cutting edge educational models from the US. This training was developed alongside mums so that the founders could get an insight into their needs – how they would like to receive training and how they would like to communicate. The training is 100% online and completed in the mum's own time with the only structured component being a weekly Google Hangout session usually held in the evening. The training in itself was new and radical with the mums required to design their own digital media campaign in the second week.

Following the training the mum and the organisation that needs a social media manager are matched by Digital Mums. This is currently done manually but soon will be fully automated through an online marketplace. The mums are mostly working 10 hours a week with each business, and most are working with two businesses so work in total for around 20 to 21 hours a week.

The mums come from all backgrounds. Some are novices in social media and some are more experienced. Some have had short career breaks while others have been out of paid employment for a long time. All need to have a passion about social media and be interested in retraining. The Digital Mums team have met some of their recruits in parks and cafés, often with their children, and others they have only met online. Mums are often natural social media managers, spending a lot more time on social networks than the average person, and all have passed the training with flying colours, according to Kathryn Tyler, and have been easily matched with clients.

The pilot has been invaluable and Digital Mums plans to put 100 more mums through the training this year. The training has been extended and Kathryn stresses that the pilot was designed to be a learning experience for Digital Mums as well as the mums involved.

Digital Mums is growing rapidly through word of mouth and reputation and was featured in 'Britain's New Radicals' in the Observer newspaper. Other organisations have been interested in buying Digital Mums' training programme. For the future, Digital Mums is planning to keep focusing on mums and their particular employment needs and difficulties rather than broadening their pool. Kathryn Tyler is convinced that this is where her company can really help, and indeed, that this is where the best recruits can be found. One of the main features of the training is multi-tasking, and as Kathryn says, *"What mum can't do that?"*

Feminarum Magazine

Feminarum is an online women's magazine founded in October 2013 by Helen Wright.

Ill in bed with plenty of time to read, Helen was fed up with magazines full of high fashion and celebrity gossip and wanted to read something of real relevance to women and especially working mothers. Helen noted down all the things she would be interested in as a working mother of three children and then got a group together on Facebook to talk about ideas.

With the aim of being educational and interesting to women, Helen launched Feminarum online and has a team of about ten freelance writers who all contribute when they can. The contributors are unpaid but work in their own time and can use their space on Feminarum to write about subjects that promote their own specialist areas. The magazine also tries to sponsor organisations that are close to the writers' hearts. Helen talks to the writers about their planned pieces and works on the issue two months in advance. People have leeway to amend their pieces or schedules according to their availability and other personal commitments.

Feminarum is diverse. Helen's ten-year-old son writes reviews for computer apps for children, and a recent piece by one writer let people know about local food banks. Other articles have talked about local schools and supporting women producers and directors in the media. The aim of Feminarum is to be 'for women by women' and to work with and feature other organisations and charities that support women, such as Birds Eye View, which supports women practitioners in film.

In the longer term, Feminarum aims to pay its writers and to continue to expand its exploration of women's issues. October will mark the end of its first year, and in this time the magazine has increased its circulation and become better known.

Forster Communications

Forster Communications is a public relations and communications agency focusing on creating positive social change for clients with an emphasis on age, health, sustainability and social justice.

In view of the ground breaking work it has completed for clients such as KMPG, Business in the Community, Age UK, NSPCC, MIND and Carers Trust, it is perhaps unsurprising that initiatives to enhance staff wellbeing are at the heart of the way that Forster Communications operates.

Flexible working has always been key to this focus on wellbeing. Around 16 months ago, Forster Communications went through a management buyout. Four of the senior team work part-time, including the Managing Director, Amanda Powell-Smith, who is fully committed to developing the culture of trust and 'give and take'. An employee engagement scheme was developed to reflect the company's holistic approach to wellbeing, recognising that people do not leave their home issues at the workplace doorstep and vice versa. As Amanda Powell-Smith says, *"Neither PR services nor life can be switched on and off on demand, but both can be managed."*

Trust and taking personal responsibility for managing your own time are central to Forster Communications'

philosophy. Employees are expected to meet deadlines and to take urgent calls on days off, but the company undertakes not to call unless it is urgent and encourages staff to work shorter hours on days when deadlines are not so pressing.

With around 30 staff, two-thirds of whom are women, Forster Communications wants to hold onto experienced people and let them work to their optimum capability. As well as informal give and take, the company enables staff to work from home or change their working hours more formally. All full-time staff work at least three days a week in the office; for example two employees split their time between commuting and working from home in Bristol and Cambridge. Flexibility has enabled these staff members to be retained.

Unsurprisingly, communication is key to the company. Appraisals are carried out twice a year, and there are weekly team meetings when everyone checks in with everyone else to ensure no one feels overwhelmed by their workload or other issues.

For the future, Forster Communications wants to ensure everyone is working in the optimum way to support their business and personal needs, men as well as women, parents and non-parents, as it recognises that this will engage people and encourage them to grow and develop creatively.

One member of staff is working part-time to study design. This could be seen as a risky strategy; perhaps this staff member might leave to pursue design full-time? Or perhaps he will stay, knowing that with Forster Communications he can continue to have a flourishing career in PR while being able to develop his other ambitions. Forster Communications is prepared to take the risk as it knows that positive staff engagement works. Turnover has increased by 25% year on year and collectively Forster saved 47% on energy consumption, beating its 10:10 global commitment target of a 10% year-on-year reduction.

Freestyle Interactive

Freestyle Interactive is a full-service digital agency that was founded 18 years ago. Located in Warwick, the company now employs around 50 people.

Freestyle Interactive has core hours of 9.30–5.30, but tries to arrange working hours in a spirit of ‘give and take’. If it makes life easier for people to start earlier and leave earlier, or start later and leave later, then that’s OK. The agency will do everything it can to meet the needs of both its staff and the business. Tracy Prince, the HR Manager, believes that operating effectively with flexibility is “*all down to trust*”. The working environment is stressful, with tight deadlines and pressure, but the more effort people willingly put in, the more flexibility they feel able to request.

As people’s lives change while they are at Freestyle Interactive, their working patterns can change accordingly. Tracy, for example, worked from 9 until 5 when her child was very young, but then switched to a 9.30 start as her daughter grew older and her needs changed. People are also able to be flexible with their time when they need to – perhaps to attend a school sports day – without any pressure to make the time up, as it is known that, when the pressure is on, people will go the extra mile. It is a culture of respect and trust.

A people focus has been at the core of Freestyle Interactive since its inception. Suzanne Linton, one of the agency’s founders and the Managing Director, “*drives the family feeling*”. As Tracy explains, “*Suzanne is very much*

an advocate of flexibility and drives this attitude throughout the business.” Freestyle Interactive needs to employ the best people and stop young professionals automatically thinking that they have to leave the West Midlands and beat a path to London for the best career. Its reputation for its working ethos has grown and Tracy says, “we often get people approaching us directly for jobs.”

The culture of flexibility and trust at Freestyle Interactive has meant that people take less time off sick, work hard and do not clock-watch. They manage the peaks and troughs in their workload to minimise their stress, and are encouraged to have hobbies and do activities. Showers are provided onsite, making it possible for staff to cycle to work or enjoy a lunchtime run. They can take two ‘duvet days’ a year in addition to holiday, keep their own hours as long as the work is done and buy and sell holiday, depending on their needs and lifestyle.

Flexible working doesn’t just apply to people with children. Freestyle Interactive encourages all its staff to follow their dreams and offers paid and unpaid sabbaticals to help people achieve this. Tracy gives the example of one member of staff who took a month’s sabbatical to join an Antarctic expedition. *“This is the sort of thing that helps retain talent and build an energetic and engaged workforce,”* she says.

Future initiatives will include how to support new fathers through greater flexibility. Freestyle Interactive wants to ensure all staff, regardless of their lifestyle or family situation, get the flexibility they need to do a great job and have a great life.

iCrossing UK

iCrossing is a global digital marketing agency operating from 17 offices with over 900 employees worldwide. The UK company was set up in 1997, became part of iCrossing in 2007 and currently employs 150 staff (56% male, 44% female) across offices in London, Brighton and Manchester.

At iCrossing UK, flexible working is available to all employees, and the majority make use of this benefit. Leading by example, all members of the executive team choose to work flexibly in various ways, be it through working from home – the company ensures that all laptops are wireless enabled – or working flexible hours and days.

Flexible working due to family commitments is not just limited to working mothers. For example, following the birth of his child, a male employee initially reduced his working days from five to four, and currently works three per week to enable him to share childcare with his partner. Some employees work flexibly so that they can pursue outside interests – they might start work later in the morning after fitness training and finish later to make up the hours. Others work flexibly to study, arranging their hours around classes. Career breaks are also available. One employee with relatives in New Zealand was able to take a one month career break to visit them. iCrossing has also introduced the ‘birthday lie-in’, a benefit that enables employees to start work at 10.30am on their birthday. In 2013, this was extended to cover their children’s birthdays.

For iCrossing, the benefit of flexible working is the direct effect it has on its employees. It empowers them to shape their own working patterns and demonstrates trust by focusing on outcomes and accountability. In a survey by The Sunday Times, ‘Best Companies’, published in March 2014, iCrossing received a two-star accreditation and was rated as ‘outstanding’ by its employees for overall work satisfaction. Employees said that iCrossing offers a “great worklife balance” and is a “great place to work”. Rachel Collier, Chief Talent Officer at iCrossing, said that

the positive feedback was a testament to the company's approach: *"We are delighted that our employees have rated us so highly in the survey because ultimately the success of the agency is all down to the people who work here. It is vital our employees are happy and motivated which is why we do everything we can to make sure working here is rewarding, exciting and fun."*

Other benefits of flexible working are staff retention, engagement and performance. *"Engaged and motivated employees are the foundation for creating, producing and delivering work of the highest quality to our customers,"* says Rachel. For employees, notes HR Manager Rosie Shimell, one of the benefits of flexible working is that *"the mutual trust between iCrossing and its employees translates into people feeling valued"*.

In terms of advice to small employers about flexible working, iCrossing recommends consulting with staff and being flexible, not creating a one-size-fits-all approach, and being ready to respond as and when issues arise.

Newydd Housing Association

Newydd has been a registered social landlord since 1974. Flexible working, as a tool to support the customer focus of the service and to retain staff, has been in place for many years – long before the statutory Right to Request it was introduced. Anyone can request any type of flexible working at any time.

Managers at Newydd are very used to handling requests for flexible working and there are clear and well-developed procedures for requests and their assessment. Following a request, the manager and member of staff will review it and adapt it if necessary to suit both their needs. Then the form of flexibility is given a short trial to see if it meets everyone's expectations and to examine the impacts, before being formalised by the HR function. Therefore, the decision is made by those who know the work best – the individual and their line manager – but centralised HR keeps a record of who is working flexibly. All types of flexible working are in place at Newydd, apart from annualised hours, which don't suit the relatively constant workflow.

Flexible working has meant that Newydd can offer out-of-hours appointments to its customers in special circumstances. Support services, such as HR, have also extended their hours of operation to support operational colleagues. This has been done by staggering the hours of the HR team while also giving them flexible shift patterns.

Newydd also sees the benefit of team-based solutions, which give everyone, not just working parents, the opportunity to have some flexibility. Teams decide among themselves on their working patterns and support each other when necessary. In this way men as well as women are encouraged to see the benefits of flexibility both from a personal and an organisational perspective. Newydd has several male employees working part-time and uses part-time working as a tool to ease staff into retirement if they wish. In addition, Newydd offers career breaks and sabbaticals to staff. It is proud of its 'trust' culture and the atmosphere that has been created.

For the future, Newydd will be looking at how it can better deliver tailored services to its customers at times that are convenient for them and will consider using flexible working to achieve this. It is also evaluating how home working might work for the organisation.

Sacker and Partners LLP

At Sacker and Partners flexible working is due to a mix of deliberate action and circumstances. More women are coming into law, which often has a long-hours culture, and if you want to retain these women, especially when they have children, then you have to do something specific to encourage them to stay.

Julia Perrin explains that traditionally people think flexibility is incompatible with the culture and client needs of the legal profession, but it can be possible to make it work, thereby creating a virtuous circle. *“People can see what is possible. Once it has worked you have a positive template.”* This has been supported at Sacker and Partners by the communications piece, who ensure everyone is aware of flexible working and the benefits.

At Sacker and Partners about 30 per cent of staff work flexibly at all levels, not just lawyers but secretaries and business services staff. Flexible working in place includes job shares, part-time working, four-day weeks, shortened working days and working from home, where technology has enabled seamless telephone and computing access. Like all organisations that make flexible working successful, Sacker expects flexibility from its flexible staff. Getting the job done well remains the firm’s priority. If a flexible working pattern is not working out people are expected to say so and be willing to consider alternative patterns and approaches. Sacker recognises that there needs to be trust and commitment on both sides so that the arrangement satisfies staff’s personal needs and the business’ needs.

Although it is still mostly women who are making formal requests for flexible working, there have also been requests from men. The benefits are there for all to see. Sacker and Partners has low rates of attrition and good rates of return from maternity leave.

Sacker and Partners’ approach to flexibility is part of a wider culture of ensuring wellbeing among staff and enabling women to develop their careers. The firm is about to roll out internal maternity mentoring. While an external company has provided maternity mentoring for lawyers for a number of years, the new scheme enables all new parents to be mentored by a colleague who can give more personalised advice and tips from experience, covering all topics from childcare considerations to workplace challenges.

During Work Life Week, the firm ran sessions covering a variety of flexible working and childcare themes and also organises ‘lunch and learn’ sessions on parenting and childcare issues. The message from Sacker and Partners is clear: flexible working can be compatible with a career in a legal firm and with business success.

SEAP

SEAP is a small, national independent advocacy charity celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. SEAP stands for Support, Empower, Advocate, Promote and it is clear that these values apply not only to the service the organisation offers to clients, but also to the way it treats its staff.

SEAP’s advocates support people in investigating complaints about health and wellbeing or social care issues. Staff have to be tenacious and challenging and the work can be stressful and difficult. However, as Graeme Clark, SEAP’s HR Advisor says, *“Our culture is empowering, supportive and transparent,”* and for this reason staff are given the opportunity to work as flexibly as they like, within the confines of meeting operational requirements.

People have all sorts of flexible arrangements at SEAP, from zero-hours contracts and working just one or two days a week to full-time employment. There are more staff members with some sort of flexible working arrangement than those working a standard full-time week. SEAP also operates a TOIL policy to ensure that hours worked over those contracted, or additional travelling time, can be clawed back quickly, and that staff do not get too stressed and unable to maintain a worklife balance.

As well as enabling staff to manage their own lives, flexible working allows SEAP to meet clients' needs, which is absolutely at the core of its ethos. SEAP likes to offer clients continuity in their advocacy, and sometimes client meetings might have to take place outside normal office hours, or on days staff have not been contracted to work, but with support they are willing to move things around and be there for the client. Graeme explains that the great atmosphere and team spirit ensure that people are prepared to 'give and take'.

SEAP works in partnership with other smaller advocacy organisations, offering support and giving the charity and its partners' employees the opportunity for engaging in interesting and varied work. This might also mean extra travelling. Working from home is possible, as staff are set up with all the equipment they need to do so.

With support from HR, SEAP's line managers have become very used to managing teams whose members may work very different hours. Managers have local autonomy to agree working hours and employees are expected to manage their own time and workload and operate as a team to support one another. This clearly works. SEAP's sickness levels are low at, on average, four days per person per year, and both morale and productivity are usually high, though they both can fluctuate across the organisation and need to be managed within an environment of economic uncertainty. Graeme says, *"We try to accommodate people as best we can within operational needs."* The result is an engaged and committed workforce and a great service for clients.

University of Bristol Students' Union

The University of Bristol Students' Union (UBU) is a democratically led membership organisation which supports University of Bristol students through their university education.

Founded over 100 years ago, UBU has been independent of the university since 2009 and, as well as its student volunteers, employs 50 salaried staff. Since becoming independent, the management of UBU has changed and there has been more of a focus on retention, motivation and engagement of staff. UBU has flexible working as a principle of its working style to both accommodate some of the evening and weekend working that is required and to reflect the profile of its staff, who are predominantly young and female. With core hours of 10am–4pm, there is flexibility in the working pattern to manage events. So, for example, if you have worked late at an event one day it may be agreed you can come in late another time. Staff may work at home for a day a week if it is agreed with their line manager and appropriate to the type of work to be undertaken. People are 'empowered and trusted' and this has created an excellent working atmosphere at UBU.

In addition, other, more formal, flexible working patterns can be agreed, such as more permanent home working. Sickness absence is reported as low and return from maternity leave rates are high. UBU reviews its practices on a regular basis, for example the Health and Safety and Wellbeing Board is considering future worklife balance initiatives.

Are you **Happy to Talk Flexible Working**?

Try our new strapline for job adverts

The strapline is the result of work by the Promoting Flexible Working to Private Sector Employers Working Group (PSWG) for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The group brought together Working Families, employer bodies, the TUC and recruiters to find practical ways of delivering culture change, outside of the legislative process.

The PSWG recognised that too few jobs are advertised flexibly, and that employers who only advertise their vacancies on a full-time basis may be fishing from a narrow talent pool. They wanted to encourage employers to think about job design before recruitment, and to give potential applicants the confidence to ask about alternative patterns of work.

The result is a strapline and a logo for employers to put on job adverts. And here it is (below). We hope you like it. We hope you'll use it. And if you do want to use it, please let us know.



We know putting a logo on an advert isn't the whole story. We've also produced some simple guidance about job design to help employers who are not yet flexible consider what the job really needs and what type of flexible working might work best. But being Happy to Talk is a great start!

For guidance to accompany using our strapline, including:

- **Designing a flexible job**
- **Writing a job advert with the strapline**
- **Handling the recruitment process**

Visit www.workingfamilies.org.uk/happytotalk

Need more help?

Employers who need more help in flexible job design and advertising can access:

Working Families Training and Consultancy on **020 7253 7243**
for a half-day training course in flexible job design.

Timewise's Flexible Job Design Helpdesk on **0800 781 1604**
or email: jobdesign@timewiserecruitment.co.uk



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