

Case study: CIPD Parent Returner Programme

Yorkshire Building Society

Size: 3,500 employees.

Location: Three main office sites in Bradford (Head Office), Leeds and Peterborough, and around 137 branches across England, Scotland and Wales.

Sector: Private Sector, Financial Services.

People function: Around 100 people in the people division, with specialist teams in Learning, HR Business Partnering & Employee Relations, HRMI & Planning, Communications, HR Admin, Talent, Resourcing & Inclusion.

Key fact: As of September 2020, 65% of employees and 44% of senior employees (E grade and above) are women. 916 female employees work part-time vs 1,243 who work full-time.

Operational context

Yorkshire Building Society has a longstanding commitment to flexible working, and has been included in a list of the UK's 30 most family-friendly employers for several years running.

However, leaders have become increasingly aware that their proactive approach, which used to make them stand out, is now becoming more widespread, and that they need to do more to retain their flexible working edge.

The team has also recognised a need to be more targeted with their encouragement of flexible working, and to make sure that their policies translate seamlessly into real life support.

Problem

The team identified four areas that they wished to address through the programme:

- Challenging the perception that flexible working isn't compatible with line manager and more senior roles, and encouraging it across all grades.
- Checking whether their policies and practices for reintroducing staff to the workplace were giving enough support.

- Ensuring that both access and encouragement to return to work flexibly translate across paternity, adoption and parental leave as well as maternity leave.
- Supporting the recruitment of parents or soon-to-be parents, who might feel concerned about not being eligible for flexible working if they were to move jobs.

What they did

The Yorkshire Building Society team took full advantage of the collaborative nature of the programme, discussing and challenging their own and others' approaches and exploring all aspects of supporting returners.

They subsequently developed a series of plans to improve their approach, including:

- Building and expanding specific returner programmes for their different groups, including offering additional support on reintegrating into the workplace.
- Creating a network of returners for mutual support and mentoring.
- Reviewing the wording of existing guides and processes to make them less formal and more welcoming.
- Creating a clear statement of their approach to flexible working for job adverts, highlighting what it means at YBS and clarifying that it is available from day one.
- Reviewing their approach to job specs, moving away from asking for specific experience and instead focusing on the expectations of the role (to support applications from women)

Outcomes

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has delayed the implementation of these plans. However, the pandemic has also caused a reassessment of the benefits of remote working, and this will be incorporated into their future flexible working strategies.

So while it is too early to evaluate the impact of their plans, the team will be looking to measure the proportion of women in all roles, with particular focus on senior management and above, and setting five years targets for improvement.

Top tips

- Seek input from your employees before you start. Don't assume you know what the issues are; ask what needs to change before taking action.
- Get the right people involved in making change happen, across the organisation and at all levels, otherwise success may be limited.
- Encourage advocacy. Share stories from people who have made flexible working work, and ask senior staff to act as role models and mentors.
- Remember to include the male perspective – asking men who work flexibly to be open about their experiences will widen male participation.

Amy Thirtle, Returner Champion (Yorkshire Building Society)

'Taking part in the CIPD's Returner Programme has given us a much broader perspective on what we need to do to truly champion flexible working and support our returners. We found the expert help invaluable, and gained lots of new ideas to explore. We also really valued the opportunity to challenge and be challenged by our counterparts in other organisations.'

'Having previously focused much of our attention on policies and procedures, we are now taking everything back to the human level, to make sure that our people feel comfortable having conversations about balancing their work with the rest of their lives. We're delighted with our direction of travel and are looking forward to implementing our plans across our organisation.'

Supported by



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