



B&Q

B&Q is a well known home improvement retailer operating out of 331 stores with 34,000 staff. It has been recognised for its workforce diversity, removing the fixed retirement age and successfully employing large numbers of older staff. Until recently flexible working was a small feature of the company's diversity policy - in a sector where some forms of flexibility are necessary given long opening hours.

In 2006 B&Q re-launched their flexible working policy. According to Margarita McNee, HR Services Manager, *"The policy before this was largely in line with legislation and we wanted to enhance this benefit. There was clear divergence in the approach to flexible working across the 330 odd stores. We had examples of excellent practice but there was no uniformity."*

The re-launch attempted to make the business and personal benefits much clearer. *"We wanted to reduce absenteeism, help employees balance work/life commitments and crucially recruit and retain the best people. The re-launch brought this out into the open and ensured that all employees were aware of the opportunity to apply."*

As part of the re-launch B&Q wanted to reach all staff in the geographically diverse stores. They used a wide range of approaches – employee forums, manager and human resource forums, articles in the Talking Shop magazine, branded briefing packs and team briefings. They wanted to make sure that *"the policies became a reality and not just bits of paper."*

Now over 60% of B&Q staff work some form of flexibility and nearly half of these are men.

Leon Foster-Hill is Engagement and Diversity Advisor: *"We are able to review what is going on centrally. Stores can record any request for an alternative to their working pattern and monitor the outcome. However we also encourage informal flexibility as we are always trying to remove unnecessary processes. The skill is in not over imposing a burden on the stores so we try to keep things as simple as possible."*

There is now considerable anecdotal evidence that take up is increasing and there is a large number of case studies at all levels at B&Q. There has also been a drop in grievances from staff over the issue of flexibility.

In addition B&Q has been forward thinking in its maternity and adoption policies. In 2008 they also introduced childcare vouchers and instantly had significant take-up. Leon Foster-Hill sees these as symptomatic of the B&Q approach: *"We are proud of our maternity policy. It is market leading in the retail sector and our adoption policy mirrors this. Where a couple works for B&Q we allow the other partner to take some of the extended maternity/adoption leave."*

B&Q wants to be seen as a market leader in the way that it employs staff. It is a key part of the overall corporate social responsibility framework – One Planet Living. *"We are looking at a model of sustainable business growth. That means being concerned with the health and wellbeing of staff. It means improving our maternity returners rate. It means more flexibility and maintaining the levels of flexible working."*

Leon Foster-Hill is clear that business benefits will follow these newer developments to their diversity strategy: *"We want to recruit and then retain the most talented people. We know then that they will deliver the best customer service which will give us sustainable business growth. We are not shy about this."*

Supporting Statement

Organisation: B&Q

Approximate number of employees: 34,000

Sector: Retails

Brief description of nature of business: The UK's number one Home Improvement Retailer.

1. Why is your organisation a good place for parents to work today? We are looking for evidence (eg, maternity return rate, men working flexibly, extra support for carers, senior level diversity) as well as any programmes or initiatives which mark you out from your competitors.

We have a market leading, above statutory minimum, flexible working policy helping employees realise their aspirations outside work without having a detrimental impact on the business, customers and colleagues. All permanent employees, irrespective of service or caring responsibilities, have the right to request flexible working. Requests can be for an *ad hoc*, short term temporary or a permanent change to normal working arrangements.

Highlights of our scheme:

- Term Time Contracts: Available to parents **and** grandparents in recognition of the supportive caring role. Our term time contracts are available for those with children up to the age of 16 years (18 if the child is disabled)
- Job Share: For employees who don't want or are unable to work full time. An online job share register is available to help individuals find a job share partner.
- Staggered Start/Finish Times: Allowing for personal commitments/interests
- Parttime hours
- Split Shifts: Fits in with employees' personal commitments
- Dual Store Contracts: Allowing employees to work at more than one location.
- One Employee/Two roles: Allowing employees to develop new and different skills and really benefit from multi-skilling. It also allows people to work in more than one area of our business.
- Home/Remote Working: Allows employees to work from home or away from their normal workplace on an occasional basis.

We also offer three to 12 month career breaks, which can be taken for any reason.

Retail is a fast paced, constantly changing environment and we continue to review our flexible working offer to ensure that it is ahead of industry best practice.

We take the support of those with childcare responsibilities very seriously.

We offer childcare vouchers across the organisation despite the fact many of our employees do not qualify due to national minimum wage issues. With the assistance of Working Families, we have been able to signpost Working Families' Tax Credits information to ensure that as many of our employees as possible are receiving some assistance with their childcare costs.

We also have an innovative set of maternity, paternity & adoption policies which also go above statutory requirements.

- We enhance our maternity and paternity payments and our adoption policy exactly mirrors our maternity policy
- Where both parents are employed by B&Q, we allow the other partner to take some of the extended maternity leave, not just the mother
- After consultation with our employees on what they would prefer, we give lieu time for employees who take up the option of attending keep in touch days
- We give up to one week paid time off for IVF treatment
- We give up to one week paid compassionate or carers leave per year

These policies have facilitated:-

- A return from maternity rate in excess of 70% (still employed after 12 months)
- Over 60% of our workforce work a formal flexible working arrangement
- 47% of these are males
- Countless others have 'informal' flexible arrangements including 'working from home' / split shifts etc.
- Employees on term time contracts has increased by over 50% since its re-launch
- Childcare vouchers have been taken up by over 100 people in just three months
- Over 25% of our managers are female (in a traditionally male environment)
- B&Q has been one of the Top 50 places where Women Want to Work for three years
- B&Q has been awarded the Gallup Great Workplace Award for the last three years (one of only eight companies World Wide and the only UK company)

2. Please describe up to three milestones, changes or initiatives which helped the organisation become the great place for working parents that it is today.

2006 – Re-launched Flexible Working from a basic response to Government Legislation to a more aspirational and all encompassing scheme. This was done in consultation with employees, managers and the main board. We also launched our IVF and Respect for People policies. IVF policy gives up to one week of paid time off and Respect for People reinforced our diversity policy and the standards of behaviour that were expected from all employees and contractors at B&Q.

2007 – Re-launched our maternity, paternity and adoption policies. In response to the direction that the Government were heading in, we wanted to ensure that we were ahead of the game. We also launched an internal 'job-share register' making it easier for people to match up with someone else looking for a job-share partner.

2008 – Childcare vouchers launched. This had been a challenge for B&Q as many of our employees didn't qualify to join the scheme. With the help of Working Families we signposted the other childcare support available. We have saved our employees over £15,000 in just four months of the childcare voucher scheme.

3. What was the driving force behind these initiative(s)? This might have been, for example, a particular business challenge, internal or external; leadership shown by an individual; employee demand for change, etc.

B&Q has an enviable reputation for employing people from diverse backgrounds and we lead the retail industry with our diversity policies. We are a responsible employer for everyone, irrespective of their background and family-friendly policies are a vital part of this work. Over the last few years we have increased our focus in this area.

4. How do you think that your initiative(s) or practice, past or current, have influenced other employers?

We are members of many employers' forums including 'Opportunity Now' which looks at gender equality, the Employers Forum on Age and, of course, Working Families. We have always been happy to share the work we have done and have published many articles and spoken at various conferences etc. about our work in this area.

We have also been nominated for two awards in the last year (Opportunity Now and EFA) specifically around our flexible working policy.