



## Britannia Building Society

The Britannia Building Society (BBS) is a group of businesses providing financial services. Most of the 4,700 staff are based in two customer support centres in Leek and Bristol and in the 233 branches across the UK. 70% of the staff are women.

The work-life balance policy was originally introduced in the 1990s. In 2003 the new chief executive introduced a new corporate strategy with a focus on five organisational values around the needs of the customer and personal responsibility.

In 2003 the Viewpoint staff survey found that 52% of employees were unhappy with their work-life balance. The results were clear. People liked working at BBS but there were a range of reasons for the high level of dissatisfaction. They didn't know what was on offer, they felt managers didn't understand their needs, they thought the arrangements were just for parents and there was a lack of senior role models. This was significant and it became a key priority in the new strategy.

Sarah Emery is Group Diversity Manager: *"In the past we would write a policy statement, tell line managers about this and hope that they would inform the staff. But following the Viewpoint survey we adopted different strategies. We knew that communication was key. We also knew that we needed to use those people who were dissatisfied with the work-life balance to design the new policy."*

The BBS also launched the new policy at director level first. They were asked to identify how they could use the policy themselves. These then became case studies. *"Some business leaders opted for compressed hours. Two worked part time. This was a very strong message to take to the business."*

As a result many people took up flexible working straight away and the number of requests grew. BBS have found that this has had a beneficial impact on team working and respect for colleagues.

*"We try everything we can to accommodate a person's request for flexibility. What we are now finding is that there are more conversations in the business about what is important to people while recognising what is important to others in the team. People are now having compromise conversations with their team and manager before they submit their application."*

Flexible working is more difficult to manage in the branch network where staffing levels are low. One person's request for compressed hours may involve not working on Fridays. This can have a major impact on the rest of the team.

*"One current challenge is balancing the needs of the individual with the needs of the business. This is particularly true in the branch network where some branches only have three or four staff. BBS have introduced 'compromise conversations' where staff and managers are asked to focus on the business need, customer footfall and the impact on colleagues."*

Now 50% of BBS staff work a formal flexible option as part of the Mutual Preferences programme. Many others work flexibly on an *ad hoc* and informal basis. Britannia also offers a flexible reward programme, childcare vouchers and has LifeWorks, an employee assistance programme.

Satisfaction with work-life balance has also changed considerably. The current Viewpoint survey suggests this has risen from 52 to 92%. This is good news for BBS. *"There is a strong correlation between our business growth over recent years and the happiness and engagement of staff. Work-life balance is a crucial part of engagement."*

## Supporting Statement

**Organisation:** Britannia Building Society

**Approximate number of employees:** 4,700

**Sector:** Financial Services

**Brief description of nature of business:** Britannia Building Society is the second largest building society in the UK providing mortgages, savings, loans, insurance and investment products to our customers. At Britannia, we're proud of the fact that, as a mutual, we have no shareholders, so not only do our members always come first but they also receive an annual share of our profits.

**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.**

- Our flexible working programme, Mutual Preferences, is available to all employees for any reason. 50% of our employees have a formal flexible working arrangement (12% of male employees and 41% of female employees) with many more people having informal arrangements agreed with their managers.
- Flexible working is found at all levels of the organisation. 11% of our senior management team have a formal flexible working arrangement in place.
- 27% of our senior management team are women and 20% of these women have formal flexible working arrangements in place.
- We have an employee assistance programme which provides 24 hour free information and support service to help our employees and their families to make their hectic lives easier. 58% of our employees have accessed this service over the last year.
- 89% of all our employees tell us that they are satisfied with their work-life balance
- We offer a full maternity/adoption leave package which not only provides support packs and a buddy throughout the leave period but also offers keep in touch days for employees who want to be kept in the loop.
- Around 390 employees volunteer for our financial education programmes; Number Partners and Fit 4 Finance in schools. Many of our volunteers with children feel that it enhances their parenting skills.
- Our flexible reward programme, Mutual Benefits, offers holiday trading and childcare vouchers which many parents find helpful. 198 of our employees bought childcare vouchers in 2008 and 5,849 hours of additional holiday were purchased too.
- We offer gender specific development programmes to non-management women and men that encourage self development and address issues from both work and home lives. To date 200 women have accessed our Springboard programme and 41 men have accessed our Navigator programme.

**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.**

**1. The launch of our 'LifeWorks' employee assistance programme:**

Lifeworks is a free and confidential service available to Britannia employees and their family over the telephone and online to help with everyday life issues ranging from debt management to divorce.

We run monthly promotions on certain topics throughout the year with the most popular promotions being:

- Annual summer childcare - This promotion provides our employees with a wall chart of events over the summer in their local area, a childcare locator facility and tips on holiday related topics such as safety in the sun.
- Childcare locator tool - this online tool allows our employees to search for childcare in their local area detailing costs, availability and specialist services
- Eldercare - this promotion provides information on finding suitable eldercare facilities for relatives and gives hints and tips on what to look for when it comes to getting the best from care services.
- Back to school - this promotion provides resources and material on toddlers, school age and

teenagers and how to adapt your parenting skills as children get older. It also includes information on lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender single parenting.

- 58% of our employees have accessed this service over the last year.

## **2. The launch of our flexible working programme - Mutual Preferences:**

Britannia's Mutual Preferences programme is a framework of flexible working arrangements aimed at anyone who wants to achieve a better work-life balance. The programme provides a range of options such as job-sharing, part-time work, flexible hours, compressed working weeks, annualised hours, home working, family leave, short term leave and employment breaks.

The reasons for choosing to work flexibly have varied from caring responsibilities and outside hobbies right through to those who wish to enjoy the benefits of flexible retirement.

It's not just the working arrangements that make our scheme stand out. We offer a package of support for flexible working which includes a case study booklet to help our people understand the full range of possibilities available to them, a range of family friendly policies and an employee assistance programme to help deal with life's issues.

- 91.21% of our people are happy with work-life balance policies (91.99% female)
- Around 50% of our employees have a formal flexible working arrangement (12% of male employees and 41% of female employees)

## **3. The launch of our flexible benefits scheme – Mutual Benefits:**

Mutual Benefits offers our employees the opportunity to match benefits to their individual needs. We recognise that everyone is different and one size doesn't fit all, so Mutual Benefits allows people to tailor their reward to meet their needs and the needs of their families.

Under this scheme, people can choose to exchange some of their salary for extra benefits or some of their existing benefits for extra salary. The benefits complement people's wellbeing and lifestyles and include things such as holiday trading, childcare vouchers, healthcare cash plans, dental insurance, private medical insurance, bicycle purchases, carbon offsetting and discounted retail vouchers.

- Around 25% of our employees chose to flex their benefits in 2008.

**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.**

Mutual Preferences – In 2003 our employee satisfaction survey revealed that 50% of staff felt that they had not got the right work-life balance. Further research showed that employees did not know what flexible working arrangements were available whilst others believed that managers did not understand their needs or were too inflexible to help. Some employees thought that if they did not have children then they could not work flexibly.

Mutual benefits – In 2005 we identified an opportunity to enable our employees more choice and flexibility in the benefits that they could receive as an employee. We knew that this would contribute to increased satisfaction levels in our employees and would help us to become an employer of choice.

LifeWorks – In 2003 we identified an opportunity to support our employees with their work-life balance by providing an employee support service that covered a wide variety of personal and home issues rather than just work related ones.

All of these initiatives are underpinned by one of the givens within our corporate strategy; 'being a great place to work, grow and develop'.

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

- In 2008 we were named as number two in the Sunday Times' Best Big Companies to work for in the UK - when asked 'what makes Britannia a great place to work?' work-life balance was in the top three factors named by employees.
- We have been named by the Government as an exemplar employer for our approach to flexible working and the impact that it has had.
- In 2007 we won the 'Opportunity Now Private Sector Award 2007' for our approach to flexible working and shared our policies with many Opportunity Now members as a result.
- We have shared our best practice through many presentations at events run by organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the BBC, Opportunity Now, the Labour Party conference, the Conservative Party conference and the Liberal Democrats' conference and many more.
- We also provide case studies and articles for research publications, websites and magazines to help share our best practice.