



Halcrow

Halcrow specialises in the provision of planning, design and management services for infrastructure development worldwide. The company is a leading consultancy in all of its core sectors – water, environment, transportation, maritime, business consultancy, planning and property. Halcrow has over 8,000 employees and operates from a global network of over 90 offices. As a values-driven company, delivering exceptional experiences to both clients and employees, its purpose is to sustain and improve the quality of people's lives.

Mandy Clarke is Halcrow's group human resources director: *"Our ethos is very strong and has been part of Halcrow for a long time. We live our purpose; it is our bread and butter and is very tangible. We are clear about how we conduct ourselves. In crises such as bereavement, for instance, the company is very supportive. It is at times like these that employees really see how good the company is and value our approach."*

Halcrow stands out in the construction and built environment sector in part because of its strong ethos. This can have benefits when bidding for contracts. *"We don't always provide the highest salaries but we offer much more – a better quality of life. We know this from our staff council, from the staff survey and from those joining from other companies. We are aware that we have influenced other companies when developing their flexible working and benefits packages."*

Halcrow's staff council ensures that employees' needs are heard and can play a big role in influencing the senior management team. Staff council chair Joanne McDonagh said: *"I am proud to work for a company like this, as it recognises that employees have lives outside the office and in order for productivity to remain at a high level, and to retain staff to grow experience, then the company needs to be flexible where necessary"*.

The company recognised the benefits of flex time in the early nineties. This flexible working time arrangement enables staff to have some control over their work/life balance. This applies to everyone in the company, no matter their status or position. The company ethos which is to act with integrity and be open and honest ensures that the system works well. *"Our people sometimes work long hours. Flex time is a formal acknowledgement that people can take hours back to help them meet their obligations."*

In addition, staff are able to request different types of flexible working to fit their need, with eight per cent of UK employees working part-time hours. Others have negotiated to work from home: *"Any of our staff can request to change their working hours. What matters to us is that they are able to manage this. We trust them to do that."*

Some of those working part-time work in managerial positions: *"We have many people, including senior men and women who work part-time. This is unusual in the industry. We even have project managers who work part time, we focus on their output and the quality of their work not the time done."*

One key driver for Halcrow's policy has been the desire to recruit and retain women employees, with a third of staff being female. This is a high percentage for a company operating in the construction and built environment sector. Halcrow has many senior female role models who can help women within Halcrow aspire to reach for the top. It offers the same terms and conditions to all staff; has enhanced maternity leave and pay and provides flex time to all its employees.

Like many companies Halcrow is reviewing staffing levels in 2009. This will be managed through consultation and handled with respect. *"It is important for us to be recognised for our positive attitude and supportive environment. There aren't many examples of this in our industry which represents 10% of GDP. We will remain true to our values and live our purpose. We will thrive through the recession as the war for talent and the competition for good people will continue to remain a problem. What we provide must make us stand out giving us competitive advantage. It would be great to be recognised and applauded for our efforts, showcased and hopefully encourage others to see the positive benefits of what we have done."*

Supporting Statement

Organisation: Halcrow Group Limited

Approximate number of employees: 8,500 Globally

Sector: Engineering/Professional Services

Brief description of nature of business: Halcrow Group Limited is a professional services engineering consultancy specialising in the provision of planning, design and management services for infrastructure development worldwide. Halcrow employs 8,500 employees in more than 70 locations around the world.

1. Why is your organisation a good place for parents to work today? We are looking for evidence (e.g., 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.

Halcrow recognises the importance of a good work life balance for all its employees and has put in place many incentives and policies to help people strike the right balance for them.

Our approach means that by offering a flex time system to all our staff, they are able to work in a way that fits in with their life-styles and family commitments. We allow employees to adjust their working times to suit their home and family responsibilities.

Halcrow has an enhanced maternity scheme and along with our supportive culture has proved successful with a maternity return rate of 99%. The enhancement pays the difference between full standard salary and the statutory maternity pay.

To further help employees with young families, Halcrow offers vouchers within its 'choices' flexible benefits package which can be used towards the payment of childcare.

We currently have 8% of our UK employees opting to work on a part-time basis, 60% women and 40% per cent are men. We offer employees the ability to work from home which enables staff to reduce their commute and to facilitate more effective working.

For those wishing to take a break from working to concentrate on other areas of their life, Halcrow provides sabbaticals.

For working women, they can be assured that at Halcrow their career is taken seriously. The proportion of senior women in the company is increasing all the time. Currently women fill 5% of our senior leadership roles compared to less than 1% five years ago.

All these approaches underpin Halcrow's purpose to 'sustain and improve the quality of people's lives'.

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.

Flexible working

Halcrow formally introduced flex time working approximately 20 years ago, putting them ahead of its competitors. Flextime has core hours of work allowing employees to vary their working day to meet home or care commitments, such as taking children to school or visiting sick relatives.

Halcrow's employees are treated with respect and dignity, echoing the organisation's values and flextime is valued by all employees.

Statistics:

8% of our employees work part-time (60% are women, 40% are men)

100% of employees are able to utilise flextime.

Choices

In 2003, Halcrow introduced its flexible benefits package known as 'choices'.

The flexible benefits are open to all staff and the benefits which particularly help working parents are:

1. Medical cover – extending private medical cover to partners and dependents
2. Holiday – staff can purchase up to six extra days' holiday, utilising salary sacrifice
3. Childcare vouchers – employees can buy vouchers to put towards the payment of childcare, this is also through salary sacrifice.
4. Cash Plan – this plan offers 16 benefits that provide money back for health care costs, such as 100% back on dental and optical costs; or support in relation to personal issues e.g. 24 hour help lines for stress counselling, medicals, legal etc.

Approximately 40% of UK employees use choices.

Female empowerment

In 2002 Mandy Clarke joined Halcrow as group human resources director and has acted as a role model for other women in the company who aspire to reach senior positions, or are working mums.

Mandy is seen as a positive role model due to her own success of balancing her career and family commitments in a position which often requires travel and time away from home. She mentors several female engineers and has been a leading advocate on flexible working in Halcrow and in the industry.

Since Mandy's appointment the percentage of women in senior roles has risen from less than 1% to 5%, and is continuing to increase. Currently a third of Halcrow's workforce is female compared to the industry average of less than 9%.

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.

Halcrow's purpose of 'sustaining and improving the quality of people's lives' is the driving force behind these initiatives. It is important to us that we enable our employees to achieve their full potential and to work in an open, honest and supportive environment.

The war for talent has meant that Halcrow must be in tune with the needs and desires of our employees and potential recruits. Our ethos, culture and flexible approach helps us stand out from the crowd in attaining and retaining employees.

We know that there is no certainty that our intellectual capital, our employees, will remain with the company, however the way that we treat people, live our values and the flexibility we provide can help us in keeping our employees and providing them with satisfying and rewarding careers. Satisfied employees mean satisfied clients!

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

Our competitors in the built environment industry are aware that our policy is successful and that they need to match our practices if they are to be a contender in the war for talent. We know many of our competitors have copied our flexible working and our 'choices' benefits.

The benefits we provide and the enhancements on statutory payments e.g. maternity leave helps set us apart and our competitors are beginning to realise. Other companies have seen that they have to be more considerate to employees with families or caring commitments.

The changes made to Halcrow since Mandy Clarke arrived in 2002 have been noticed by people in the industry and human resources experts. People seek out Mandy's view on current issues like diversity and she is often a speaker at human resources events and industry conferences.

We know from what our employees tell us that we are on the right path in looking after our staff. This is further acknowledged by the fact that our competitors benchmark themselves against us.