



National Grid

National Grid is a regulated engineering business with a largely male workforce. Catherine Hamilton is Inclusion and Diversity Manager: *"We grow our own staff. We have lots of training schemes and we work with other similar engineering companies to develop the skills base. We have a low turnover of staff and in the past working at the National Grid was seen as 'a job for life'."*

The workforce at National Grid was and remains largely full time. Until 2003 part time work opportunities were only offered to women returning from maternity leave.

Change started in 2003 with the introduction of flexibility for all. This enabled any employee to present a case for flexible working. Other supports to working parents followed - paternity leave, a carers' network, childcare vouchers and parents@work, a one stop shop for advice and information. *"We are trying to be a much more exciting place to work. We are investing massively in the utility industries and actively looking at the green agenda."*

These changes were triggered by several factors. National Grid is drawing from a changed recruitment pool. *"Young people's expectations of a career for life have changed and engineering companies like ours have to become more attractive to potential employees."* In addition National Grid is now recruiting more women who are working in areas that were traditionally male dominated.

In 2007 National Grid acquired a large USA business and overnight became a global operation. For both parts of the business to work effectively many employees had to work more flexible hours – later in the UK and earlier in the USA – to ensure contact and good working relations. At the same time the company started reducing the number of sites to help control costs and improve effectiveness. *"With all these changes we wanted to find new ways of managing flexibility in the most effective way."*

In 2003 National Grid introduced a green travel policy for the 1,800 staff at the headquarters. They required 40 % of the staff to travel to work by coach, car share or use public transport. This led to changes in time management and array of new flexible work options. *"There was resistance initially as people had to travel at set times and actually had less flexibility. But there have been huge benefits. People have become better time managers and feel less guilty. It has meant that many staff have opted to work at home and have set up home offices and the whole site is more aware of the need for a flexible approach to work."*

The Hinckley call centre reflects well how flexibility has been endorsed in parts of National Grid. There are 350 people employed here working 90 different work options – part time, term time, split shifts and late shifts. Crucially they are doing this for a wide range of reasons from caring responsibilities, to attend religious events and for educational, travel and sports pursuits. *"All these have been accommodated in a service with daily peaks and troughs in activity which needs to be responsive to customer needs. Flexibility has really thrived there. We have open minded managers who have asked the question 'why can't we do things differently'."*

The flexible working options are now part of a wider strategy to make National Grid a more inclusive environment. *"We are on a journey that will involve changing behaviour. We are looking for a much more inclusive and supportive environment where all employees have the opportunity to develop and are able to strike the right work life balance. I think the state of the external economy will help us even more. Using technological enablers will help us keep our skills base and recruit more diversity into our engineering schemes. They may all want more flexibility in the future."*

Supporting Statement

Organisation: National Grid plc

Approximate number of employees: 10,000 UK (and 17,000 US)

Sector: Energy and Utility

Brief description of nature of business: National Grid owns the high-voltage electricity transmission network in England and Wales and operates the system across Great Britain. It also owns and operates the high pressure gas transmission system in Britain and its distribution business delivers gas to 11 million homes and businesses. We are a regulated engineering business made up of a 77% male workforce, with an overall average age of 47.

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.

- Flexible working is available to all employees and based on all requests being supported unless operational justification is provided by the line manager. The policy is supported by user friendly guidelines and case studies to market a greater awareness beyond caring responsibilities. In addition to formal arrangements many informal requests are supported that have no bearing on terms and conditions.
- Helen Mahy the Group General Counsel and our inclusion and diversity sponsor and flexibility champion encourages her own global team to work flexibly and also advocates this with the executive team. "National Grid's approach to flexibility has helped my development greatly".
- For employees with responsibilities outside the workplace, our family provisions policy supports continued skill development and career progression. These include extended career breaks, sabbaticals and childcare breaks.
- Each employee taking a childcare break (seven weeks) can receive the National Grid childcare allowance (£45 per week per child). Almost 100% of women on maternity take the break during the SMP period and 22 men are in receipt of the allowance.
- In addition childcare vouchers are available via the Flexible Benefits scheme, and are taken up by 5.7% of our staff.
- Fathers benefit from two weeks paternity leave with maternity and adoptive parents having up to 52 weeks leave.
- Absent employees are kept up to speed with business developments via our "Keeping you Posted" scheme.
- Despite a return rate of 98% for maternity returnees, research into ways of further improving their experience has led to additional initiatives - management training; processes have been revised and aligned with national best practice and returnees are included in the induction process.
- We offer a phased return to work, taking excess holiday build up for the first few months on return and can mean up to an additional 33 days.
- We have an emergency leave scheme: staff can take time off to cover for childcare, make new arrangements, or for carers to attend medical appointments. Our policy is more generous than required by law with a slightly broader definition of dependants – e.g. we include elderly neighbours that rely upon assistance from our employees. We would expect managers to use their discretion in most cases to allow for paid time off.

- We are planning to launch a carers' network as part of our established disability confident network, to provide support to employees who care for someone who has a disability/illness whether permanent or temporary.
- We are particularly proud of our advisory and support group parents@work run by parents providing a one stop shop for advice and information about managing the work-life balance from a family perspective, including case studies and a buddy network to enable sharing of experiences for mothers, fathers and managers. Events on work-life balance, parenting and fathers are provided. Responding to the needs of this growing population, parents@work will re-launch in line with its first anniversary as 'Families@Work', providing information and support on family-related challenges which affect our working lives.
- We offer career development support and mentoring through various channels including women only, those with or caring for others with a disability, new starters and our ethnic minority employees.
- Women make up 24.8% of our entry grades, and 35.6% of all promotions: both against a backdrop of 23.4% female employees.

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.

- Parents@work, established April 2008 following three women attending a women only course. They identified an inconsistency in how women were treated during and following their maternity leave. As well as reviewing our family friendly policies, the group undertook external benchmarking and as a result recommended that a portal of information be established to complement our policies with practical support. The aim is to make parenting a gender neutral issue, empower employees through the provision of information and support and aid consistent application by managers through training and support.
- Flexible working for all has been available since 2003. Our intranet has a flexible working section which guides employees and managers through the process. HR offers face-to-face workshops for managers to guide managers on the benefits and how to support the range of flexible working options. "The flexibility and management support available is a key factor for my continued desire to work for National Grid" (female senior manager). In our call centres there are over 90 different work patterns to accommodate religious requirements, caring responsibilities, educational, sports pursuits and travel issues.
- To a work-life balance question in the 2008 Employee survey, 73% of females and 70% males believe that their immediate manager or supervisor supports them in balancing work and personal life issues. We analyse our employee survey by those identifying as working reduced hours and this group are more positive across the range of questions.
- Role models – Women in Networks (WiN) have promoted flexible working at all levels for some time. Confidence to ask for a different way of working and more women at senior levels working flexibly has moved managers to think differently. We collected a range of personal stories featuring senior managers and how flexible working has supported and enabled their career development. The stories are featured on our advertising pages for Where Women Want to Work, to ensure that role models are visible and our commitment is demonstrable. The case studies collected on the parents@work site include men working flexibly.
- 9% of all employees work formal flexible contracts, within this men make up 8% and over 11% are managers. Of the 92% female flexible workers, 14% are managers.

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.

1. Employee survey results and feedback from the I&D training for all managers, revealed that managing flexible working was not seen as comfortable and perception was of someone not pulling their weight if not "present".

2. Becoming a global organisation has created more acceptance for all types of flexible working to meet business demands. Technology is provided to support the majority of staff such as laptops, broadband, blackberries and mobiles and 'hot-desking' across the sites. Technology and communication enablers provide the positive support for everyone to still reach their potential and feel involved and engaged even while out of the office.

The new green travel policy particularly impacted our HQ in 2003 with 20% of the 1,800 managers and staff travelling to work by coach, car share or public transport and therefore time management and a variety of different work patterns were adopted. This has provided the opportunity for others to then seek to work different hours.

3. Our CE had dinner with 20 female managers (January 08) and heard about the inconsistencies of returning to work and how this could be managed better. His commitment and public support to the female agenda and the parents@work project made a difference amongst the senior leadership.

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

- We have achieved The Times Top 50 where to work for the last three years since the award commenced. We are the only energy utility to have done this. This has created publicity and interest from other employers as did winning Working Families' award in 2007.

- We work closely with other utilities in attracting a wide diversity of potential employees to engineering careers. We know that our policies and benefits are above the benchmark and others come to us for guidance and advice.