



## Nationwide Building Society

Nationwide is the biggest building society in the world and by far the largest in UK. It provides financial services particularly mortgages, savings and current accounts in around 1,000 retail outlets, where approximately half of all staff are employed. The majority of the remaining employees are spread across the headquarters in Swindon and in the administration centres in Northampton and Bournemouth.

Nationwide is a mutual business and its values are crucial to the way the business operates. Jo Taylor is an Employee Relations Consultant: *"Our values cascade throughout the organisation and permeate everything we do. Behaviour is important to us. Treating our employees fairly is crucial to the success of the organisation."*

Nationwide first introduced a flexible benefits package in 1997. Now about a third of employees work less than 35 hours a week. Over 600 employees work on an annualised basis which is particularly successful where there are clear peaks and troughs of activity. In addition they have a range of leave policies which enable employees to take breaks from work and still be guaranteed their job on return. Long service is not unusual and is celebrated at the Nationwide. *"Since 1997 we have had good employment policies which enhance existing legislation. We listen to our employees and try to incorporate what they want into what we do. Over this time our competitors in the banking industry have grown and we have had to compete to be in a good position to recruit and retain the best people."*

The policy was overhauled in 2002 and again in 2007. *"In 2002 we saw what was happening in the real world. Our customers wanted different opening hours and access to services. This provided the opportunity to review all our flexible working policies."*

Further changes to the flexible working policy followed in the 2007 review. One of the changes concerned homeworking. Nationwide was aware that the process to request working at home was very long winded and put many people off. By working with the union and the other stakeholders they redesigned the process and made applications easier. Now nearly 200 people work at home.

Nationwide's work-life balance policies are under constant review. They work with Nationwide Group Staff Union, and use other methods of gaining feedback. The annual staff satisfaction survey has a particularly high response rate. *"We have to be ahead of the game but always keep costs under control to ensure that we remain competitive. We need to keep our family policies at the top of the scale."*

One review by an external agency found that people were generally happy with their work-life balance and that there were no serious barriers to working flexibly. But they did find that there were problems with consistency across the Society. *"We need to ensure that managers understand the business reasons for our policies and to ensure that these are applied consistently. We don't want our employees to feel aggrieved. Where we do identify difficulties we carry out further investigations and nip them in the bud."*

In the next year Nationwide will monitor changes in legislation on both maternity and paternity leave. *"We will continue to make sure that the issue of diversity and equality does not get lost. We will review our family friendly policies and take on the views of our employees. We want to ensure that our employees remain engaged with this and that our policies remain pitched at the right level."*

## Supporting Statement

**Organisation:** Nationwide Building Society

**Approximate number of employees:** We have around 19,000 employees – these are situated at our head office in Swindon, throughout our wide branch network and main administration centres at Northampton and Bournemouth.

**Sector:** Financial Services

**Brief description of nature of business:** Nationwide has a unique place in the financial services sector – the scale and reach of banks with the traditional values of a building society – honest, open and trustworthy. We offer a range of products including mortgages and savings, current accounts, insurance and investments.

**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.**

We are pleased to offer an array of enhanced family friendly policies and incentives that in many circumstances extend much further than legislation. A summary of these is outlined below:

- **Maternity Policy** - allows employees with more than 26 weeks service to receive ten weeks full pay followed by 29 weeks statutory maternity pay. If the employee hasn't reached 26 weeks service, they receive two weeks full pay and maternity allowance thereafter. Employees with service of 26 weeks or more are entitled to a £200 bonus upon return to work. The right to request flexible working is also available to the returnee, as is the option of a phased return to work pattern throughout the first four weeks. Nationwide employees are also entitled to 10 'Keeping in Touch' days for which they receive their normal rate of pay.
- **Adoption and Long-term Fostering policy** – this mirrors all the maternity benefits outlined above.
- **Paternity Leave** – partners are entitled to two weeks full pay upon the birth or placement of their child, and are allowed time off to attend antenatal and medical appointments with their partner.
- Nationwide also offer a reasonable amount of paid fertility leave and allow employees to use part of their annual leave entitlement in order to act as a birth partner.
- **Carers' Leave Policy** - further to annual holiday entitlement, employees are entitled to an additional 13 weeks unpaid leave.
- In the event of a domestic emergency, employees are entitled to one day's paid leave to help resolve the problem. For compassionate circumstances, employees have the opportunity (upon agreement with their manager) to take a reasonable amount of time off.
- If an employee has worked with us for at least one year they are entitled to apply for an Employment Break; this can be a period of at least one year or a maximum of five years.
- **Short Break** – entitlement to a period of one to six months unpaid leave, with guarantee of returning to their current job role.
- An enhanced Flexible Working Policy, allowing all employees to request an alternative working arrangement. We provide a variety of flexible working arrangements such as job share, part time/reduced hours, shift working, annualised hours, homeworking and term time contracts.
- The option to purchase childcare vouchers through our flexible benefits scheme, 'YouChoose', and use the salary sacrifice option to make the most of non-taxable benefits.

- 'Bring your Child to Work' week, which is the opportunity for employees to bring their child/children into work for one day to undertake some work experience and understand the diverse range of career opportunities available at Nationwide.
- We also offer a 24 hour helpline titled, 'EmployeeCare' which is a confidential and free counselling, personal, legal and debt guidance service for all employees.

All the policies and benefits outlined above are located within our staff Intranet; we have a 'Parents at Nationwide' site covering advice on choosing childcare, details of any discounts available and a section for queries. Furthermore, we have an online and paper copy of the 'Becoming a Parent Guide' which employees can check their entitlements and refer to for advice regarding their pregnancy or expected placement of a child.

#### Supporting Statistics\*

- We have around 19,000 employees, 70% are female and 30% are male.
- During 2008, 624 women took maternity leave. 22% of these had at least 10 year's service and 93% had over one year's service. 529 of these have returned to work, 67% on a part time basis.
- Nationwide has 183 homeworkers, 56% are male; 32% are aged 50 and over; and 13% work less than 35 hours.
- 660 employees (4%) work on an annualised hours basis, both male and female in various job levels.
- 100 employees job share, of which all are female at various job levels.
- 107 employees work term time and are all female; 87% work in job level 1 and 13% work at job level 2.
- 560 employees have purchased childcare vouchers via our flexible benefits scheme – approximately 3% of the workforce.

(\*all figures as at 31st December 2008 unless otherwise stated)

## **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.**

1997

'YouChoose', our flexible benefits scheme was established in 1997. It is designed for employees to make the most of their salary by purchasing voluntary benefits that are suited to their individual needs. There are a number of family friendly options including childcare vouchers, private health cover, discounted holidays and dentist plans. Nationwide employees can select as many childcare vouchers as they wish; not only do they benefit from the tax and NIC exemption on the first £243 per month, they also receive a 5% discount on the entire amount selected.

2002

In July 2002, improvements were made to our work-life balance policies, making them among the best offered in the sector. Changes to the maternity policy meant eligible employees received either two or ten weeks full pay depending on their entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay. Ordinary Maternity Leave was increased from 18 to 26 weeks, and Additional Maternity Leave from 40 to 52 weeks. Additionally, returnees had the right to request flexible working, incorporating a phased working pattern for the first month back at work.

These same improvements were also incorporated into the adoption and long-term fostering policy.

Paternity leave entitlement was increased to two weeks at full pay and the carers' leave policy introduced, enabling individuals with caring responsibilities to take up to 13 weeks unpaid leave.

Guidelines on bereavement leave were revised, ensuring that managers had the flexibility to grant additional leave depending on individual circumstances. Similarly, time off for fertility treatment and booking annual leave to act as a birth partner was also introduced.

2007

In April 2007 our flexible working policy was updated, making the application process easier and more efficient for employees wishing to apply to become either formal or informal homeworkers. At the same time our flexible working intranet site was updated with further information, advice and guidance for employees and 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.**

Firstly, customer demand for business functions which operate outside of the 9-5 norm. By offering a range of flexible working arrangements we are not only helping employees balance their work and home life, but it allows us to provide a customer service that meets the requirements of our business functions, which often operate outside conventional working hours.

On an employee level, Nationwide is able to maintain staff and retain skills and knowledge that may be lost due to personal circumstances. We promote working arrangements that 'fit in' with family and individual commitments, resulting in increased motivation and loyalty to the organisation.

We have found that promoting the organisation as a 'family friendly employer' is an advantageous recruitment tool. By having such policies and incentives in place we are widening the talent pool as candidates are applying knowing that their personal and/or family commitments can most likely be accommodated.

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

We believe our work-life balance policies, which have predominantly advanced in their offering over time, have influenced other employers by being some of the best in the sector. For example, our enhanced flexible working policy has always been available to all employees and is not restricted to individuals with caring responsibilities as with UK legislation.

In addition, we often receive requests from other employers to share policies and practice as part of benchmarking and research activities.

By becoming a founder member of the 'Employers Forum on Work Life Balance' in March 2000 we have encouraged other organisations to incorporate and benefit from a business case for work-life balance into their overall organisational strategy.