



## National Health Service

Work-life balance in the NHS has many facets. The sheer size of the NHS (the largest employer in Europe) means that its employment policies and practices are influential to employers outside the health service. Family-friendly working in the NHS has links with targeted campaigns to get medically trained women (particularly nurses and midwives) back into roles they had left, often when they started a family. Recruitment and retention were therefore some of the drivers for a family-friendly approach in the NHS. The Improving Working Lives framework was developed to help NHS Trusts make improvements in the lives of NHS employees. All trusts had to attain this standard, meaning that terms and conditions across the NHS are broadly similar. As a result, flexible working is now well established in the NHS, and some types of flexible working, such as team-based self rostering, were established here. Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust was chosen as a Top Employer as it has implemented policies common across the NHS, and has done so with flair and innovation.

Work-life balance has developed in a significant way since 1999-2000. As Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust note: "...there is a constant drive to support staff when considering their work and family commitments." Work-life balance options include flexible working patterns (part-time work, annualised hours contracts, flexi-time etc), an innovative flexible retirement scheme helping staff 'ease down' into retirement, and also childcare support (a voucher scheme, on-site nurseries, holiday playschemes and emergency childminders). In addition there is recognition that families aren't just about children. The Trust estimates that one in seven of its workforce is a carer who needs to balance their caring with their job. A Special/Carer Leave policy is in place, supported by a "Carer Guide" which explains the options available. Support that staff can access includes hospital drop-ins, carer pamper days, free training and advice.

The success of integrating a family-friendly approach is demonstrated by statistics collected by the Trust. They estimate that almost half their workforce works a reduced hours arrangement, and 95% of requests to work flexibly are approved. Flexible working is not limited by grade or seniority – there are examples of flexible working at Director level.

Embedding flexible working in the NHS may be helped by devising specific events to respond to staff interests and demonstrate the availability and benefits of family-friendly working. The approach at Worcester has been to focus on holding Maternity and Paternity sessions, where parents can go to find out what is available for them before and after birth. Information given includes maternity and paternity pay, flexible working options and nursery and childcare options. The trust has also focussed on wellbeing, and has introduced Mind, Body and Soul days where staff are able to access health checks like blood pressure tests and general fitness and health testing.

In terms of a business case for family friendly working, links can be made from work-life initiatives to improved performance. In the experience of Worcester: "Healthy staff will promote healthy living when doing their day to day work, but not in an overbearing manner. This means patients are well cared for. There is a direct correlation." This is the win-win situation which can be the 'golden key' for unlocking family-friendly working within an organisation – where work-life integration measures positively affect the performance of the business.

## Exemplar NHS Organisation Supporting Statement

**Organisation:** Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

**Approximate number of employees:** 5,575

**Sector:** Public

**Brief description of nature of business:** Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust provides hospital-based services from three main sites, the Alexandra at Redditch, Kidderminster and Worcestershire Royal Hospital at Worcester.

We provide a wide range of services to a population of around 550,000 people in Worcestershire as well as caring for patients from surrounding counties and further afield. The number of patients cared for each year is over 95,000 planned and emergency operations, more than 130,000 A&E attendances and around 500,000 outpatient appointments.

**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.**

### Flexible Working

At Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, which employs 5,575 staff on three hospital sites in Worcester, Redditch and Kidderminster, there is a constant drive to support staff when considering their work and family commitments.

Flexible options in place have proved to be very successful with 41% of staff agreeing through the staff survey that the Trust help them find a good worklife balance with 60% of staff agreeing that that can approach their immediate manager to talk about flexible working. 49.7% of staff work a part time arrangement and when considering staff and their commitments 95% of flexible working requests are granted.

All levels of staff within the Trust access flexible working including Deputy Directors, working part time arrangements. Members of the finance team are also working a nine day fortnight.

### Craig Higgins, Senior Finance Manager

Craig has been working a nine day fortnight for the last 15 months.

He is able to continue his role from home using the IT infrastructure and communication devices provided by the Trust. Craig is also able to work flexibly from home during the school holidays.

### Flexible Retirement

The Trust employs 28% of staff between the ages of 41 and 50 and 24% of staff between 51 and 66+ and recognises the benefits of greater flexibility in the process of retirement, helping to make this phase in staff's lives more rewarding and enjoyable. This is an effective way of giving staff the opportunity to "ease down" into retirement compared with more conventional routes.

### Childcare and Caring

With a high percentage of staff (82%) within the Trust being female, the majority of caring for children and elderly relatives falls on their shoulders. These staff are also supported with costs relating to caring. Childcare support up to the age of 15 is available to all staff. Childcare vouchers are available and these can save parents up to £1,195 a year on childcare costs.

There are two hospital nurseries onsite each offering 50 childcare places. As childcare does not end at school age these nurseries are able to offer holiday playscheme places up to the age of eight years old. A range of holiday playscheme places are in place offering childcare for older children, these schemes also offer NHS staff discounts of up to 20%.

The Worcestershire Family Information team works in partnership with the Trust and offers a bank of childminders for staff to use when emergency childcare is needed. Staff in all roles regularly use this service when their usual childcare arrangements have broken down.

On average over 50 staff per month access childcare and caring support, information and advice through the Staff Support Co-ordinator.

### **Eldercare**

One in seven of staff within the Trust is a carer who needs to balance carer support with their working day. A Special/Carer Leave Policy is in place, in addition there is a “**Carer Guide**” for staff that explains what carer leave is available. Staff have accessed a range of support that includes: hospital drop-ins, carer pamper days, free training events that include bills to wills advice and free computer taster sessions, free winter warmer packs.

Staff can find out through their Staff Support Co-ordinator about how to access Carers Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Carers Direct Payments. The Trust is actively exploring accessing eldercare vouchers when available, this will further support our carers when needing to pay for care in the future.

## **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.**

### **Maternity and Paternity Information Sessions**

Over 220 staff have accessed these sessions that are available across all hospital sites. Fathers and mothers attend these sessions to help them to find out what is available to them before and after the birth and to help them be better prepared.

These sessions have proved useful and give peace of mind in knowing what financial support is in place including maternity and paternity pay and leave entitlements and flexible working options for when they return to work. Nursery information is also provided and discounted places are negotiated on the parents behalf through the Staff Support Co-ordinator.

### **Mind, Body and Soul Days**

Since 2007 these have been available to staff across the three hospital sites. They are organised so that staff can access health checks and information at a time to suit themselves.

In 2008 staff accessed **829** free sessions, offering a range of advice and checks that included BMI testing, blood pressure checks and general fitness and health testing.

Information also includes, no smoking advice, diabetes checks and stress management. In particular staff enjoyed healthy eating advice and tastings provided free by our onsite caterers, personal training plans devised especially for each member of staff and weight management advice is also available.

These have proved successful with staff returning this year with significant improvement in their health and wellbeing since their last health check at the 2007 sessions.

The programme for 2009 is planned.

## **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.**

There is a recognition that staff need access to up to date information when planning their family or reducing their income and hours of working. Staff need to be able to make these decisions to help them plan for the future.

From the maternity and paternity sessions, there has been positive feedback from managers, there is consistency of information with less confusion from staff since these sessions have been in place. These sessions are a one stop shop that offers information about their pay and leave, flexible working opportunities, how to apply for maternity leave, childcare vouchers, pensions advice, Keep in Touch (KIT) days and parental leave.

Staff are now much better informed and are able to make considered decisions about maternity leave and return to work providing a smooth transition from work to maternity leave and back to work. At any one time up to **118** staff can be on maternity leave (January 2008) which confirms the need to provide up to date, accurate information.

The Trust received external funding in 2006 to support staff further with work-life balance initiatives. When talking to staff and asking them about their health and wellbeing it became obvious that staff would consider accessing wellbeing initiatives if they were able to have these available in the workplace.

With this in mind, the funding kick started on site **Mind Body & Soul** days for all staff. These are held from 11.00am – 3.00pm at their hospital site, thus giving them opportunity to come along and spend some time accessing these sessions.

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

The Trust was nominated and was a runner up for the 2006 Working Families Employer Awards. This award was recognising the successful policies and practices around supporting staff with flexible retirement options and the positive take up of flexible working opportunities.

The Trust's approach was featured in the Equal Opportunities December 2007 Review "**Beyond Retirement- retaining older workers**" in the NHS and will be featured as a case study on the Department of Health's Equality and Diversity Good Practice database.

The Trust works in partnership with other local employers and has membership with the local employers' forum. The Trust has supported Worcestershire County Council with the implementation of their childcare voucher scheme and is currently working with the Worcestershire Primary Care Trust to offer **Mind, Body and Soul** days to staff working alongside community based Health Trainers.