

Employment Outcomes for Women in London's Economy

Case Study Appendix

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1 Flexible and distance working at Ernst & Young

At Ernst and Young we spoke to Pearl Cash, a Senior Account Manager who heads up the Business Relationships team. Her role includes making sure that the business has the resources it needs to enable its staff to do their jobs and deliver what the business needs.

There has been a large programme at Ernst & Young to ensure that people can work where and when they need to. If an employee needs to work outside normal office hours, or from a place other than the main office, then this is possible with the technology provided by Ernst & Young. People do though have a responsibility to ensure this fits with their co-workers and client commitments. Pearl said:

'For many years the majority of my work has been carried out in the London office but have lived in Solihull. I have been able to carry on with my senior management post by taking advantage of the remote working opportunities available within the organisation.'

Remote and flexible working has been available for many years but it is just in recent years that people have really started to take up this option. Pearl added 'Remote working has been available for 16 or 17 years, but when it first started it was viewed as something quite bizarre. Now it is pretty much the norm. All of my team now work at home at least one day a week'. However, Pearl observed that while Ernst & Young actively promotes flexible and remote working as an option, it is not seen within the organisation as an option that is available 'just for women'. 'The nature of our business means that more and more people are taking advantage of the flexible and remote working arrangements across the board.'

Pearl also commented that people with disabilities or ill-health can also benefit from employers who adopt this approach to working arrangements. 'I myself had to wear a cast on my leg for six weeks following recent surgery and the technology, using conference calls and remote working instead of going into the office to meet up, allowed me to continue with my job during that time'.

2 Maternity support at Clifford Chance

Clifford Chance is an international law firm with two offices within the City of London. The company has been actively seeking to increase the diversity of its staff profile for some time. In September 2007, Clifford Chance was identified as one of just three firms in the legal sector to be placed in the top 50 firms in *The Times* 'Where Women Want to Work' 2007 rankings.

Clifford Chance makes their statistics regarding the representation of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities within the London office publicly available via their website (www.cliffordchance.com/expertise/publications/details.aspx?ContentItemId=9943); impressively, they also publish the proportional uptake of flexible working arrangements within the London offices too. Currently over half of the solicitors working at Clifford Chance are female (and one-fifth are from ethnic minorities), while nearly one-fifth (17.4 per cent) of the partners are women.

Alison Middleton, HR Policy and Advice Manager and Sarah Twite, Diversity Manager, spoke to IES as part of the research. Alison explained that they had conducted a review of the company's maternity package around a year previously, driven by awareness that they had not reviewed their policy for some time and by anticipated changes in legislation. Alison said:

'As part of the review we asked "Talking Talent" to come in and look at our policy from the "softer side". They spoke to women that had been on maternity leave over the past five years, including some who had left, to find out about their experience of the current arrangements.'

As a result, Alison had made a series of recommendations to the firm to address three areas in which the interviews revealed that staff would appreciate support. Firstly, the review revealed that there was no real 'ownership' of maternity policy within the company – it tended to fall between the line manager and HR. Because of this, women said they did not know who was best placed to provide advice on pregnancy arrangements. To address this, Alison recommended creation of a maternity specialist post within the HR team for women to go to as a first port of call for information and advice on maternity provision. In the past few months the company has expanded

this position and now three HR officers have been trained up to deliver this specialist advice. As well as supporting pregnant women their role includes liaison with line managers too.

The second issue to emerge from the review was that line managers would welcome guidance on managing pregnant employees. Alison therefore recommended that the firm produce guidance on managing pregnant employees and then consulted further with line managers to identify the types of information they would like to be provided with. She then produced guidelines and a checklist for line managers on managing pregnant employees before, during and after maternity leave.

The third recommendation was to introduce a maternity coaching programme for staff. Sarah Twite said:

'The research revealed that some of our pregnant employees would appreciate support regarding their arrangements for maternity leave. In particular, dealing with issues of handover prior to going on maternity leave; adjusting to their new role as a mother and the time away from the Firm; and finally, preparation for their return to work, re-building their confidence and, for lawyers, their client contacts.'

The coaching programme is run by Talking Talent and is conducted on a one-to-one basis with very senior staff and in small groups for all other staff. The coaching usually consists of three sessions – one before taking maternity leave; a telephone catch-up session while the woman is on maternity leave; and one session on return to work.

The next step was to publicise the new maternity package. Alison set up briefing sessions for business services line managers and she produced a briefing pack for the Senior HR Managers and heads of the legal sections to use in briefing their staff. In addition to this the company revamped their intranet:

'Whereas before, the information was scattered across several different areas, now we have brought it all together. All of the policies and procedures are now in one place on the intranet and there is a downloadable booklet on maternity leave provision too.'

Alison added that they now also provide information on health and safety and pregnancy at work from a risk assessment point of view, and they also offer fitness training advice for pregnant employees.

The Clifford Chance maternity package has recently received accreditation from the children's charity Tommy and their latest initiative focuses on male employees:

'We started to think, "perhaps men are being left out!" So we have introduced lunchtime seminars for men on topics such as "preparing for parenthood", "homework issues", "understanding little minds" – these are run by an organisation called Parents Matter.'

The company Talking Talent is monitoring the maternity coaching programme for the company, but in addition Clifford Chance has devised an in-house questionnaire to

help them to monitor the impact of the changes. It was very early days at the time of the interview, but Alison was planning on starting the company's evaluation in early 2008.

And more developments are planned. Alison is now thinking about introducing an informal buddying system for women returning to the company after maternity leave. This will increase still further the support available to women in this far-sighted firm.

3 Monitoring policy impact at Middlesex University

Michael Howard is Equalities and Diversity Manager at Middlesex University, a post-1993 university with three sites in north London. Michael explained that the university had offered a range of provision from flexible working to on-site nursery provision for some time that would be of value to its employees but had recently reviewed its provision:

'It seems to me that several things have made a significant difference in the last year. One is a review and re-launch of the flexible working policy. We are now being much more explicit about widening access to flexible working. It is not just focused on mothers, and never has been, but there was a perception that it was.'

As part of that review the HR department set up workshops and individual surgeries to look at flexible working across all categories of staff. As a result of reviewing the policy and current working patterns, the university realised that it had not really adapted over time and hence decided to re-launch the policy and to focus in particular on widening access to flexible working. The university had moved on reviewing home working at the time of the interview, and as part of this was looking at the infrastructure issues that surround this, such as ICT requirements and health and safety. Michael said:

'Again, home working is available to all staff, but there may be a particular benefit for women as historically they more often need to work from home, and we want to ensure we do it as well as possible.'

Michael went on to say that the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 had made the university review its retirement provision.

'We wanted to make it more equitable for individual employees. The legislation was the main driver for this change, and to be fair without that push we would most probably not have introduced it. However, once that push was there, we went beyond what the legislation required. The law only requires employers to introduce planned retirement, but once we looked at the issue, we realised that it was more beneficial for us as an organisation

to move towards a flexible retirement regime than have an arbitrary cut-off. So we have moved the focus towards a working life approach that focuses less on people leaving the organisation at 65 and more on the managerial processes such as career planning than on retirement.'

Middlesex was the first university to have removed compulsory age retirement from its employment contracts. While Michael felt that this change had had little impact to date, as it was very recent, the university believed it would impact on how it is perceived as an employer.

'I have a feeling that this will become more important over time. Women historically have tended to benefit less from pensions which can mean they need to continue working because their pensions are insufficient; this change in policy means that they have the choice of whether to continue in employment or not. And part of the package is that they can negotiate more flexible working patterns.'

As part of a recent organisational re-structuring the university had created new Heads of Department posts which were part senior manager, part academic posts. These posts appear to have been particularly attractive to women, and as a result the number of women in senior management positions had increased from 30 to 35 per cent.

'This seems to be partly to do with the nature of the posts but also that people feel that they do want to stay with the university. This is the first exercise that's had a disproportionate gender effect of this type and I am still trying to analyse the reasons – it seems to be less about the policies as such and more about the softer issues that make people feel that they have an affinity with the organisation. You need to have the basic policies in place but once you do, it becomes more about the relations between the organisation and the staff, issues around loyalty.'

The university had begun collecting data on the position of senior women to assess the impact of its policies and to support its work to provide a coherent system of development and progression and workforce planning.

'With policies such as the flexible working it is an on-going situation. We are trying to adopt a holistic approach to this rather than letting it be seen as something that is "just for women".'

4 Family-friendly working arrangements at McDonald's

Nicky Ivory, Reputation and Resourcing Consultant with McDonald's Restaurants, described a range of initiatives that McDonald's have put in place in recent years that, while not being focused exclusively on females, are likely nonetheless to be of particular help to women in trying to attain balance between work and family. Nicky said:

'In January 2006 McDonald's launched a new "Family contract". This initiative is primarily targeted at hourly-paid employees. If two members of the same family work in the same position in the same restaurant, this contract allows them to swap shifts without informing their line manager. It was piloted with twelve employees in Wales and was found to allow family members much more flexibility. It is particularly helpful for employees who have elder or childcare responsibilities, or if they are trying to combine working with studying. McDonald's was the first company to introduce this type of contract and this year they extended it to become a 'Family and friends' contract. This means that if friends or family members are working in equivalent positions within the same restaurant they can swap shifts.'

Since its introduction the scheme has grown substantially – people say it really helps them to juggle their commitments, and it helps the manager too, because s/he does not need to worry about re-arranging shifts.

McDonald's also has a flexible working policy for management positions. In general, all management positions are fully flexible, and in addition they have a policy of offering part-time arrangements (with a minimum requirement of three days a week) and managers can select and fix the times that they work to suit their own requirements, for example, to fit around their childcare arrangements.

At present, nearly half of McDonald's hourly-paid employees are female (44.5 per cent); 41 per cent of their restaurant managers are female; and 44 per cent of their support staff are female too (these staff groups include administration, IT, corporate affairs and marketing). Around 80 per cent of managers started off as crew (hourly

paid restaurant staff members). Within the senior management team 38 per cent are female and within the Senior Executive team four of the 13 executives are female. With the exception of only a few very senior roles all managers have started out in their careers as 'crew'. Even the Vice President of Operations started off as a 'crew member'.

A Women's Leadership Network has been established in McDonald's for around a year; the network ran its first conference recently. One of the ways in which the Network is trying to help female staff to maximise their opportunities is by arranging mentors and looking for training and development to help women to progress in their careers.

In addition to these direct ways in which McDonald's policies can help women to progress, Nicky felt that some of the actions that McDonald's has taken recently in terms of re-branding and re-imaging of restaurants have helped McDonald's become more attractive to women and has led to its gaining a place in the lists for The Times Top 50 places 'Where Women Want To Work' in 2006 and 2007, and the Financial Times Top 50 'Best Workplaces 2007'.

Nicky finished by observing that some of the people who go to work in McDonald's may not have entered their chosen career because they failed to get the grades they required or even because they have come from overseas. McDonald's offers all its staff the opportunity to study and gain qualifications (it is currently sponsoring around 2,000 hourly-paid employees to study on-line for GCSE equivalent qualifications in maths and English) and in some cases, to go on to university.

5 Career development at the Metropolitan Police Service

At the Metropolitan Police Service ('MPS') we spoke to Heather Court, a Sergeant who works in the gender strand of the Diversity and Citizenship Focus Directorate. The MPS is required by the Public Sector Duty on Gender Equality (Gender Duty or GED) to take action to positively promote equality and was one of the organisations selected by the (then) EOC to participate in pilot project to compile the codes of practice for the GED.

Part of the MPS's remit externally is to focus on women's safety and inclusion, which is driven by the Mayor of London. Their remit broadly covers all areas relating to women and considers whether they have access to the same quality of service delivery as men. For example, historically, most of the procedures that had been set up for dealing with victims, witnesses and detainees had been done so in the assumption that the person was male. A recent project led by Heather's team piloted the distribution of hygiene packs for women customers. It contained items such as sanitary products, a comb, tissues and lip balm.

Within the MPS, Heather's role focuses on issues of recruitment, retention and progression of women. There is a particular focus at present on the areas of the work of the MPS that currently do not have significant numbers of women.

Heather spoke to us about some of the actions the MPS had taken internally to improve the position of women within the organisation. She spoke of two particular development initiatives the MPS had introduced to help women advance in one area of the organisation in which they are currently under-represented: the CO19 Specialist Firearms Unit. Heather said:

'The MPS has been trying to attract women into areas in which they are currently under-represented. One of these is the CO19 Specialist Firearms unit. When CO19 began their initiative 18 months ago, there were around 500 officers, 490 of whom were men. They wanted to attract and recruit more women and minority ethnic officers. They set up "Insight" days for women to attend during which they could try on the kit, ask questions

and have a go on the firing range. All the female firearms officers volunteered to train as mentors to support and guide the women throughout the long application process.'

'We found that many of the women fell at the "papersift" part of the application which requires applicants to provide evidence of their skills against national competencies, and identified that this was in part due to inadequate descriptions/detailing of their abilities. Many of them saw expressing their abilities as boasting, or didn't recognise and credit themselves appropriately with what they saw as normal professional standards rather than specific skills. We therefore devised a coaching programme to help women identify and express their abilities, maintain focus on their personal development in order to pass the various role requirements and complete the rigorous application process.'

The next stage of the recruitment process was the Job Related Fitness Test, and it was identified that training regimes which assisted men to pass the test did not necessarily enable women to do the same (women having different physiologies). Their next step was to address this:

'We also identified the job-related fitness test as a barrier for women being accepted into this type of post, even amongst otherwise very fit women, and explored why this might be. Working with our occupational health department, we recognised that women's and men's physiology is different and therefore what works for men in training doesn't necessarily work for women. Occupational Health therefore devised bespoke training programmes for the women, with physical training instructors to coach and encourage them. It is still early days, but we are beginning to see an increase in the numbers of women successfully applying.'

These development initiatives are set against a backdrop of changes in recent years aimed at improving the position of women within the police service: in August 2001 'The Gender Agenda' was published (developed by an executive group of associations including ACPO and the British Association for Women in Policing). This was a national initiative focusing on the specific needs of women working in the police service. The needs of women police officers were its prime concern but it recognised similar needs of all women and men in the Service. Receiving ministerial support from the Government, it focuses on:

- recruitment, retention and progression
- communication
- caring responsibilities
- flexible working
- development
- continued significant organisational support.

In September 2002 the MPS Development and Organisation Improvement Team ('DOIT'), led by Denise Milani (who is now Director of the Diversity & Citizen Focus

Directorate, within which the Gender Strand sits) launched the Engender strategy which consisted of a range of initiatives and local action plans designed to retain and progress all women within the MPS.

Amongst the work that Ms Milani carried out was a series of women's seminars, entitled 'Dancing on the Glass Ceiling', in which the views of 1,000 women employees were sought. At these seminars the women discussed what currently did and did not work for them within the MPS, and, as an outcome of these seminars, Ms Milani commissioned a report by OPM which made a series of recommendations for developing better work practices in the MPS. One result of this work was the development of policy and guidance on flexible working:

'HR have developed a fabulous policy on flexible working and to support it they have produced two guidance booklets – one for the employee who wants to work flexibly and the other for managers of people who wish to take advantage of the policy. In addition HR has a work/life balance & flexible working advisor who can provide guidance on everything from flexible rosters to emergency childcare.'

It is anticipated that this will make flexible working more consistently available to all those who want to take up this option.

6 Experimenting with family-friendly work hours at London Borough of Camden

In Camden we spoke to Akua Agyepong, HR Advisor for Diversity, London Borough of Camden. Akua said:

'Camden is a good place for women to work – this is reflected in all the statistics – more than 60 per cent of its employees are women. It has good working practices which include flexible working for example term-time hours and the compressed week. There is part-time working to meet childcare arrangements and where their position allows for it employees can work from home.'

There is a strong presence of women amongst the directors and senior managers, including the Chief Executive. Three of the six Directors are women, while at Chief Officer level there is pretty much a balance of women and men.

'We have been experimenting with splitting some jobs into smaller, more family-friendly, work hours, perhaps 2-3 hours a day, with individuals choosing whether they work those hours in the morning, over lunchtime or in the afternoon. When a person applies for a job they are asked if they would like to work part-time and if the managers and the service are able to meet the request it is supported. There are examples of job-sharing at across the organisation Around 30 per cent of our employees work part-time – 35 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men. So it is not just the women who work flexible hours, it is everyone.'

So Camden sees this very much as being a case of 'just good working practice' rather than something introduced 'just for women'. Akua added:

'We have reviewed our approach to flexible working and it is more about 'working smartly' – it just makes good business sense. And it affects people's work – they will get more done if they are working at home without the two-hour commute. And we have good support for progression – it is not specifically targeted on women, but the framework for development for middle managers is very flexible and designed to let people pick up learning when it suits them, the learning opportunities are offered periodically rather than being just "one-off" events.'

In addition to this general approach to good working practices Akua added that there are some specific things that Camden does that makes Camden attractive to women:

'We offer good maternity leave, so a high number of women employees do return to Camden after having children. And we offer childcare vouchers to both male and female employees, which means that they get tax relief on the costs of childcare.'

7 Leadership development at Accenture

We spoke to Susie Mullan, Director of the Human Capital and Diversity programme at Accenture. The focus of her work is on developing leadership capabilities within the company across all areas of diversity and in doing so creating the role models that drive employee engagement across the whole firm. Particularly on the female leadership front, Accenture has introduced a development programme called Accent on Women to support the development of women into senior leadership roles. This has included holding women-only senior executive leadership events, with senior-level personnel giving presentations. There is also a Leadership Sponsorship programme, in which UK Board members sponsor senior executive entry level women. There are also additional development programmes at more junior levels.

The intention behind focusing the programme on progression into senior positions is to ensure that women employees can see a career path in the firm that will persuade them to stay with Accenture. Susie said:

'We recognise that there is a huge talent pool out there and if we are not in a position to offer such effective policies and practices then we will not hold onto those employees. But if we can help balance career opportunities and growth with effective policies in practice our employees and our business will benefit hugely.'

Susie also observed that one of the challenges in that progression to leadership is retaining talented women after they have children. Therefore the company offers a competitive maternity leave package with nine months' full pay along with pre- and post-maternity leave workshops. There are also optional 'keep in touch' days for women on maternity leave and the company facilitates networking opportunities amongst women returning to work. One of the recent developments is that the company offers employees up to two weeks' leave for fertility treatment.

'It is our multi-faceted approach that makes us a good place to work and we are trying a number of initiatives to try to retain women and make us the employer of choice for women.'

The retention of female employees and particularly those with children is a key component of talent management for all organisations that wish to remain competitive. Accenture is confident that its strategies aimed at increasing engagement and leadership development will help it to achieve this.

Susie concluded by telling us:

'We recognised that we do not struggle with recruiting staff so over the last five years our policies have been more focused on retention. Some of the many areas where we have taken action include parenting and progression. We are making good progress. The Guardian has identified us as one of the top organisations where parents want to work and we have an ambition to continue to improve in all areas.'

8 Empowering employees at Cisco

Nikki Walker is Director of Strategic Planning and Execution for Emerging Markets at Cisco. In addition she heads up the Women's Network in the UK and Ireland for the company and at the time of the interview was moving into a broader diversity role in Europe.

Nikki said she believes it is the overall attitude of the company that makes Cisco a good place for women to work.

'It is a company that gives people the opportunity to really make a difference. It's a reasonably large company and very empowering – people can have a big impact very quickly. A female junior graduate was working with me who made a proposal which was then rolled out across the company within six weeks. She said to me "I managed to make a huge difference – I never imagined it would be like this!"'

Nikki said that the company encourages its employees to work across the various different functions.

'So if you want to get lots of experience and try different things you can. Cisco is prepared to take a risk and let their employees broaden their experience by moving into what are often quite different areas of work.'

As with many of the other companies we spoke to, Cisco view their actions as making sound business sense.

'It is a business imperative. As we go forward the talent gap will get bigger, we will need to attract and retain across all groups in society. We will need to appeal to Generation Y and to men and women as they age and start to have to care for elders. It will mean a change from where we are. We have looked at the statistics regarding the ageing population profile, what will happen is that the proportion of 35-44 year olds will decrease as the population ages. That means that it is not just childcare issues that people will have to deal with but also ageing parents.'

Nikki will be reviewing these issues as part of her new role heading up Diversity and Inclusion for European Markets:

'We need to put policies in place that will appeal to every age group ... to continue to be successful we need to be constantly innovating and the best way to get innovation is to have a truly motivated workforce. The way to get that is through inclusion.'

Cisco's twin approach to diversity – ensuring that policies recognise the different needs of employees, coupled with recognition of staff contributions and opportunities for further development – is likely to ensure that it remains an attractive company for women for many years to come.

9 Encouraging women applicants at British Gas

Dave Cox and Carole Willsher of British Gas's Engineering Academy spoke to us as part of our research. They said that British Gas Services, which is part of Centrica, has been active for quite some time in attending and speaking at recruitment fairs and events such as the Women in Plumbing annual conference, in order to encourage more women to apply for engineering jobs within British Gas Services. The company also works hard at building relationships with educational institutions. Dave said:

'It's important to encourage women to apply for roles in areas that have traditionally been male-dominated. Whenever we hold any recruitment events, we challenge the perception that engineering jobs are just for men. Those women who do apply and are successful enjoy the role very much.' Dave Cox, Resourcing Manager, British Gas Academy

Dave and Carol talked about the actions they have been taking to increase the numbers of women. They have found that, at recruitment fairs, women tend to gravitate towards the more 'traditionally female' occupational stands, such as fashion, and consequently might overlook the British Gas stand. Carole said:

'Women tend to congregate around the more traditionally female occupational stands, and unless approached they often pass by the British Gas stand – the organisation is trying to change this. We have small gifts that we hand out – lip gloss and nail files, and we use these as a way of starting a conversation with them about the sector.' Carole Willsher, Recruitment and Diversity Specialist, British Gas Academy

British Gas Services has had a diversity team in place within its recruitment function for the past 4-5 years. One of the key remits of the team is to build up the workforce, so that it reflects the organisation's customer base in terms of its proportions of women and black and ethnic minority members. At present, out of a workforce of 9,000 engineers, only 90 or so are women, and so the organisation is hoping to recruit more and more each year.

'We want to get the word out that this job is great for females and that you can't know how great it is until you apply.' Dave Cox, Resourcing Manager, British Gas Academy

Last year Carol ran four open day/taster events around the country for women, including one in London. These events allow women to ask questions about what the training is like and what is involved and have a go at different activities. They have also started running workshops in schools – after these, 52 per cent of girls say they would consider a job in engineering.

While it can be quite difficult to measure the results, there has been an increase in the level of interest from women in applying for engineering apprenticeships, and there has been a significant increase in the number of females in engineering trainee roles, from 9 per cent in 2006 to 13 per cent in 2007.

'Some of these are internal applicants, who have moved over from other functions within the organisation. British Gas Services find it particularly difficult to recruit engineers around the M4 corridor, London and the South-East, so making the role more appealing to women increases the number of internal and external applicants, and helps our drive to increase female representation.'

Compared to the percentage of female applicants, a higher percentage of women than men are successful in being recruited onto the apprenticeship programmes, with no advantage being given during the application process. The main challenge, therefore, is to get women to apply in the first place, and that is why they are focussing their efforts on engaging with women at recruitment fairs and other similar events.

British Gas has recently removed all age limits from their training programmes – now women and men of all ages can start apprenticeships with them. Future plans include recruiting an extra team member so that diversity will have a more dedicated focus. Further, in 2008 British Gas Services will look more closely at its recruitment timetable and aim to be 'in the right place at the right time' in order to try to appeal to as many women applicants as possible.

'We have always recruited some women into engineering apprenticeships, but this sometimes smacked of tokenism and women in these roles tended to gravitate towards other parts of the business. This might have been because they found it intimidating to work in a male-dominated environment. However, things have improved considerably and in one apprenticeship group, there is a 50:50 split between men and women. We want to get the message across that this job is no longer the physically demanding role that it used to be and that those women who are successful in joining the organisation in this role really enjoy it.'

10 Developing a worldwide workforce - flexible working and career development initiatives at Standard Chartered Bank

Standard Chartered Bank is listed among the top 25 companies in the FTSE-100 index. Its headquarters have been based in London for over 150 years. The group employs over 70,000 people, representing some 115 nationalities in over 50 countries, with around 1,600 employees based in London.

Natasha Davydova, Group Head, Technology Production Services, and Antoinett Bruin, Group Diversity and Inclusion Analyst spoke to IES about the initiatives that Standard Chartered has taken in recent years.

Natasha is responsible for technical infrastructure across the 57 countries in which Standard Chartered operates, looking after areas such as global networks, data centres, desktop application support and information security. Around a hundred employees work with Natasha in the technical hub in London, providing technical support services to the bank along with other hubs in Asia. Natasha said:

'We have introduced and are now enhancing a flexible working arrangement policy. People in the bank have the opportunity to work flexibly in terms of the hours in the day and the days in the week that they work, at the discretion of their manager. There is a mechanism for people to apply. This also allowed females returning from maternity leave to work part-time to fit in around their family responsibilities.'

'We are also currently expanding our policy to provide opportunities for home working. In the financial services sector home-working is relatively new concept but we are making good advances from the technology perspective and are working closely with HR to ensure people have the technology needed to support home-working. We understand that some areas within the bank require the staff to be present at work but where they can work from home we will allow it.'

Standard Chartered has been piloting the flexible working policy in four markets and it will be rolled out more widely across the globe in 2008. Natasha said:

'It allows us to expand our reach in the search for talent because not all talented and skilled individuals have the desire to work full time or at certain times. Another important point is retention, because in the war for talent, although the monetary side is important, flexibility is also becoming a major factor and therefore flexible working will allow us to increase retention and position us as the employer of choice.'

As well as these global initiatives available to all eligible staff, Standard Chartered formed in January 2007 a Women's Council (as part of Group Diversity and Inclusion). Natasha's colleague Antoinett Bruin, Analyst, Diversity and Inclusion added:

'We have Diversity and Inclusion or D&I champions in all of the countries in which we operate. We are looking to 'bridge the gap' with regard to gender representation. We currently have 49 per cent women amongst our staff, but in senior positions it is only around 20 per cent so the challenge for the last year has been to get it to the current level and we will continue to strive to improve this ratio.'

The Women's Council co-sponsored a Chinese delegation to the Women's Forum in France on Economy and Society in October 2007 at which there was an international discussion of women's issues. Standard Chartered is also planning to sponsor the Women's Forum in Shanghai in May 2008.

'Other future D&I events took place, eg the Global D&I Conference in Bangkok in January 2008 where over 70 D&I champions, council members and ambassadors were invited. It was an opportunity for participants to network and build a strong team spirit to achieve our 2011 aspirations. External speakers and top senior executives were also invited along.'

The Champions are planning events in all the countries in which they operate, with monthly Champion and Women's Council meetings to report progress. Antoinett added:

'We had a Women's Forum in Dubai in May 2007, this event brought together over 100 talented female leaders representing 36 countries from across the Bank to address some gender issues and how to overcome the challenges females are facing, success stories by role models were also shared and workshops to help show women how to take their career forward were conducted. This forum was supported by the Group Management Team to emphasise on the importance of the women's development within our organisation.'

Antoinett also added:

'D&I is part of the bank's values, we are getting all the support needed from the senior management including our Group CEO Peter Sands, not to mention we have a constant commitment from Jaspal Bindra who has taken the role of Chair of the D&I Council in 2006 in addition to his responsibilities as Asia Director.'

Standard Chartered will soft launch a new mentoring programme for a select group of women as a start, this group will be mentored by senior executives; if the initiative proves to be a success, then Standard Chartered will roll out the programme to a larger group of employees, both women and men. Standard Chartered is also seeking a development programme for its female employees to contribute to their career development.

Antoinett Bruin quoted Jaspal Bindra saying:

'Diversity and Inclusion is crucial, it is a competitive advantage as it attracts world class talent and supports achieving excellence in performance and ultimately continues the Bank to be a leader in the markets we operate in. Embracing diversity and inclusion takes us much closer to achieving our company aspiration in being the best international bank leading the way in Asia, Africa and Middle East.'