

Eli Lilly and Company Ltd (Lilly UK)

Attracting and retaining high calibre employees

The company

Lilly UK, one of the UK's top pharmaceutical companies, is the UK affiliate of major American pharmaceutical manufacturer, Eli Lilly and Company.

The workforce

No. of worldwide employees 41,000

The challenge

Employees were failing to balance home and work demands. The 1995 Lilly "Voice of the Employee" survey showed that only 30% of respondents felt that they could adequately balance their home and work demands. Employee questionnaires, focus groups and individual feedback showed that UK employees wanted more flexible working patterns and to have more ownership of and responsibility for managing their working lives.

The response

At the beginning of 1995, a small project team was set up to outline the company's view on alternative working practices. This provided all UK line managers with a toolkit to help them balance their business challenges with the needs of their employees. Employee opinions and needs throughout the UK were fed into the project team. From the outset work-life balance was viewed as part of the overall business strategy - the policy needed to support all employees at all stages of their lives; it also had to reinforce the core company values – respect for people; integrity and thirst for excellence

Lilly UK's inclusive work-life programme was launched in May 1996 and focused on flexible working practices and breaks from work. Flexible working patterns included job shares, home working, part-time working, reduced hours, staggered hours (different start and finish times) and term-time working. Leave options include 'V-time' (voluntary time off for a short period of time), phased return to work after sickness or maternity leave, career breaks, sabbaticals, paternity leave, maternity leave, and adoption leave.

The company continues to encourage a culture of flexibility through its regular employee survey; focus groups, for example a group set up to look at flexible working within the sales force; and looking at ways of improving current policies: a recent innovation is that potential retirees can now work reduced hours as they move towards retirement.

Take-up

- The majority of staff who adopt flexible working patterns are female and have childcare or eldercare responsibilities.
- Employees regularly take up programmes, such as career breaks giving employees the opportunity to travel; and sabbaticals, giving employees the opportunity to learn a new skill
- Phased return after sick leave is embraced by the company's occupational health department

Business benefits

The company says: "Work-life balance requires a responsible and mature approach

from every employee whose first and foremost aim must always be to meet the business' objectives and to fulfil customer demands."

Work-life policies have helped Lilly UK to:

- attract high calibre recruits
- retain skilled employees
- reduce recruitment costs
- improve employee morale
- maintain a competitive edge, and
- react more effectively to changing social demographics and skills shortages.

The future

"An organisation like Lilly UK must never be complacent about work-life balance and just because we have a good number of programmes on the shelf does not mean that we have a workforce that is able to balance work and personal life."

"Communication, walking the talk, roles models, keeping the philosophy alive and being flexible are all important aspects of a true work-life balance culture and Lilly UK continues in all of these to strive for best practice."