

Marks & Spencer

Employers for Women

We are a large multi-national retailer selling stylish, high quality and great value goods. We are long established on the UK high street and have an expanding international business. Our employee base is around 81,000, with 72,000 in the UK and predominantly female.

We are very proud of our strong reputation for being a trusted company with a great reputation for supporting women in the workplace. Corporate Social Responsibility is at the heart of our business and we're working hard with our customers, employees and suppliers to raise awareness and improve sustainability.

We are proud to have featured in the Times Top 50 Employers for Women in 2011 and 2012.

Our Chairman signed up to the '30% Club', which targets at least 30% women on the board and we were very proud to achieve this target earlier this year.

Below Board level women account for 32% of senior management. They are encouraged to take on trusteeships and non-executive directorships to help develop and build capability for Board directors of the future.

74% of our workforce is female. This provides us with a fantastic pool of talent for our future.

Issue to be resolved

We aim to increase employee engagement by demonstrating that our female employees can progress into senior roles. This is an intrinsic part of our CSR approach, which is widely communicated externally and forms part of our brand image.

We actively seek to encourage women into work from disadvantaged backgrounds through our Employability Programme – Marks & Start. This has been running since 2003 and goes from strength to strength. Starting as a UK initiative we have continued to expand this to our international business to help promote opportunities for women in the workplace, wherever they work in the world.

Increasing the health and wellbeing of our entire workforce is a Plan A commitment (under our CSR banner) and we are actively working to help our employees on this journey, with specific support for women.

Action taken

We work to provide our employees with an employee voice by providing clear feedback and communication channels through which they can give their views. We listen and respond specifically to the needs of our female employees.

We have a Diversity working party, comprised of HR and CSR functions. They highlight any focus areas across the business and work together to develop business cases for future Diversity projects.

The group was established to minimise duplication of work and give departmental contacts for diversity advice. Since its inception the group have worked together on several projects including creating a Diversity Matters DVD which is now delivered to all employees at induction.

We run an annual employee engagement survey and ensure we split all results by gender so fully understand responses by women across the organisation. We were delighted with the results from last year's survey. The female engagement index showed in Retail 76% of women versus 73% of men and in Head office 79% of women compared to 77% of men are highly engaged. This year we are trialling an open comments box to better understand our employees, and we will be particularly focused on the responses from our female employees. We have also increased the frequency of the survey with quarterly 'pulse' surveys so we can keep close to our people and their engagement with the business.

We have consistently removed barriers to work for all of our employees by introducing flexible working early and often over and above our legal requirements. For example:

- We removed the default retirement age in 2001 – 10 years ahead of the Government legislation because employees and line managers were telling us they wanted to be able to retain an experienced workforce and give people a choice
- In 2003 M&S was one of the first businesses to introduce the right to request flexible working to ALL employees. We have some great statistics
 - 73% of female employees work part-time
 - 83% of over 50's work part-time
- In 2006 we introduced flexible retirement allowing people to take their pension benefits and continue working. In 2010 85% of those taking their pension carried on working for M&S and the majority of these were women

The combination of these strategies, ensure we are an employer of choice for women by offering flexible employment opportunities and will help us to ensure we have more female candidates in senior roles within our business.

All senior managers have committed to the actions in our CSR report. We have included gender reporting within our CSR report in recent years in an open and transparent way. We will set ourselves stretching targets and this will further strengthen our approach on workplace diversity.

We have worked pro-actively with a number of charity partners to set and achieve stretching targets to enable women to gain work experience and gain employment and our Marks & Start programme is a continual focus.

As part of our focus on health and wellbeing, we launched 'Plan A Health.com' in 2010 an interactive website in addition to a comprehensive breast screening offer for women that focuses on the over 40's and has been offered for many years to female employees and spouse/partners of male employees.

Under our Retail Ambassador programme, employees go in to schools to teach pupils about careers in retail. The Retail Ambassador Programme (RAP) is an offshoot from the National Skills Academy for Retail (NSA) and Skillsmart UK (prior to changes to this organisation) aimed at improving the skill base in the Retail Sector. It is a nationwide programme which operates in partnership with retail employers and educational institutions with the aim to inspire young people aged 14 years and above to pursue a successful career in retail.

Result

We have created a positive culture for women by offering part time opportunities and flexible working options, which have resulted in a 73% female part-time workforce. These include for example women job sharing at all levels up to and including senior managers in the business and term-time contracts, which our employees tell us are important to them.

We have female role models in senior positions across our Company, within Retail 50% of Store Managers are women and at the top level 31% of our board were women in 2012.

Our strong CSR initiatives have also helped us support women back into the workplace. Some 5,000 people have been through the Marks & Start programme since it started; we have targeted lone parents (98% of whom are women) and work with a charity partner to provide them with work experience. 40% of participants go on to find jobs with us or another employer. Many ex-participants volunteer to become buddies for new participants, wanting to pass on their positive experiences. Therefore buddies are often women, and can relate to the challenges of participants entering the job market. The role of a buddy can be recognised as a step on the organisation's career path of a Customer Assistant. 82% of buddies learned new skills, 93% feel motivated by involvement and 81% say it makes the company a better place to work.

On PlanAHealth.com we run many health initiatives including weight loss and exercise challenges and get people involved as teams across the business to meet the challenges' targets. The majority of participants were female. In a recent weight loss challenge the winning team of 5 people (4 women) lost 4.5 stones or 28.6 kg with total participant weight loss at an amazing 3000kg.

We also introduced a 'Manage your Menopause' micro-site which had a video and tips on the wellbeing website; this received extremely positive feedback from our female employees.

Our National Business Involvement group (BIG) has 20 women representatives (83%). This group has been elected to represent our 72,000 employees across the UK on key business issues and change. Our business is dedicated to informing, involving and consulting with this group. The group has influenced major policy changes, e.g. absence policy, refund policy and holiday booking policy.

The BIG Idea scheme – which involves National BIG was introduced in 2010 when results from our Your Say Survey told us that people wanted to be listened to and get involved. Every quarter, a Director poses a question on a specific business issue and employees can submit their ideas and the winner earns the chance to play a part in making the idea happen. We have had particularly high engagement in the scheme from women and this year 68% of the ideas reaching the quarterly Top Ten have been from women.

We conduct a comprehensive pay review by gender across our business annually and this data is reviewed by our HR Leadership team and actions agreed. Pay ranges are attached to roles and are made available in an open and transparent way on our employee intranet. Our Reward team carry out external benchmarking throughout the year and monitor the impact of managerial pay decisions.

Since we removed the Default Retirement Age in 2001 and introduced Flexible Retirement in 2006 where employees can start drawing their pension whilst continuing to work for us, our number of employees aged 65+ has more than doubled, improving the age diversity of our female population.

By extending flexible working and offering part time opportunities, supported by a clear career management process, we've helped women stay in key roles and continue to progress their careers. We have therefore retained high performing progressive women, increasing engagement.

Next Steps

Our flexible working policy gives line managers the confidence to view flexible working in a positive light, giving requests due consideration prior to making a decision. Flexible working will be further embedded by making information more accessible to employees, making employees more aware of options available to help them achieve a work life balance.

We remain committed to supporting employability in our communities and Marks & Start plays a key role for us on this strategy. Last year and this year we will achieve around 1,000 Marks & Start placements across our stores. We have already expanded our employability programme internationally and to date have provided 300 women across Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh work placement opportunities.

In addition at our recently launched new national distribution centre in Donington we have a dedicated role setting up the Marks & Start initiative with Remploy. This is a key focus for us to enable those from a disabled or disadvantaged background to work in this exciting new business.

We have expanded our work with women to include female offenders. We work closely with HMP Send and HMP Style female prisons, through employees using their charitable volunteering day to deliver employability and skills workshops to women offenders, whilst promoting our employability programmes to them. Some of these ex-offenders have secured jobs with M&S since leaving prison.

In the last year we have had 330 lone parent placements and 40% of those completing a placement have been offered permanent roles.

Our diversity forum will continue to identify and realise opportunities to retain our position as a top employer for women.

We will continue to work with an organisation called Pure Potential which works across Schools and Colleges helping to provide information and understanding about their options on leaving education. We provide relevant and up to date case studies around women who successfully complete our Graduate and Management Trainee Programmes.

We work with the Fashion Retail Academy which has a strong female presence by offering placement opportunities for their students, running mock job interviews and participating in careers fairs on campus.

Contact

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