

Non-Verbatim Minutes

APPG Women in Work: What does 'good employment' look like?

Monday 13 December 2021, 3-4 pm via Zoom

Chair: Jess Phillips, Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG

Guest speakers:

- **Charlotte Veillet**, Policy and Benefits Manager at John Lewis Partnership
- **Clare Corkish**, HR Director at Vodafone
- **Alison Last**, Corporate Communications at Kellogg's
- **Martina Murphy**, Barrister and Vice-Chair of the Employment Law Bar Association (ELBA)
- **Catherine Colloms**, Corporate Affairs Director at Openreach

Minutes

Jess began the session by outlining that Covid has projected the need for employers to support female workforces. She said that the Employment Bill is thought to return in 2022, and will present an opportunity to better employment practice into law. In this meeting, we will hear from employers on what good practice means to them and what measures they have put in place to maximise their female workforce. She then introduced **Charlotte Veillet, Policy and Benefits Manager at John Lewis Partnership.**

Charlotte Veillet began by saying that the John Lewis Partnership is the UK's largest employee owned business, employing around 800,000 partners in 300 places across the UK.

She shared that in the summer they announced a package of measures to support working families, based on feedback from partners, staff and their work and parents network. They have committed to a flexible first policy, advertising all jobs with flexible options so long as its operationally possible. They have also introduced leave for those who have experience baby loss and furthered work to support part-time workers to progress in their role.

She went through the equal parenthood policy. She said that studies have shown that sharing childcare can be good for gender equality and reducing the gender pay gap but affordability makes this difficult to achieve. She said that 2 weeks paid maternity/paternity leave was not enough, so the equal parenthood policy gives 26 weeks paid leave, broken down at 14 weeks full pay and 12 weeks at 50% of pay once you've worked at the Partnership for a year.

She said that since introducing the policy, there has been an uptake in paternity leave, which they now call co-parent leave. On average, partners are taking 16 weeks leave at the birth of their child and a quarter are taking the additional 12 weeks at half pay, which

demonstrates that affordability is clearly a barrier to men and women having time off. The response to this has been overwhelming, with co-parents sharing that having the time off together has been invaluable. She said they also had feedback that it has helped them to support partners when self-employed. She said that they are learning lots and going to continue on this path.

Jess thanked Charlotte and said it was interesting to hear what everyone has already suspected on parental leave being based on affordability. She said that pilots like this are really useful to see what works and what doesn't. She then introduced **Clare Corkish, HR Director at Vodafone**.

Clare Corkish, HR Director at Vodafone began by saying that she is very proud to work at Vodafone who have a history of progressive policies on domestic violence and abuse support, maternity and paternity policies. In those cases, she said that the important feature is supporting people in their return to work and that in the first 6 months back people are paid full time, but only need to be back in the office four days a week.

She shared Vodafone's future ready way of working, which came about as a result of the pandemic and virtual working. For Vodafone, it proved that virtual working did not have a detrimental impact on business and productivity. The policies put in place were based on the principles of flexibility, empowerment and trust. She said of the 10,000 employees across the UK there are 3 ways of working: blended, entirely work from home and site based. Blended requires no fixed days of working, but the needs based on the role. Entirely working from home and site based are based on the roles. She said that striking the balance between the business needs and the individuals needs was the priority.

She said that some of the benefits have been removing the location barrier to hiring, removing a London-centric approach and broadening their pool of candidates. She shared this has also been the case with international working, something that wasn't possible before the pandemic. She shared that they also have a spirit of Vodafone day, which are intentional no-meeting days, to support employees wellbeing.

Overall, she shared that the feedback had been incredibly positive from both existing employees and prospective hires.

Jess thanked Clare and said nobody is advocating working from home full time for absolutely everyone, but the blended approach is the future. She then introduced **Alison Last from Kellogg's**.

Alison Last, Corporate Communications at Kellogg's introduced Kellogg's and her role in employee communication. She said they employ 1500 people in the UK in two factories in Manchester and Wrexham. She said she is also involved in the Kellogg's employee resource group, focusing on inclusion for women.

She said that Kellogg's wanted to tackle the challenges facing women in the workplace that aren't often talked about, one of which was menopause. She said that at an open discussion, someone mentioned menopause and it sparked a mass of discussion, where

it was highlighted that more awareness and support was needed. She said that greater support for men and women during fertility treatment and pregnancy loss as well. She said that it was highlighted that support for men also came from discussions and creating a culture where everyone felt psychologically safe was key.

She went on to explain that all managers are trained by an external menopause hub, on how to talk to colleagues and support team members. Managers are trained to recognise the need for time off for appointments related to fertility treatment or pregnancy loss around the demands of work. She said that flexibility and individual support is key. She said that they also have a free counselling helpline at Kellogg's. She said that crucially, all of these policies do not require a doctor's note and are based on trust. She shared that they have introduced the policies but now it was important to create a culture where people feel comfortable to have the conversations with their managers about them.

At Kellogg's they have committed to gender parity by 2025, they are currently at 48% but even reaching an extra 2% won't be easy and requires work to get there. There are policies in place to have more female senior representation. She said they have also rolled out the Google I am Remarkable programme, which she recommended. It is a free workshop to help females and other underrepresented groups better promote themselves and the work they do.

She highlighted the need for male allyship and understanding to make these changes the new normal, and part of this is making sure that they are part of the conversation. She said that Kellogg's have provided training on things like masculinity in the workplace.

Jess thanked **Alison** and said that it was nice to hear about her own personal experiences. She then introduced **Martina Murphy, Barrister and Vice-Chair of the Employment Law Bar Association (ELBA)**

Martina Murphy, Barrister and Vice-Chair of the Employment Law Bar Association (ELBA) said that she had listened with great interest to all the policies and wanted to share some thoughts on the upcoming Employment Bill.

She said that from a legal perspective, she is hopeful that a new duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and new protection from third party sexual harassment in the forthcoming Employment Bill. She hopes that accessible guidance will come alongside that and a new statutory code to support the legislation. She said this was important as if a woman does experience sexual harassment in the workplace, it becomes a huge barrier to the return to work and also the return to future workplaces if not properly dealt with.

On flexible working, she said that we are hopeful the Employment Bill will introduce the right to request flexible working from day 1. She highlighted current legal barriers to flexible working currently. She spoke about extended redundancy protection for women and new parents, which would give protection from notification or redundancy of pregnant women that they are going on maternity leave until 6 months after she's returned to work. This would provide a lot of reassurances to in particular women.

In terms of good practice, she spoke about her role as a self-employment worker and said that mentoring has a really positive effect in particular. She gave an example that they recently created a pathway scheme for men and women but could assist women in looking ahead and receiving mentorship from senior colleagues. In term of her own experience, she emphasised the importance of supporting other women in the workplace as a woman.

She rounded off by saying that she was happy to take questions in the chat or to be emailed after the session.

Jess thanked **Martina** and said that she was particularly interested and in support of the sexual harassment guidance in the forthcoming Employment Bill. She said that she has campaigned for a very long time for a preventative duty and agree entirely that it needs to be workable for employers. She said that she very much expects it to come into play given that it has been written into the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy. She then introduced **Catherine Colloms, Corporate Affairs Director at Openreach**.

Catherine Colloms, Corporate Affairs Director at Openreach, introduced Openreach as the nations broadband network, a subsidiary of BT but very independent. She said they are in the process of building a nationwide full fibre broadband network to reach 25 million homes and businesses by the end of 2026. They employ 36,000 staff across the UK of which a majority are frontline engineers, installing equipment. She said that as they build this workforce, one of the key challenges is building a female workforce and retaining that talent.

She said that Openreach have a target of committing to 20% of all trainee engineering recruits to be women by 2025 and a 50/50 senior management team. She said that historically, Openreach has been typically an older, white male demographic, but they are moving in a new direction. They are currently as low as 4.6% on women coming in as trainee engineers in 2018/19, moving to 12% of recruits in 2012 and 18% this year, so they are getting closer to the 20% target. In terms of measuring and tracking progress, she said that they publish a diversity and inclusion report to hold themselves accountable.

She said that they commissioned research to understand what the barriers are to hiring women which showed that language has a huge role. The research showed that 50% of women were less likely to consider roles that had a coded gender bias. Off the back of this, they created a consciously unbiased job description for gender roles. Interestingly, 4 in 5 women said they wouldn't consider working in engineering, so they are reviewing the use of the word engineering in job adverts because in reality the term can mean many different sorts of roles. She said that they tested the revised unbiased adverts against the original adverts and had the impact of a 200% uplift in the applications from women, showing that even subtle changes made a huge difference.

She moved on to speak about what more that the Government and employers could do to better support female talent which she said comes back to barriers and stereotypes. She said that Openreach do outreach with schools and its crucial that girls think of engineering as a career option early on.

Jess thanked **Catherine** and spoke about her husband's role as an engineer who worked a shift pattern that actually helped childcare responsibilities. She said when we hear the word engineer, we assume no flexible options but actually in practice, in her experience, this wasn't the case, so she agreed that the language is really important.

She began the Q&A and kicked off by asking the panel, how do you think we can encourage more organisations to get involved in the good practices that your organisations are going through.

Clare Corkish, Vodafone responded that the last 2 years have been a great time and example to push for this, as it has demonstrated the ability to continue with these learnings.

Jess agreed that when an employer looks after their staff, they usually reward this by staying longer and working hard.

Charlotte Veillet, John Lewis Partnership came in to say that they publish their maternity policies on their website, to enable transparency, so that there isn't that barrier for women to ask. She said there should be some healthy competition amongst employers to better their policies.

Alison Last, Kellogg's came in to say that in fact over the pandemic, actually productivity increased and that demonstrates the importance of a culture of trust.

Jess highlighted a question in the chat box, "*Are Vodafone advertising the flexible working options in your job ads? If so, have you seen an uptake or a difference on the diversity of applicants?*"

Diana Roper, Open Reach came in to say that they don't currently advertise flexible working but its perhaps their next step as an employer.

Clare Corkish, Vodafone came in to say that at Vodafone the policies and principles that they work by are advertised on their website and the types of roles you'd expect to fall into each category.

Charlie White, John Lewis Partnership came in to say that they did a piece of work with the 'nudge unit' or behavioural insight team looking at trialling flexible working wording on job advertisements and it found that it increased the number of applicants by 50% and it increased the proportion of women applying from 38% to 51% and so that has been a really helpful piece of evidence leading to them developing their advertisement of flexible working.

Jess rounded off the session by saying that she often hears that the problem is when women don't put themselves forward but actually there is real value in the point that the way these jobs are advertised don't attract women. She rounded off by thanking the panellists for their interesting contributions and to everyone for joining the session,