# Fast-tracking the path to a positive and inclusive workplace

**Rachel Campbell**, Head of HR, Lantra

At Lantra we had been making steady progress in developing a positive and inclusive workplace, working with staff to increase work life balance and minimise inequalities. However, once we were hit with the first Covid lockdown our approach automatically accelerated as we were thrown into unknown waters.

Our IT department had already been working hard to improve all staff accessibility, with everyone having access to laptops and data stored securely on the 'cloud'. We had Microsoft Teams already available on our laptops, but at this point, few had been brave enough or felt the need to try it... little did we know what was coming!

When the pandemic hit, with the IT work already undertaken, the majority of staff were able to work from home with full access to all applications through VPM and continue to communicate on Teams. Some teams were able to work on site on a rotating basis.  These new enforced working arrangements brought different challenges for



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different people and it was important for the business to understand individual needs, retain the skills and knowledge in the business and keep staff engaged.

Staff were faced with a range of unexpected challenges which had not been on their radar a few weeks earlier, including caring for

## THE LANTRA INITIATIVE

**The initiative included:**

Allowing staff to use Lantra equipment to stay in touch socially with colleagues via Teams or Zoom or WhatsApp

Providing business updates twice a month from the CEO which were sent to both work and personal email accounts

Regularly running a Wellbeing Survey to understand how staff felt about their wellbeing and how Lantra could provide further assistance

Running short Staff Engagement pulse surveys

Maintaining 'Shout outs' and thank you's for staff achievements

Maintaining contact with our consultation forum representatives

Introducing a 'buddy' system for those who were struggling

Training to support managers who are managing remote teams.

Posting lots of support and helpful information on a dedicated Intranet site and sending  links or copies to work and personal email addresses

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young children, supporting elderly relatives, home schooling, finding their own spot to working in a full locked-down house, managing feelings of anxiety or isolation, worries about paying the bills and job security to mention a few.

For us, the key to supporting the wellbeing of our staff and keeping engagement levels high, was focussed around maintaining two-way communication and supporting flexible working arrangements. *(See panel.)*

We also ran a flexible working survey asking how staff would like to work in the short and longer term so we could revise our policies … and our thinking accordingly. As a business we recognised that the world of work no longer operated in a 9-5 environment and if we wanted to retain and attract talent, we needed to broaden our thinking about how we work. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that staff who have more control over how and when they work are more productive and at Lantra we wanted to buy in to that premise.

Whilst home working has been imposed upon us at the moment, the majority of staff indicated that once 'normality' resumes they would prefer a mixture of office and home working. Other approaches we have implemented include:

**Compressed hours** – eg Full-time hours worked over 4 days rather than 5 days.

**Annualised hours** – with less hours worked during school holidays and more hours worked in term time, but with pay equalised over 12 months.

**Split hours** – eg working early in the morning and later in the evening to support childcare

**Flexible work patterns across a week.**

**Range of part-time working patterns.**

There was inevitably some resistance to increased flexible working and this has generally focussed on the premise "if I can't see someone how do I know that they are working their 9 to 5…how can I manage them". We have worked hard to shift the culture from when and how individuals working to them achieving the outcomes set. This is not an easy transition and we are by no means there yet. Adopting increased flexibility requires a great deal of trust from both managers and their teams; giving staff more accountability about how they work comes increased responsibility to ensure performance is achieved.

## Increased flexible working requires different input

If allowing part homeworking, for example, there are additional costs, such as for laptops, home office equipment and methods of managing data security. However, the benefits of increased work-life balance, positive employee engagement and reduction in carbon footprint (through our lack of commute) will in many cases outweigh cost.

With increased flexible working also comes the need for stricter policies and guidelines. Staff who take a flexible approach to work, can often find themselves working longer hours or blurring the lines between work and home life, with the laptop always switched on. As a part-time worker myself, I have certainly found this to be the case and often find myself working on my 'non-working days'. This is not expected by my manager and we have put clear guidelines in place. I recognised that I needed to impose some personal self-discipline to restore the balance. Yet, this is hard to do, particularly if staff want to prove that their preferred arrangement works, and they want to demonstrate their commitment to the organisation. It is therefore important that we help our staff to manage their time and their working pattens, developing new working habits.

More flexible working also requires a different approach to managing performance. Employees need to clearly understand the expectations on them and their objectives and managers need to understand how they manage and motivate their member of staff to deliver to plan.

At Lantra we have offered training in managing remote teams and are encouraging a move from a directive to a more coaching and supportive management style, more suited for individual needs. This is early days and part of our develop-

ment plan over the next 18 months.

The staff at Lantra have been fantastic throughout the Covid pandemic. We have communicated and involved staff as much as possible and they, in return have provided great contributions, embraced new ways of working and demonstrated their commitment to the organisation and our customers, despite all the personal challenges they have faced.

## Creative workplace solutions for different kinds of businesses

I recognise that the nature of our business has made it easier to adopt home working and flexible work patterns and that this is not possible in many organisations. No one solution works and different organisations need to find what works for them.  Not everyone can create opportunities for staff to work from home. But with some creative thinking and by involving staff, flexible arrangements can be possible.  For example, developing alternative shift patterns such as twilight or early shifts for workers who have caring responsibilities or who simply would like to do something different during the core hours in their day! Annualised hours may also work well for industries that have increased workload during certain times of the year, they could be paid an equal monthly salary but recognise that they work a 48 hours week for the busy six months of the year and a 32 hour week in the quieter six months. Job sharing or part-time opportunities may also be possible in some roles. There is often a perception that part-time or flexible workers are not as productive or committed as traditional full time workers. In my personal experience, this is far from reality with increased effort and productivity being the case when individuals can balance all aspects of their life better.

For me the key is to understand your staff. Talk to them about what could improve their work-life balance and involve them in exploring how different options could work. Businesses need to be brave enough to give it a try. A happy and engaged workforce is a very productive workforce.
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