



American Express UK

American Express (Amex) is a leading world financial services and travel company. In the UK there are 6,000 employees based in two centres in London and Brighton plus some other hub locations.

Amex has a strong ethos which has influenced the attitude to employees and their family responsibilities. Samantha Bidwell is Director of Global Diversity and Inclusion: *“Our Blue Box Values culture emphasises strong employee engagement and a shared mindset. These values are based around teamwork, good citizenship, integrity, respect, sharing and being flexible to circumstances. You can really see and feel the values and they have considerable heritage. We have real buy-in for this from both our leaders and employees.”*

All employees are allowed to request a flexible working option. Currently about 30% of employees work a formal flexible arrangement in the UK. A large number of others work flexibly in more informal ways. *“Flexible working has been ingrained in our culture for some time. Being a global company we have always had to work across different time zones. Now it has stepped up a gear, we have become more purposeful about it.”*

Surveys and research evidence have been used to find out what kind of support existing and potential employees would like. This has helped guide the family friendly and flexible working policies. Cost has also been a consideration: *“There are other reasons for the increased openness to flexible working. Recently we have also looked at how we use space better and this has helped develop a more collaborative environment. This has made a contribution to keeping costs down. Good partnership with our technology and real estate functions has made this all possible.”*

Women make up almost 60% of the Amex workforce in the UK. The company sponsors a Women’s Interest Network and representation of women at more senior levels is increasing every year. *“We are always to ensure that we don’t lose momentum on career progression. This is so wasteful for both individual and the company. This is important particularly when women return from maternity leave.”*

Amex sponsors other networks around gay PRIDE and Black and Asian staff. The networks monitor what is happening on the ground and make recommendations for change.

Amex has a variety of methods for assessing progress. They use formal methods such as the ‘scorecard’, the employee annual survey and target setting. In addition they are using focus groups and ‘skip level meetings’ to help people reflect on what is going on. *“We work with the networks and are beginning to use more targets as a way of monitoring progress and assessing our achievements.”*

Samantha Bidwell feels that Amex has not been public about its family friendly culture but is pleased that recent external validation with encourage the company to do more. *“We were very pleased to be third in The Times award for best company to work for. It was a very credible award as it is largely based on employee feedback. This endorses the value we place on flexibility as a benefit for both the business and individuals. This is a really challenging time for business and there are a lot of pressures but we feel we are in a strong position to continue with our focus on employee engagement and move forward with our expansion of flexible working practices across the globe.”*

Supporting Statement

Organisation: American Express UK

Approximate number of employees: 6,000 in UK

Sector: Financial Services

Brief description of nature of business: American Express is a leading global payments, network and travel company, founded in 1850. Headquartered in the World Financial Center in New York City, the company has approximately 65,000 employees worldwide.

1. Why is your organisation a good place for parents to work today? We are looking for evidence (eg, maternity return rate, men working flexibly, extra support for carers, senior level diversity) as well as any programmes or initiatives which mark you out from your competitors.

American Express moved up four places to a No. 3 slot in 'The Times 2009 Top 20 Best Companies to Work For' achieving the top score (72%) of all 20 companies in the external survey for flexible working arrangements and the balance between work and home life. In 2008 the organisation received the Special Award for being 'Best for Wellbeing'.

American Express' success in creating a supportive and flexible environment for its people, especially those with families and carers, can be attributed to its deep rooted, value based culture. The "Blue Box Values" culture emphasises strong employee engagement and a shared mindset that is reflected in its family and carer friendly practices:

Flexible Working

- American Express is driving flexibility into its business, employee and real estate models through expanding the range of choices in how, when and where people work. Therefore, all employees across the globe are eligible to request a flexible working pattern. Approximately, 24% of the global workforce works in a variety of flexible working arrangements and we predict that this will double within the next five years.
- In the UK, approximately 30% of men and women working at American Express have a flexible working arrangement including part-time working, homeworking, compressed working hours and job shares. At junior to middle management, 16% of employees work flexibly and at senior management to executive, 8% work flexibly. (These statistics exclude informal homeworking arrangements).
- We are very proud of the partnership between HR, Real-Estate and Technologies in creating the 'BlueWork' concept which has been piloted in London, Sydney, Singapore and New York to create innovative working environments to support new, flexible business models. Despite the economic climate, global expansion of BlueWork has been accelerated to ensure that both the business and employees benefit from 'Hub, Club, Home and Roam' facilities.
- To create a global community of integrated flexible working practice, the organisation re-launched in February 09 its online flexible working portal called 'Ctrl, Alt, Work' that provides transparency on policies by country and business areas and self-service tools for employees.

Family Friendly Policies

- American Express provides enhanced pay for maternity, paternity and adoption leave. Due to interventions such as mentoring partners, bonus pay scheme the organisation is currently achieving a return to work rate of almost 90% (up from 75% in 2007). All of our policies are available for civil partnerships and employees of either gender.
- The organisation operates a Care-4 voucher child benefit system via a salary sacrifice arrangement and is being expanded to include on-site childcare facilities for select offices.
- Our employee assistance programme provided by BUPA healthcare is available for all employees, their partners and dependants offering a 24/7, 365 days a year confidential and impartial advice service on a range of issues from consumer through to legal rights, financial concerns, debt issues and domestic matters.
- All employees are automatically included in a group healthcare scheme that provides benefits for private medical treatment for illness or injury, routine dental treatment, access to a 24 hour GP helpline and discounted gym membership.

Career Development for Women

- Women make up 64% of the global workforce, 59% in the UK.
- 36% of VP and above positions in the UK are women.
- In Europe in the last three years, we have achieved 21% increase in our middle manager and above female population and a 30% increase in our VP and above female population.
- Our Women's Interest Networks (WIN) in London and Sussex have over 1,000 members creating opportunities for professional development, mentoring, networking, for men, women and carers. Our networks are actively involved with our Regional Diversity Councils, shaping our recruitment and talent development strategies.

2. Please describe up to three milestones, changes or initiatives which helped the organisation become the great place for working parents that it is today.

- 1) Our '**Embrace**' philosophy was established in 2005 to create new ways of working, which excite, engage and enable our people to deliver great business results. Since then, the organisation has seen a significant uplift in leaders' support for flexible working and employees' awareness that flexible working is available for all. Therefore the number of formal full and part time flexible work schedules has increased from 10% to 24% globally in 2008 (note: excludes 'informal' work arrangements so numbers are higher). Global pilots of **Phased Retirement Programmes, Project Resource Teams, Alumni Networks** are also outputs from this initiative which has led to HR's partnership with Real Estate and Technologies on '**BlueWork**'.
- 2) Our involvement with Working Families in 2007/8 on the '**Britain's Best Boss**' external and internal campaign highlighted that great leadership can be achieved as a working parent. Through positive success stories, the campaign promoted active senior leadership support on importance of our family and carer friendly practices. An often quoted milestone in leadership and employee discussions.
- 3) Our EMEA **Employee Networks**, since 2004 have grown from one to seven across the region, acting as pro-active constituents to with our Diversity Councils and HR teams such as recommending changes to our advertising branding, advice on legislative changes and overall reinforcing the organisation's message that flexible working, works!

3. What was the driving force behind these initiative(s)? This might have been, for example, a particular business challenge, internal or external; leadership shown by an individual; employee demand for change, etc.

There are a number driving forces behind these initiatives:

- Being pro-active to demographic shifts such as an ageing workforce in most of our markets and business units i.e. Technologies, Finance and how best to address generational needs.
- Research conducted via surveys, focus groups with potential and existing employees highlighting that flexible working, supportive work environment and family/carer friendly policies are key attraction and retention factors.
- Evidence from our annual employee engagement survey showing that our most highly engaged employees are those who work in a virtual office setting, two or more days a week.
- External and internal brand awareness gained via the Working Families 'Britain's Best Boss Campaign'.
- Collaborative research projects e.g. Sylvia Ann Hewlett from Centre for Work-Life Policy (CWLP) on 'Off-Ramp, On-Ramp' and 'Extreme Jobs' and Towers Perrin on Leadership and Employee Engagement driving up awareness for family friendly practices.
- Improving our employer brand recognition in employer of choice awards/surveys to ensure we remain competitive and are genuinely regarded as a 'Great Place to Work'.
- Overall, being a responsible organisation that despite the current economic climate is recognising the benefits from offering flexible working models and maintaining/expanding employee benefits are critical levers to employee retention, engagement and productivity.

4. How do you think that your initiative(s) or practice, past or current, have influenced other employers?

The reputation enjoyed by American Express around the world has come about as a result of the unique relationship that exists between the organisation and its employees. Far from merely paying lip service to the demands of a changing workforce and evolving societal values, American Express has preferred to address these changes by 'walking the walk'. Our international workplace awards such as 'Great Places to Work' (UK, No.3, Spain, No.2, Argentina, No.1) are testament to this philosophy, influencing other employers that inclusive workplaces must be built on firm foundations - embedded company values, strong leadership and employee engagement. As a result of being part of Aurora's 'Top 50 Where Women Want to Work', Amex was recently featured in the Sunday Telegraph, 'Women Today' resource guide on how it supports working families.

Our Embrace initiative which has generated schemes such as 'Project Resource Teams' (PRT), Phased Retirement Programmes, Alumni Networks and more recently 'BlueWork' and 'Ctrl, Alt, Work' flexible work portal are often used as best practice examples by other organisations. Our various research projects such as The Centre for Work-Life Policy (CWLP) with Sylvia Ann-Hewlett, Towers Perrin highlight our experiences and success stories on leadership and talent development which we share via webcasts, conferences and networking forums.