

# QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE CITY: A report on Work-Life Balance in the City of London

## MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

### *Introduction*

This report is the result of qualitative research carried out with focus groups of City workers, directors and partners by PARENTS AT WORK in February and March 2001. The aim of the research was to establish whether maintaining personal work-life balance is an issue for City workers and - if so - what are the key barriers and solutions to better balance.

### *Research findings*

Findings have been grouped under five key themes:

- 1 Focus groups identified a **prevailing City culture** characterised by high commitment, high reward, challenging work and responsiveness to clients reflected in the need to work long hours. It is a 'macho' culture which militates against flexible working.
- 2 **Attitudes towards work-life balance** vary among City workers. For some, long hours are a positive choice. They are prepared, in the short term, to trade long hours and high pressure for large salaries and career enhancing work. Others want to work shorter hours or more flexibly, but currently find themselves unable to do so.
- 3 **Social expectations and many City jobs have changed** in the space of a generation. The work-life balance debate has extended beyond women with young children to encompass changing expectations among fathers and other younger workers. Senior jobs are perceived to have become more pressured and more demanding leading junior staff to question career aspirations more closely.

- 4 **Barriers to working more flexibly** were identified. The most important is the culture which interprets a desire for balance as lack of commitment. Moreover, there is a widespread lack of confidence that jobs can be worked flexibly while managers are accused of adopting outdated management techniques.
- 5 Focus groups suggested **two solutions** - the need for new, non-standard role models of success and sharing experience of successful flexible working.

### **Challenges for the City**

Based on the evidence we believe the City faces three important challenges:

- 1 City employers have a broad range of work-life balance policies in place, but must now **move the culture** forward to fully include employees who take them up.
- 2 City organisations appear to lag behind counterparts in other sectors when it comes to **exploiting technology to facilitate flexibility**.
- 3 Consistently high **staff attrition** in the face of changing demographic patterns suggests the City may be in danger of losing key skills and of being unable to replace them.

### **Background to work-life balance and the business arguments**

So that readers can place our findings in a broader context, we have provided a short history of developments leading to the emergence of the concept of 'work-life balance'. We have given examples of the business arguments for and against work-life balance initiatives. And we have provided references to the literature on organisational culture and how it may be changed.

To discuss the report findings, or sponsoring further research, please contact Anna Allan ([anna@sustainableworking.co.uk](mailto:anna@sustainableworking.co.uk)) or call 07761 377924

For a copy of the full report please contact Working Families ([www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)) or call 020 7253 7243.

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