

Company Name:

B&Q plc

**Point of contact
for narrative:**

Fraser Longden – People Director

**Business Benefits
Realised:**

Attracting and retaining a diverse talent pool who are able to work flexibly to ensure work-life balance, which improves colleague engagement, individual and company productivity, customer service and ensures our workforce reflects the community it 'serves'

**Business Metrics
demonstrating
value:**

Great customer service, retention of skills, knowledge and expertise, improved attendance and productivity

Background and Context

B&Q has a well-known legacy for employing older workers and for offering a range of flexible working arrangements to all of our employees.

People are at the heart of what we do and we believe that a diverse workforce and offering flexible working arrangements creates a mix of talents and makes us a successful business. B&Q are proud that so many of our people not only develop their skills and careers whilst working for us but also have the opportunity to enjoy have a second or third career with us.

We are a founder member of the Employers Forum on Age - now the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion - a network created by employers to remove discrimination and promote inclusion in the workplace.

The environment in our organisation has seen us win the Gallup worldwide award for outstanding Employee Engagement for the last five years, winner of The Observer Ethical Business Award 2010 and ranked one of the Top 50 Places where women want to work. In 2012, B&Q picked up the award for Best 50+ employer. Organised and presented by the 50+ Show and solely based on the internet nominations and votes of those who are aged 50 and over. We received this recognition due to our continued belief that our customers, colleagues and business benefit from a mix of ages working together, to provide the best in new ideas and experience.

B&Q is the UK's largest home improvement retailer employing over 30,000 employees. We are proud of the diversity within our workforce.

- Our eldest employee is 90, our youngest is 16
- with over a quarter (28%) of store employees aged over 50
- nearly 64% of our employees work a formal flexible working arrangement
- 49 employees on a term time contract 2 of which are male
- Our male/female split is 56%/44%
- 87% of our employees return from maternity leave.

In the late 1980s, we faced a number of challenges:

- Period of rapid expansion & growth
- Reduced supply - Low unemployment, competition in recruitment
- Young workforce with higher labour turnover
- Demographics were changing
- Customer perception

We had to start thinking differently about our potential talent pool so we decided to target older workers recognising that the aging population had a commercial fit with the core of our business:-

- More likely to be Home Owners
- Experience of DIY
- Reflective of our customer base
- Core understanding of what makes great customer service
- Likely to be able to work non-traditional working hours

However, we did face assumptions and prejudices:-

- Ability of older workers to adapt in a fast moving, customer lead environment
- Older workers' training needs and learning styles
- Expectation that they would struggle with any computer based systems
- That their perception of B&Q would not attract or retain this population
- That older workers would struggle with the physical demands of the role

We made a bold statement by opening a store in Macclesfield in 1989 solely staffed by over 50s and were immediately surprised by the results

- Phenomenal response rate for vacancies
- Extra time allowed for training proved unnecessary
- Wider skills base and sharing of life experiences
- Over 50's wanted to work – Self-esteem & financial necessity as well as making new friends

Through an independent study by Warwick University, we were able to validate our business case. Compared to our other stores:-

- Profits were 18% higher
- Staff turnover was six times lower
- 39% lower absenteeism
- 59% less shrinkage
- Improved customer perception of service
- Increased skills base

B&Q now accepts that a balanced workforce which reflects the community in which we trade and offering a range for flexible working arrangements will always work best.

- All of our policies are discrimination free
- We offer flexible and varied on and off the job training arrangements to suit the needs of all of our employees
- Every new employee completes our Diversity e-learning training focused on Respect for People
- We deploy our people so that we ensure we provide second to none customer service when and where our customers expect.

Over the years we have also received recognition for our innovative flexible working policies which have always been more generous than the statutory minimum. Available to all employees irrespective of caring responsibilities, we encourage formal, informal, ad hoc and short term flexible working arrangements to allow us to remain agile whilst also attracting and retaining talent.

We aim to support our employees to balance work with their other commitments and personal interests whilst also ensuring we continue to offer a great service when and where our customers expect.

- Our term time contracts are open to grandparents, not just parents or guardians.
- We allow employees to accrue hours for KIT (Keep In Touch) days whilst on maternity, adoption and paternity leave so that they can take this time back after returning to work to spend further time with their children.
- If both parents worked for B&Q we had always allowed them to share the mothers' unpaid maternity leave.
- Our phased return to work arrangements ensures our employees are not financially worse off even if their return to work forfeits their entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay.
- We offer both dual role and dual location contracts to allow either students or those needing an extra income to continue to work with us and share their knowledge and expertise of the business.
- Employees who accrue lieu time for working additional hours have three months to plan their leave.
- Our annual leave arrangements incorporate the hours accrued for Bank/Public Holidays. Every employee accrues annual leave hours each time a Bank/Public Holiday occurs based on their contracted hours not on their contracted days. This means every employee has the full calendar year to plan and take their minimum 6.6 weeks annual leave providing them and the business more flexibility without any detriment to our business activities.

We also consider flexible working, as well as reasonable adjustment arrangements, for employees with disabilities to ensure we are able retain their knowledge and skills within the organisation.

Case Study 1

B&Q's eldest employee, Albert Billington, recently celebrated his 90th birthday. He is happy being one of Britain's oldest workers and has no plans to quit. His manager says he is a shining example of how age is just a number.

Albert joined B&Q at the age of 67 after a 53 year career in the print industry. But on his retirement he found he missed the discipline and camaraderie of work so he started working for B&Q in 1990 at our Sutton Store in South London as a part time Customer Advisor. He worked there until the age of 80 when he left to live in Bristol but it wasn't long before he joined B&Q again as a part time Customer Advisor at our Longwell Green store in Bristol.

Albert is a very popular employee. Because he enjoys DIY and has completed numerous home improvement projects through the years this puts him in good stead when he comes to passing on his home improvement knowledge to both his colleagues and customers. He really is a shining example of the fact that age is really just a number.

As a naturally gregarious person, Mr Billington says enjoys meeting different people and now has several close friends he had met through his work.

Case Study 2

Julia Stallard is 69 years old and joined B&Q in 1998 when our store in Longwell Green opened.

Although she now works 13.5 hours each week she originally started on a full time contract at the age of 55 on the Hardware department having worked in her father's Hardware shop during her school days. When she left school she went straight into the business to work full time.

After then spending time in the Leisure Industry and running her own pubs for around 20 years. She then went back into the Hardware business as the manager of a Hardware shop for 13 years before joining B&Q and sharing her vast knowledge of Hardware and using her years of being in the leisure industry to provide great customer service.

Case Study 3

Ken (Harry) James will be 81 years old in October. He joined B&Q when Longwell opened in October 1998.

Ken started full time at B&Q as a Customer Advisor and has gradually reduced his hours since 2003 when his wife had a stroke. Ken is also a full time carer now and enjoys his time with B&Q as it keeps him active and he likes the interaction with customers and colleagues alike. He now works 10.5 per week.

Prior to joining B&Q having left school in 1947 and training to be an engineer Ken joined the Royal Navy to be a Radar and Radar Mechanic until he left in 1953. He then had joined Fussell & Watts Ltd, a box making company in 1956 where he worked his way up the ranks and became Company director in 1982.

Case Study 4

Jas Sohal, a HR Business Partner at B&Q Store Support Office in Hampshire and mother of three children, joined B&Q in September 2001 on a full-time 6 month contract. Being a qualified solicitor she was perfectly placed as an Employment Legal Specialist, proving herself to be a valuable asset to the team and was soon offered a permanent position.

In 2004, keen to expand her career beyond law, Jas joined the Retail HR team as an HR Advisor. Jas has since taken on roles focusing on engagement within B&Q.

After taking a year's maternity leave Jas returned in 2009 to a full-time position as an HR Advisor, later deciding to request a part-time position. Jas is now enjoying a successful job share role as an HR Business Partner with a colleague, Jo Holmes, allowing them both more time with their families.

Jas says *"B&Q is truly a great company to work for, giving people the opportunity to shine and the support they need to make their career ambitions a reality. The company's flexible working has been a great benefit for me, enabling me to get a good balance in terms of fulfilling work life as well as the time required to dedicate to my family."*

Case Study 5

Cheron Evans started worked for the company for 18 years. Cheron's journey began as a Customer Advisor in our first ever B&Q Warehouse store, from where she soon progressed to Department Supervisor and then successfully onto Trading Manager. Having studied part-time at Derby University for a Certificate in Personnel Practice, Cheron successfully applied for B&Q HR development programme and took the role of HR Advisor in store.

Cheron has continued in this role whilst having 3 children, the flexibility of the business has enabled her to work part-time but continue with her development at management level. Cheron is now on a development programme to progress onto the next stage of her career path as Regional People Partner and is now back to working full time hours.

Cheron tells us *"B&Q is a really down to earth and family friendly company to work for. The flexible hours have given me the chance to progress my career by studying part time and to spend quality time with my children."*

Case Study 6

Chamaine Whyte is a full-time Supervisor from B&Q Peckham. Chamaine joined in 2010 initially working part-time as a Customer Advisor on Checkouts. Her potential was quickly recognised in store and within one month of joining she progressed to a full-time Supervisor in our Front End team.

In this role Chamaine has engaged and inspired her team with continued success whilst developing her already strong leadership skills. Chamaine has completed numerous courses and has since received a full-time contract. Chamaine adds: *“B&Q is a fantastic place to work as it really gives you the opportunity to progress and develop your career within the company at all levels. I have learnt so much in the time I have been here!”*



As a retail business, we take most of our Sales and have the most customer visits over the weekend.

Following a review it was evident that our deployed resources didn't match our sales and customer flow during the weekend and we concluded our service provision and potential to drive sales during peak trading hours needed addressing.

As a result, a national change programme focused on weekend rotas and coverage and clarified the aspirational working patterns of our retail colleagues. We undertook a programme that included the national business case along with education and briefing packs to support managers with their discussions with their teams and ensuring any necessary local changes where applied consistently across the estate.

Over 20,000 employees were consulted to rota their hours to better suit our customers. This has resulted in:-

- an increase in our weekend coverage to 16.4%.
- Our customers noticing an *overall* improvement in the service they receive – and they've told us about it. Sundays in particular have seen the most positive uplift in customer service.

In the last year we have increased weekend Sales participation and weekend hours participation.

Sales participation up 1.5% to 33.9%
 Hours participation up 3.5% to 28.7%

Additional Articles/Case Studies



Sally Gunnell
issue.pdf

