

# Bin the 9-to-5!

Tackle the skills shortage through flexible working, argues **Helen Townend**



In a recent interview, I was asked by a young dad if, were he successful, it would be possible to leave early one day a week due to childcare issues. My immediate response was “Of course”. Post interview, my co-assessor questioned why he had hesitated to say yes immediately to this request. In this digital age, why do we cling to the idea of bums on seats, 9-to-5?

The geoscience sector does not fit into the 9-to-5 framework and it doesn't need to. Today's technology allows us to work anywhere 24/7. The key to flexible working is efficiency and productivity, to enable staff to hit clear targets.

Ours is a flexible industry, requiring site visits and fieldwork across the world. Field data collection underpins our work and provides valuable learning opportunities for our teams. Fieldwork is vital to ensure we continue to provide practical solutions, rooted in reality. We therefore expect flexibility from our employees; they should be able to expect the same from us in return.

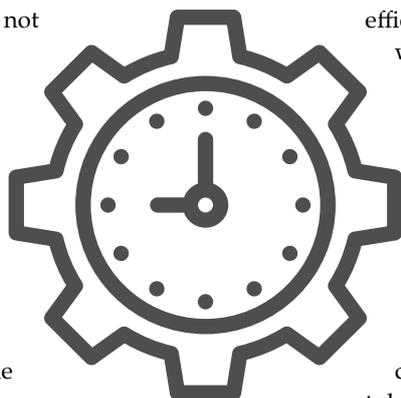
Flexible working requests are most likely to come from working parents, but there are many other valid reasons to work fewer or variable hours, such as a reduced commute, caring for an elderly parent, volunteering or making time to improve your mental wellbeing.

## Investment in career progression

Flexible working is sometimes perceived as a barrier to career progression, but why should that be? This outdated notion supports discrimination and hinders diversity. In our industry, where knowledge and experience are king, it is our employees who provide that knowledge and experience, irrespective of the number of hours listed on their contract.

We lose women in their 30s and 40s as

they become bored and stagnate in positions where they are overlooked due to supposedly full-time requirements of subsequent roles. Geoscience industries need to recognise the long-term potential of our 20- and 30-something women, rather than focusing on the logistical difficulties a period of theoretical maternity leave may cause. We must invest in these intelligent, competent, efficient, multitasking women who can successfully apply their skillset to anything thrown at them.



Embracing flexibility for all staff will enable working parents to share parenting responsibilities without detriment to either career, and opens a company to a potential talent pool that is often

ignored and overlooked by more traditional businesses.

## Balancing life's logistics

Technology and smart working can assist in attaining work-life balance. As an added bonus, employees are loyal to flexible positions that tally the logistics of work, home and private commitments. Those employees may not work fulltime, but the business benefits from their knowledge and experience, and with advancing technology, they can impart that knowledge as and when it is required.

The number of young people opting to study geoscience is waning, which will only act to intensify the current shortage of trained geoscience professionals that our industries so desperately need. With a more flexible approach to rule for employment, we enhance the chances of both attracting and retaining a diverse set of the best people into our sector.

Helen Townend, Technical Director, Amey Consulting and Rail

## SOAPBOX CALLING!

Soapbox is open to contributions from all Fellows. You can always write a letter to the Editor, of course, but perhaps you feel you need more space?

If you can write it entertainingly in **500 words**, the Editor would like to hear from you. Email your piece, and a self-portrait, to [sarah.day@geolsoc.org.uk](mailto:sarah.day@geolsoc.org.uk). Copy can only be accepted electronically. No diagrams, tables or other illustrations please.

Pictures should be of print quality – please take photographs on the largest setting on your camera, with a plain background.

Precedence will always be given to more topical contributions. Any one contributor may not appear more often than once per volume (once every 12 months).

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