

MAYOR OF LONDON



Managing an Agile Workforce

London Healthy Workplace Award (LHWA) – Webinar

15 October 2020

OVERVIEW

Managing an Agile Workforce in the COVID-19 Era

This presentation provides an overview of an LHWA webinar which took place on 15th October 2020. These slides provide a summary of the talks from the two guest speakers, including extracts from the talks.

The full webinar is available to watch at: <https://vimeo.com/482036262>

AGENDA

17:00 – 18:00 Short presentations, panel debate and Q&A

- **Matt Creamer** Senior Policy Officer | GLA
- **Natasha Harris** HR Director | HM Revenue and Customs
- **David Blackburn** Chief People Office | Financial Services Compensation Scheme

18:00 – 18:10 Break

18:10 – 18:45 Group Discussions and Networking

Webinar available at: <https://vimeo.com/482036262>



OVERVIEW OF TALKS

Natasha Harris

Natasha provided an overview of the changes made to working practices in HMRC in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the transformation of working practices to extend home working, the impact of flexible and remote working on staff engagement and the steps taken by HMRC to support employee wellbeing.

Creating a flexible workforce was a huge task

“In terms of enabling us to work in different working arrangements; things happened in two phases. We had a *mobilise phase* which was about changing our configuration from an organisation that was office-based to one which was largely working from home. The second phase was the *stabilise phase*. In the mobilised phase the IT function enabled the majority of the 64,000 workforce at HMRC to be able to work from home. The IT teams did that by extending the network capacity so people could access our systems, but not only that, they sent home thousands of bundles of equipment to those who were performing critical roles.”

The organisation did a lot to allay fears about coming to the office

“We have had colleagues going into the office [with critical worker status] over the course of the last seven months ... and we had these two economies running [home vs office working], and the perceived unfairness by colleagues was made known to us in no uncertain terms. We did support colleagues who were working in the office to travel safely to and from work. We had to provide managers with a lot of support to ensure that the request for colleagues to work in the office was really clear, and that nobody who felt wholly uncomfortable being in the office was made to do so. We had to provide a lot of reassurance around the safety of our offices and we did that via videos and testimonials from colleagues in the office, which really helped, as well as leaders themselves working in the office role modelling, and demonstrating that it was safe to do so.”



OVERVIEW OF TALKS

Natasha Harris

The organisation saw an unexpected uplift in staff engagement

The biggest opportunity that we have found has been the increase in employee engagement. The last poll survey taken in July, showed an increase of 13 percentage points ... for HMRC that's pretty unprecedented. We also ran a pulse survey to ensure that there were different questions and different emphasis and that gave us a really rich picture about what was driving changes in engagement and how people were feeling in the organisation. Over three quarters of respondents agreed that HMRC was doing a good job helping them to feel connected to one another. Managers have reported that they feel more connected to their teams, feeling that there's more space and time to get to know individual circumstances. And we, we found that managers were making much more time to connect with their teams on a much more informal basis than the typical team meeting ... over 90% of colleagues agreed that their manager trusted them to do their job effectively. That was pretty profound for us. In previous annual poll surveys we had found that levels of trust have been much lower in the organisation.



OVERVIEW OF TALKS

Natasha Harris

Strategies for supporting wellbeing were paramount

“We know that colleagues were often in less than ideal environments at home; in some cases multiple adults trying to work from home, and without full risk assessments ... We were also concerned around about loneliness, about domestic abuse, and technology fatigue, just to name a few things. We know that colleagues had a range of care responsibilities which were complicated by school closures the closure of care homes, many colleagues continue to work juggling those responsibilities and for those who weren't able to, and we supported them with paid, and unpaid special leave.

We've needed to be quite responsive and adaptive to policymaking, and we've worked with trade unions to develop suites of policies that have supported a range of different circumstances. And we've also empowered leaders and managers to make decisions based on their own judgement.

We've used new and existing tools such as Yammer, to create additional vehicles to engage with our workforce around wellbeing. The guidance and support that we have for colleagues is all in one place. We've been relentless at communicating around wellbeing, by many mediums, and we continue to ensure that leaders and managers have the information they need to be able to support their teams.”

OVERVIEW OF TALKS

David Blackburn

David summarised what the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) does and then went on to talk about measures they have taken to change working practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are some of the key messages ...

Flexible working is the default option

“Our starting point at the FSCS has been for about the last 2 ½ years, every job in our organisation is flexible. So we turned the process for requesting flexible working on its head and said, rather than every employee having to explain to us or justify why the role could be worked flexibly, we said, our starting point is that every job in the organisation is flexible, that is genuinely our belief. So, at the beginning [of the pandemic] from March, we already had an organisation where about 90% of the workforce was working flexibly in some way or another.

Working hours are now more flexible

“[Since the pandemic] we’ve evolved some of our flexible working principles ... we've got rid of core hours and we now have a seven to seven day. Not only do we recognise that colleagues want greater flexibility about where and when they work. They want greater flexibility in the working day itself, and what they might want to do is work from home between seven and 10. They might then want to come into the office for a series of meetings, avoiding peak-time public transport, do that for a couple of hours, and then go home, maybe have a break, maybe pick the kids up from school, and then maybe do an hour between six and seven. We've been very explicit ... your day is entirely down to you and your team and your line manager for you to structure.”

OVERVIEW OF TALKS

David Blackburn

Regular use of staff surveys identified people's biggest fears

“We ran a survey in August, when we had started to think about a phased staged return to the office ... we asked people to categorise how they were feeling between very anxious, slightly anxious, comfortable, and excited and 78% of our employees, said they were feeling some level of anxiety. When you drilled into the reasons why they were feeling anxious, they weren't feeling anxious about the FSCS, they weren't feeling about anxious about fact that we had created a COVID secure working environment they trusted us. What everyone's anxiety was driven by was accessing public transport.”

The office still plays an vital role in our work

“we think that the office has an amazingly important part to play in our working lives ... permanent home working, actually, is not something we think is right for the FSCS. We think that the office is incredibly central to our culture of collaboration, creativity, and, human interaction, the value of human interaction. We recognise that actually what we need to do is give people a degree of certainty and clarity around what that means. And so what we call that is our 40/40 rule ... 40% of our workforce, 40% of the time, on any average day, we expect to see in the city.”

We invested in home workers

“[We recognized] the importance of creating the right having the right home environment, and not just assuming that everybody's working situation is, is fit for purpose, we introduced a new £200 equipment allowance for all employees at the FSCS, to support them.”

FURTHER INFORMATION

- **You can view that full webinar at:** <https://vimeo.com/482036262>
- **London Healthy Workplace Award** – Learn more and sign-up to the award. Once you've signed-up, we'll introduce you to the Healthy Workplace Lead in your borough who can explain more and guide you through the application process
<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/health/london-healthy-workplace-award/about-london-healthy-workplace-award>

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