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BABY COME BACK

■ With other professions trailblazing innovative and flexible new working packages, property firms risk losing female staff returning to work after maternity leave.
Lydia Stockdale reports

'SURVEYING IS PREDOMINANTLY ABOUT MARKET knowledge and contacts – and if you take a long time off to have a family, you will be in danger of losing track of both by the time you go back to work.' So says Pippa Harrison, an associate director in Savills' hotel and leisure team, who returned to work earlier this month, six months after having her second baby.

Harrison is a successful working mother. But according to the Exemplar Employer report commissioned by the government, property is not viewed as a great place to be for those hoping to be encouraged and supported as they return to working life after having a child.

While the number of women in property is increasing – 28% of graduates are now female, and women make up 15% of the industry, which is 5% up on five years ago – services firms are failing to introduce adequate female-friendly initiatives.

Last month, property made only one appearance on the list of more than 100 'exemplar employers' that are carrying out innovative work to address issues of equal pay,

flexible working, occupational segregation, recruiting and retaining women, training and development, and assisting women returning to work after having a child.

English Partnerships was the industry's sole representative on the list, which was compiled for the Government Equalities Office by Opportunity Now, a charity that aims to overcome the challenges employers face in recruiting, retaining and developing the careers of women. A large number of banks, accountants and management firms made the list. KPMG's flexible working scheme, along with Citi's managing maternity scheme and Ernst & Young's retention of women programme, were all deemed 'exemplary'.

Opportunity Now director Sarah Williams-Gardener says: 'It is my belief that the property sector has been guilty of fostering a macho culture, making it more difficult for women to succeed. Investment banks and City firms face exactly the same issues. The difference is that, as a sector, they are very attuned to the fact that, if they don't create workplaces where women can succeed, then they will lose them.'

ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL

Earlier this month the new RICS Equal Opportunities Working Group, which is expected to address areas such as those highlighted in the exemplar employers list, had its first

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meeting. It is taking over from its Raising the Ratio Task Force which, over the last eight years, has aimed to represent and communicate the issues and challenges faced by women across the property profession.

All the services firms *Property Week* spoke to believe they offer equal opportunities to their employees (see boxes below and overleaf). Joanna Embling, partner at Cushman & Wakefield, suspects that those compiling the list of exemplar employers were unaware of the work going on within property companies.

She points out that numerous property firms were included on *The Sunday Times* Best 100 Companies to Work For list, and argues that the industry is 'alive to the issues'. 'Good business practice takes for granted recruitment and promotion on the basis of merit,' she says.

Maria Francké, national chairman of the Association of Women in Property and head of planning and development in Scotland for Drivers Jonas, believes the property industry's 'male-dominated reputation' has done it a disservice. 'We are aware of some good work by property companies where initiatives are under way to encourage and support women aspiring to top managerial roles,' she says.

But Louise Ellison, a former member of the Raising the Ratio Task Force and now research director of the Investment Property Forum, says there are 'undoubtedly a limited number of initiatives going on within organisations'.

A Raising the Ratio study published at the end of 2006 showed that while the industry had increased the number of women entering property, there was a big drop in the number of RICS women members over the age of 40.

Forty three per cent of women who had left the industry said the need to spend time with their children and family was their main reason for not re-entering the surveying profession, while 38% said restricted career progression put them off returning.

'While the property industry has come far, there is a long way to go in terms of monitoring ourselves and giving people good leadership,' says Ellison. 'Companies may have policies in place to make sure pay is equal, but unless you're checking, it's difficult to make it reality.'

The firms that made it on to the government's 'exemplar employers' list offered more than the average equal opportunities employer. Williams-Gardener gives a list of seven points which, if adopted and administered correctly, can lead to a company being classed as 'exemplary' (see box, p91).

English Partnerships was included on the list because its Women into Management Programme goes a step further in terms of helping women assess their own career goals. Kitt Walker, regeneration manager for the East Midlands was one of its first participants.

'If you're thinking of starting a family, it is even more important to position yourself to make sure you are not left behind,' she says.

TEAM WORK

Company policies are one thing, but it takes managers and teams to ensure they are both accepted and successful. Pippa Harrison, for example, left CB Richard Ellis after having her first baby to join Savills, as it offered her more flexible working practices.

'At the end of the day company policies can only be successful if management is willing to be flexible and works with its employees to put the policies into practice,' she says.

While CBRE has policies designed to help women returning to work, including generous financial incentives, she found that working closer to home on a regular basis was not an option within her team there. This was partly because of the fact that there was no local CBRE office for her to work from.

Her manager at Savills, head of hotels Philip Johnston, says individuals working part-time bring a different perspective to the team.

'Also, they cover you at different times of the day, so from the client's point of view there is always someone to talk to,' he says.

The realities women face when returning to work after having a child are highlighted by Catherine Penman, a partner in commercial research at Knight Frank, who had her first child 18 months ago and is expecting another this September. She used to be head of her department, but has gone back to work two days a week as a partner.

'Knight Frank was accommodating when I said what I wanted to do, but the business has to be profitable,' she says. 'If I wasn't

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bringing in sufficient money, it wouldn't work.'

By allowing Penman to work two days a week, Knight Frank is retaining talent for the longer term, which makes good business sense.

Returning to work after having children is not just a career decision. It is also a financial one, as women have to factor commuting and childcare costs into their calculations.

'When you've been working hard for 10 years, it's difficult to walk away,' says Harrison.

With more women than ever entering the property industry, the new RICS Equal Opportunities Working Group, along with individual property companies, need to find innovative ways to stop more women having to do just that. ■

OPPORTUNITY NOW'S SEVEN-POINT PLAN FOR A MORE EQUAL WORKPLACE

1 Map out your current situation. Before you can begin to find the most appropriate route to success. You should be looking to see where women are throughout the organisation by grade and department.

2 Take action on equal pay. Conducting an equal pay audit should be the first step, followed by a planned set of actions to address any issues that are uncovered.

3 Consult other women in your organisation. What are their concerns? Are there any areas of your corporate culture that are off-putting? If policies are to be successful, there must be commitment at a senior level to drive

them through. Leaders' behaviour can send powerful messages.

4 Establish and promote flexible working and encourage male participation in flexible working. Results should be rewarded, not the number of hours spent in the office.

5 Use open-recruitment tools such as advertising and employment agencies, rather than relying on informal social networks and referrals.

6 Promotions within the organisation should also be transparent.

7 Ensure that a critical mass of women are in executive positions.

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INNOVATIVE POLICIES FOR EQUALITY: HOW THE BIGGEST PROPERTY SERVICES FIRMS COMPARE

SAVILLS

- Benchmarks all salaries by status and peer group as part of an annual remuneration process
- runs training initiatives aimed at supporting family-friendly policies, which have improved in recent years
- measures the number of women it recruits and their progression through the company by grade and role.

KNIGHT FRANK

- Conducts a pay audit twice a year, rewarding people according to experience, results and what they bring to the business
- flexible working arrangements are evaluated on a case-by-case basis
- 21% of its UK staff at associate level and above are women
- in 2006, it recruited 16 graduates to its commercial team in London, 11 of whom were women.

DTZ

- Reviews salaries and bonuses annually and cross-references by department and across genders, regularly monitoring its male and female ratios
- offers flexible working options
- 23% of those working part-time are at associate director level or above
- 20% of associate directors and directors in the UK are women
- offers women on maternity leave a 'return to work' bonus.

ATISREAL

- Conducts a regular pay audit, and measures the number of women it recruits, and their progress throughout the organisation by grade and role
- anyone with family commitments is given the option of working flexible hours and working from home where necessary
- offers a 'return to work' bonus for women returning from maternity leave
- 16% of associate directors and directors are female.

CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

- Benchmarks salaries and other benefits internally and against its competitors
- considers requests for alternative working arrangements from employees with at least 12 months' service
- 40% of UK-based staff, 30% of UK-based associates and 10% of its partners are female
- sponsors the Association of Women In Property and has own internal networking organisation Cush Women.

continued overleaf →

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KING STURGE

- All salaries are reviewed on an annual basis
- analysis of the average and median salaries by grade demonstrates very minimal difference between male and female partners and staff
- considers flexible working applications from all staff on a case-by-case basis
- has 25 female partners out of a total of 314
- monitors male and female ratios at graduate level
- encourages internal networking, mentoring and coaching relationships.

JONES LANG LASALLE

- Reviews parity across grades and roles, and monitors female and male split across the groups and across the grades
- promotes flexible working
- 35% of its fee earners are female. 21% of associate directors and 26% of national directors are female
- 71% of individuals who have been on maternity leave in the last five years have returned to work
- has been listed in *The Times Where Women Want to Work* Top 50 for the past two years
- sponsors Women in Property
- has an established mentoring programme.

GVA GRIMLEY

- Does not conduct a regular equal pay audit, but the human resources department is involved in all salary reviews and promotions
- has an equal opportunities policy and is relaunching its family-friendly policy
- considers requests for flexible working
- is due to publish new home-working policy
- has 53 female managers in senior positions compared with 349 males
- has a Developing Our Talent programme
- Does not measure the number of women it recruits as it 'takes a fair approach to recruitment to ensure we are getting the best person, regardless of their sex'.

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COLLIERS CRE

- Does not conduct a formal equal pay audit
- salary reviews are carried out on an individual basis based on performance and are reviewed by the human resources team
- most flexible working applications are trialled
- 15% of directors and associate directors are female
- measures the progression of female staff through close monitoring of starters and leavers
- has an equal opportunities policy that is supported by training initiatives.

DRIVERS JONAS

- Reviews all salaries every year and carries out a pay audit
- was the highest-ranking property company on *The Sunday Times* Best 100 Companies to Work For list this year
- promotes initiatives such as Women in Property
- accommodates returning mothers by giving a choice of flexible working options
- 11 of its 90 partners and two of its 22 equity partners are female
- Measures the number of women it recruits, and where female employees progress to throughout the organisation by grade and role.