

My flexibility story

Some articles in this series have revealed enormous difficulties in implementing flexible work practices. Sometimes, however, it all goes quite smoothly. **Jane Menzies** found that working in a stable team within a large firm provided a supportive environment for transitioning back to work from maternity leave.

I commenced at King & Wood Mallesons (KWM) in February 2012 as a graduate solicitor.

I now practise in the dispute resolution group in the Brisbane office. KWM is a multinational law firm with more than 2700 lawyers across more than 30 international offices.

I returned to the firm from maternity leave in January this year. I spent my first three months working two days a week, which proved to be the ideal transition back to work.

I cannot say that careful planning and consideration resulted in this arrangement. It came about because my daughter secured two days of child care a week from the start of the calendar year. I decided to return to work at the same time, which was a little earlier than originally planned. However, it worked out really well as I was able to slowly transition back into work but still had a lot of time at home with my young child. If I had my time again, I would repeat the process.

After three months, I changed to working a nine-day fortnight. I had the benefit of several working mothers around me who suggested that I take a day a fortnight to arrange things on the home front and to spend some time with my daughter.

That worked reasonably well for the first few weeks but, as time went on, I found that I was getting into the habit of making myself available for work on my day off. That was a choice I was making, rather than through pressure from my colleagues, but eventually I decided to simplify things and return to a full-time role. I still have flexibility in my role and work every second Friday from home.

I was very well supported by the firm through the transition from maternity leave back to work. Typically, part-time arrangements at KWM involve a three-day working week but, through open discussion with my supervising partner, we agreed to a two-day week for a short-term period. My supervising partner and colleagues were very supportive during that period and, I hasten to add, have continued to be so ever since.



By working on larger matters, I could focus on discrete tasks that could generally be completed in two days. I found that period really rewarding and at the end of the three months, I was primed to return to a larger workload.

To my mind, the opportunity to work flexibly is a real benefit of working at a large law firm. The dispute resolution team at KWM in Brisbane is quite large and has been relatively stable since I joined the group. This environment supports the varying flexible arrangements across the team.

I have been fortunate to have direct role models in the team, as there are several other more senior lawyers who are also working mothers, including a partner. They have each tailored their working arrangements to their home lives and that has made me feel comfortable doing the same.

It has also meant that the team is conditioned to part-time and flexible arrangements and, because of that, I felt completely at ease when negotiating my arrangements.

This story appears on behalf of the Flexibility Working Group, an initiative of the Queensland Law Society and Women Lawyers Association of Queensland. The group needs your story – good or bad. Please contact flexibility@qls.com.au and share your experiences with flexibility in the legal profession. Jane Menzies is a solicitor at King & Wood Mallesons.



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