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## Case Study: Maddocks

# Laying down the law on flexible work practices

*Major Australian law firm, Maddocks, has a proud record as a fair and flexible employer, having been recognised several times in recent years for its workplace practices and strong focus on its staff.*

This year, Maddocks was again recognised as an Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace (EOWA) Employer of Choice for Women for the sixth consecutive year.

The firm is one of only sixteen employers recognised by the Victorian Government's Working Families Council for developing innovative programs and practices to improve the work and family balance of their employees, and was a recipient of the inaugural Fair and Flexible Employer Award in 2009.

Maddocks is ranked as one of Australia's top 20 law firms with offices in Melbourne and Sydney. A key part of the organisation's strategy is to be the best law firm to work in, it's no surprise that innovation in the area of flexible work policies is a major focus.

As an example, a recent equal opportunity survey carried out by the firm found that males were hesitant to request flexible work arrangements. Investigations are now underway to determine why males are more reluctant than females to utilise the many flexible work arrangements offered by Maddocks and it's likely the outcomes will be added to the firm's policies.

"Maddocks prides itself on having a unique and values-driven culture, respected and adhered to by partners and employees. One of our core values is respect for the value of the individual and diversity," says Liz Ryan, Maddocks' Director – People and Culture.

The firm established an Equal Opportunity and Diversity Committee in 2008 as a sub-committee of the Board. Chaired by the CEO, the committee addresses all issues that relate to the role of women at Maddocks including initiatives around promotion, career development, discrimination and other issues that are important to women.

Currently, only 17% of the firm's partners are women. Over the past 15 years, 12 women and 17 men have progressed internally to partnership, however, to support strong growth the firm has needed to recruit externally. The firm says it is symptomatic of the profession that when executive search lists are produced, 95% of possible candidates are men.

Maddocks has identified several factors behind the low number of female partners and the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Committee is preparing a paper with aspirational goals to increase the number of female partners that will soon go to the Board for approval.

Fair and flexible workplace policies and initiatives at Maddocks have contributed to a staff turnover rate that is well below industry averages, with 16.5% of staff having been with the firm for 10 years or more and 40% for five years or more.

"Maddocks, by supporting our individual circumstances, is sending a clear message that we are each valued regardless of how and when we work and that our individual contribution will continue to be acknowledged and rewarded," says Jannett, Shared Services Manager with the firm.



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Among the flexible work arrangements available to staff are:

- > **Quality part-time work – 18% of staff at all levels of the organisation work part-time. Four partners (including one male), two directors, 15 senior associates and special council as well as other staff work part-time.**
- > **Job sharing – 25 staff currently job share.**
- > **Non-standard hours – Many staff work non-standard hours to assist with school picks up and drop offs. One staff member who wanted to work full-time but was unable to find childcare on Wednesdays swapped days and now works Saturday, which assist with her family commitments.**
- > **Working remotely – Staff can log in from home, adding greater flexibility. One staff member moved to the Kimberleys in WA for about six months to support his partner's career and continued to work for the firm remotely.**
- > **Leave of absence – a significant number of staff have taken long periods of leave of absence (up to two years).**
- > **Purchased annual leave – a new policy being implemented this year allows staff to buy up to four weeks extra annual leave.**
- > **Parental leave – 6 weeks to a maximum of 12 weeks paid maternity leave and 2 weeks to a maximum of 4 weeks paid paternity leave, depending on length of service.**
- > **Personal leave – the firm offers generous personal leave provisions, including carer's leave.**

As a sign of how well the firm's policies are received, 100% of women return from maternity leave and virtually all of them return to part-time and other flexible working arrangements.

When staff go on extended leave, particularly female staff going on maternity leave, there is often a concern about career progression. Maddocks makes every effort to ensure these concerns are managed properly and has a number of programs such as 'Keep in Touch' lunches for pregnant staff and those on maternity leave.


In addition, the firm is in the process of developing a formal 'Corporate Mums Program' to further assist the transition of women back into the firm and their jobs.

Maddock's believes that its family initiatives have been successful, however, appreciates that to remain at the forefront in the industry, their initiatives and policies need to be constantly reviewed and updated if necessary.

One initiative currently being considered by the People and Culture team at the request of senior management is the viability of the firm closing at 3pm each Friday during daylight savings to enable staff to enjoy more leisure time. It's a great example of how the firm is prepared to place staff first as it strives to meet it's commitment to be a great place to work.

#### Contact for further information:

Liz Ryan, Director – People and Culture  
Maddocks  
Tel: 9288 0516  
Email: [liz.ryan@maddocks.com.au](mailto:liz.ryan@maddocks.com.au)



The Victorian Government's **Fair and Flexible Employer Recognition Awards** are designed to recognise employers who have developed innovative programs in policy and practice that improve the work and family balance of their employees.

Fair and flexible working arrangements benefit staff, employers and businesses as they:

- > Help staff manage their work and family balance.
- > Help businesses attract and retain the best people.

The Working Families Council (WFC) promotes the award and encourages businesses to set up fair and flexible working practices.

Visit [www.ways2work.business.vic.gov.au](http://www.ways2work.business.vic.gov.au) for more information.

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