

# We must retain the right people

FOR years the most successful businesses have recognised that customers are individuals. Businesses of all kinds have been designing products and services for specific types of people for years. Ever more sophisticated methods are being used to refine how businesses identify your individual needs. Innovations such as loyalty cards, enable supermarkets to monitor an individual's buying habits to an extraordinary level of detail. This information allows the supermarkets to offer their customers just what they want. So, in a world where our individual needs as consumers are being treated with such respect, why is it that we are all treated the same by our employers?

A business is only as strong as its people, and that is never truer in a business such as ours where we rely upon people's expertise and dedication to our clients. This is why we have been looking at the issue of staff recruitment and retention. Our starting point for this review was to recognise the fact that everyone is spending more and more time at work and many of us even have the facilities to keep on working when we get home.

*Ashton Morton Slack is one of Sheffield's largest law firms and therefore a significant local employer. Robert Bryars, partner at the firm looks at the issue of attracting the right people and keeping them – an issue that is essential for any businesses' future success.*



A full time working week of 9-5 clocks up 35 hours per week, yet how many organisations can claim they adapt to accommodate the varying needs of employees in their organisation. The advantages offering employee benefits are well documented, including; higher productivity and competitiveness, raised morale, motivation and commitment and improved recruitment and retention of

a diverse workforce. However how can a successful business retain a diverse work force with a one-size fits all approach to employee benefits?

It was this acknowledgment that prompted us to develop a fresh and dynamic approach to employee benefits. We employ specialists in a range of services from personal injury to intellectual property rights and has an additional support function offering

roles such as accounting, secretarial, receptionists. This has led to the development of flexible benefits scheme, we realise that we have over 150 individuals working for us, each of them with different needs. We have a mix of young staff, families, older workers, people want different things at different stages of their lives and it was important that we could offer an appropriate choice of flexible benefits.

As part of this twelve month review we had already teamed up with the specialist provider 'You at Work' to bring their employees a range of offers through a voluntary offers site, this proved popular with staff so we decided to extend this initiative to introduce a choice of benefits. We started with our 'people feeder group' a communication tool that allows people to have their say on a range of issues, this allowed us a first hand insight into the different types of benefits that people did and didn't want. We were then able to generate an effective list of benefits, these include lifestyle benefits such as; the facility to buy and sell holiday, health insurance, dental plans and fitness offers along with childcare vouchers. Employees can then select the option that best suits them.

The investment that we have made in over the past twelve months is something that every business should seriously consider. The success of our firm is very dependent on attracting and keeping the best people and all employers need to become more innovative if they are to succeed.

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## Why it is important to keep start-up numbers growing

BUSINESS incubation continues to play an essential role in the growth of Sheffield's economy.

Sheffield Technology Parks has once again increased its number of business start ups from previous years. Over the last two years we have helped establish in the region of 70 high growth businesses in the creative, digital and technology industries with a success rate approaching 100%. To ensure this trend continues we need to keep the number of new start ups flowing.

Sheffield now boasts two new business incubators operating in bioscience and advanced manufacturing that have both come into reality this year. This allied with Sheffield Technology Parks' specialist knowledge, places Sheffield on a firm foundation for the future.

These are all key sectors identified in Sheffield's City Strategy and Yorkshire Forward's strategy for the wider region to develop the city's economy. Now these building blocks are in place it's important that business incubation develops further. We need to encourage a greater number of new businesses to start up and deliver further capacity in terms of incubation facilities and office space. All of which will maximise the potential for businesses to start up, survive and prosper in our city.

The development of the Sheaf Valley into an attractive area for businesses will play a large part in Sheffield's immediate economic development. Sheffield Hallam University is becoming more prominent in the area and the first building of the long-awaited E-campus project will take shape in the next 12 months. This will boost the development of creative, digital and technology industries in Sheffield, and will increase the potential for business partner-

By **PETER WOOD**  
Chief Executive, Sheffield  
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expand on the work of the inward investment agencies who have made good inroads in attracting already established businesses from outside the city. This is an area I'm sure Creative Sheffield will look to develop as it sets its stall out as the driving force behind the economic regeneration and development of the city.

Sheffield Technology Parks is also beginning to see growth in this area as the city's reputation grows in strength once again. At present approximately 15% of our client businesses have been attracted from outside the region, with recent additions from Israel, Italy and Manchester.

By 2009/10 Sheffield Technology Parks hope to be able to support 100 high growth businesses per year. To achieve this we will need to continue Sheffield's progress in becoming a strong attractive city for entrepreneurs and investors.

Businesses will need to work together with developers and public sector bodies to market Sheffield together, so that as a city we can spread our wings beyond South Yorkshire and attract a wider audience of innovators and investors.

Sheffield Technology Parks have ambitious plans for the future and have the desire to be able to help more fledgling businesses. The refurbishment of our west wing at the city centre site, which represents a quarter of the site, will be completed this coming year to accommodate further expansion. On top of this we are exploring other opportunities for expansion around the city region.

There is real potential for the city to take off in the coming year and I look forward to being able to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise from a confident and prosperous Sheffield.



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