

**“Diversity in
New Zealand
workplaces is
now a reality.”**

To practise or to peace-keep – A lawyer’s dilemma

COMPANY : Minter Ellison Rudd Watts

Torn between his burgeoning law career and a four-month deployment to the Solomons as an officer in the Territorial Army, Nick Jones initially opted to stick to his suit and tie but his employer, Minter Ellison Rudd Watts, had other ideas.

“I was initially reluctant to take the time off as I was concerned that I would fall behind in my legal career,” says Nick. “But when I told the HR department about my decision they had a quiet word with me about the opportunity I was turning down. They said that in later years my grandchildren would be much more interested in my army career than any commercial case.

“They really showed some vision in seeing beyond a focus on budgets to what would be best for me in the long run.

“They were also realistic about the effect on my career, saying I’d probably come back and find that I might have slipped behind in terms of technical knowledge. They said not to worry too much as I would soon make this up with some hard work.”

Nick has been with the Territorials for eight years; three years training as an officer cadet and five serving as an officer. During the first three years he was still studying for his law and arts degree. The Territorials paid his study fees and living expenses during that period.

He worked for Minter Ellison Rudd Watts during the last two years of his degree and joined the firm as a solicitor after graduation. “My involvement in the Territorials was one of the topics we discussed at my first interview,” says Nick. “They didn’t know a lot about the Territorials but they were certainly interested and enthusiastic about what I was doing.”

Nick usually fulfils his commitment to the Territorials in his own time but serving with the peacekeeping force was obviously going to impact on his work. He has no regrets.

“Deployment was the best thing I’ve ever done in my life,” says Nick. “As Platoon Commander, I was in charge of 32 soldiers so I had a lot of responsibility. It was a school of hard knocks environment in terms of developing leadership and management skills.

“Of course it’s amazing to go to another country and learn about a completely different culture. I felt that our efforts made Solomon Islanders feel more secure in their own country so it was very satisfying and fulfilling.”

After serving in the Solomons from April until July 2007, Minter Ellison Rudd Watts gave Nick another month off to attend a friend’s wedding in Europe. “When I came back to work they gave me a ‘budget holiday’ which gave me time to get up to speed, so although

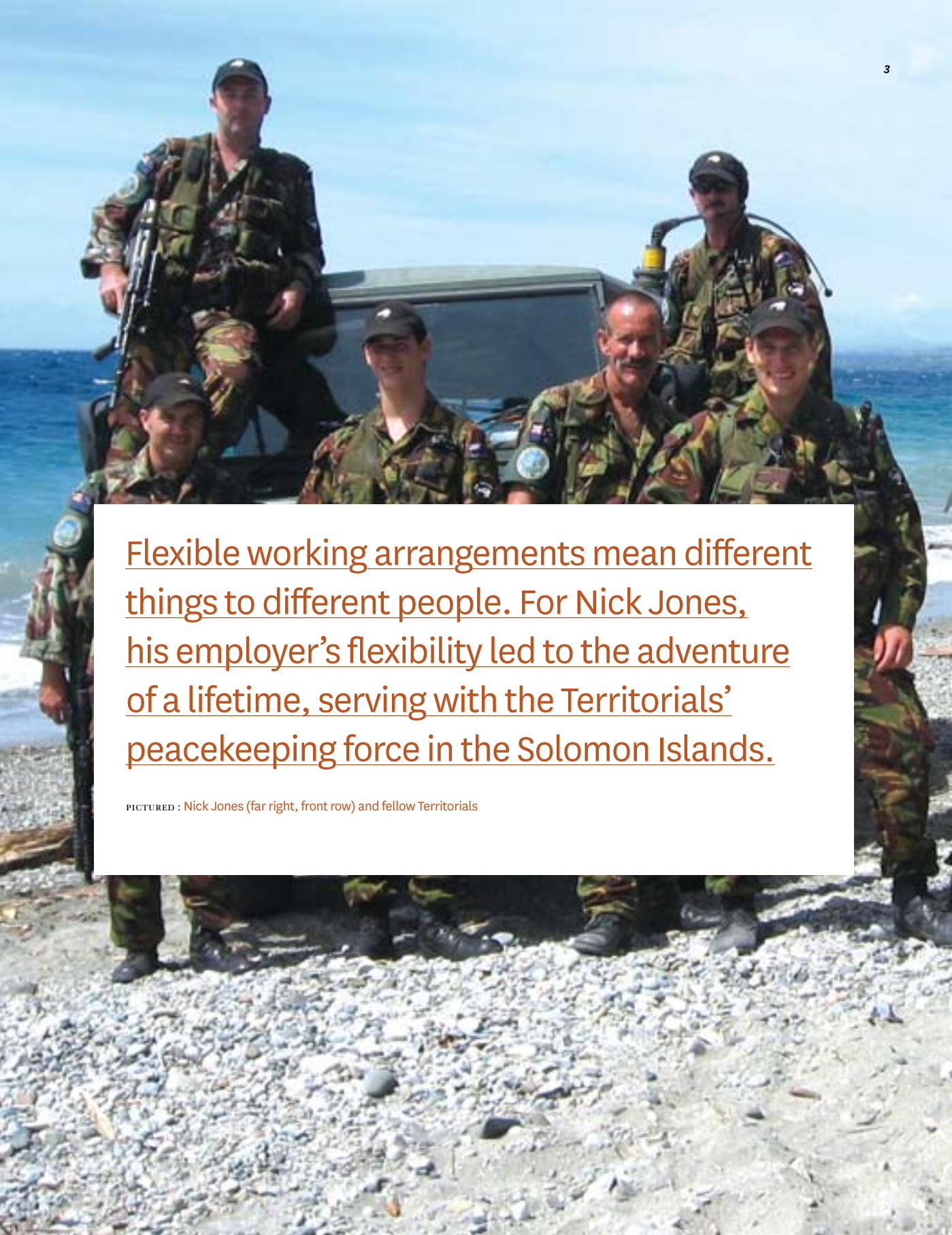
I was still earning money I was not judged against a target.”

In addition, Nick’s time away will be counted as continuous employment so he will be entitled, along with his peers, to the substantial bonus solicitors receive after four years with the firm.

“I’m really grateful for this and everything else. I think Minters had real vision in encouraging me to take the deployment because they saw it as part of my development as a lawyer and a person. The firm really does practise what it preaches in terms of valuing the person behind the lawyer.”


Nick says he is already noticing his experience during the deployment paying off at work. “The army and the law complement each other greatly. I developed my ability to make considered, clear decisions and a lot of our clients are very interested in my experience. As leaders in their own right, they can relate to the leadership challenges I faced and the skills I developed.”

Managing Partner Mark Weenink agrees with this assessment, saying the firm has benefited enormously from Nick’s experience with the Territorials. “He is a highly motivated young man who has actively taken leadership roles both within his team and across the firm in a way which distinguishes him from this peer group.”



Flexible working arrangements mean different things to different people. For Nick Jones, his employer's flexibility led to the adventure of a lifetime, serving with the Territorials' peacekeeping force in the Solomon Islands.

PICTURED : Nick Jones (far right, front row) and fellow Territorials

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black top and dark pants, stands in a warehouse. She is smiling and has her hands clasped in front of her. The warehouse is filled with stacks of cardboard boxes, many of which are labeled 'EVEREADY'. The floor has yellow markings, including '01D5-2' and '01D5-3'.

With high staff engagement levels and relatively low staff turnover, Energizer still needed to find a solution to work-life balance issues raised by employees.

PICTURED : Karen Johnson

Energizer – A personal approach to flexibility

COMPANY : Energizer

Energizer employs 93 people to market and distribute batteries, blades and lighting products throughout New Zealand. Its Auckland-based operations include sales and marketing departments, as well as warehouse, call centre and administrative support departments. It also employs sales personnel around the country.

Energizer combines a strong commitment to work-life balance with a pragmatic understanding of the difficulties involved in providing flexibility and meeting business needs.

The company has offered some flexibility around working hours for a number of years but has recently taken a more systematic approach. “We tried to write a flexibility policy,” says HR Co-ordinator Karen Johnson, “but everyone is so individual we decided to come back to our core value of communication. As well as having regular team and one-on-one meetings, we use our company newsletter to share stories around flexibility. We also started a cross-functional team to look at employee satisfaction, including work-life balance.

“One thing that we hoped to improve through our flexible approach is a better understanding of what issues our team members are facing. We found that when we were not communicating effectively we were having increased absenteeism.

“Flexibility works, however you have to be seen to be managing people who aren’t managing the flexible work model well. We need people to tell us in advance if they can’t be here. To make it work, everyone has to play their part in communicating.”

She gives an example of one staff member who had always been reasonably reliable and was suddenly regularly absent from work without any explanation. It emerged that his family situation had changed and he was having difficulty managing his family needs, especially transporting his children to school. Energizer gave him two weeks’ leave to allow him to deal with the changes to his situation and get back into a routine. He is now working well within the flexible framework.

Staff are encouraged to talk with their manager if they are having difficulty managing personal and work-life issues. Managers are also required to ask team members if

they have work-life balance issues and this has become an integral part of the twice-yearly formal review process. “This is a way we can encourage people to ask for what they need,” says Karen.

This focussed but informal approach is paying off for the company and its employees. Karen says the business benefits of flexibility and clear communication include reduced absenteeism, happier staff and managers, and low staff turnover. “No-one has left recently due to dissatisfaction with Energizer.”

In fact, a resignation was avoided by giving one woman six months’ extended leave to help with the care of a family member. “She had worked for us for more than eight years but was coming to work and worrying all day,” says Karen. “She said to us, ‘My heart’s not here’, so we arranged for her to take time off to be with her family.

“We arranged a temp to cover for her and she’s now been back at work for more than a year so we retained a very loyal member of staff and avoided any disengagement or absenteeism during a stressful time for her.”

Fridays just for Helen

COMPANY : Energizer

With an elderly mother and two grandchildren pleurably filling up part of her weekend, Helen realised she wanted more time to herself. She has worked in a full-time administrative role at Energizer in Auckland for 13 years. She wanted more 'Helen time' as she calls it.

"Everyone's supportive and happy for me to do it and I feel great," Helen says. "It's swings and roundabouts, of course. I'm very much old school in my working habits and would never use or abuse an employer. I don't take time off at a drop of a hat and only stay home sick if I'm really sick."

The response was positive so Helen now spends Friday "chilling out with a book at home".

Helen's four-day week works well for Energizer due to her responsible attitude and the availability of another staff member to extend their hours to work on Fridays.

The supportive, relaxed workplace culture meant Helen felt comfortable to communicate her work-life balance needs – a four-day week with Fridays off. The response was positive so Helen now spends Friday "chilling out with a book at home". She acknowledges that she wouldn't have actually resigned if she wasn't able to reduce her hours but she's very happy with the new arrangements.

Back to kindy: Innovative flexibility

COMPANY : Franklin Kindergarten Association

Many workplaces wanting to provide flexibility grapple with factors over which they have little control.

In some industry sectors, flexible working arrangements take a great deal of determination, consultation and ingenuity. Despite many constraints, Franklin Kindergarten Association (FKA) has developed various options to ease workloads and offer some flexibility to its teachers.

FKA operates 25 kindergartens in the Franklin region, employing 70 teachers and 30 support staff. Staff retention is critical to the business due to a serious shortage of qualified early childhood teachers and the importance of continuity of care for young children.

With limited funding and no room to move around classroom hours or holiday periods, Professional Practice Manager Raewyn van Lingen says that FKA manages to provide some flexibility through part-time and job-share positions.

A recent change in the collective agreement and some innovative thinking create scope for even more flexibility.

“Changes in the way short-term relievers are paid mean we can

now employ them for just an hour rather than in half-day blocks,” says Raewyn. “This allows for much more flexibility because a reliever can work an extra hour at the end of her shift to cover for another teacher. We’re still adjusting to this new way of employing relievers but it’s going to make a real difference to the amount of flexibility we can offer.”

FKA is proactive about asking staff what support they need to do their jobs well. When it learnt how much work its head teachers were taking home it was determined to ease the load. As well as limiting flexibility in obvious ways, high workloads tend to have a severe impact on morale and commitment.

“We introduced a release allocation so that each head teacher can take off four half-days each term to see to administrative work,” says Raewyn. “This allocation costs us \$30,000 per annum but it’s a very worthwhile investment in retaining quality staff.”

Another initiative gives FKA’s staff more control over their holidays. Kindergarten teachers often find it

hard to take an uninterrupted break during holiday periods as administrative work, professional development, kindergarten cleaning and other interruptions can all intervene.

As a result of its forward-thinking approach, turnover of teaching staff at FKA over the past three years averaged only 8% per year. All of FKA’s 70 teaching positions are currently filled and all its permanent teaching staff are qualified registered teachers. Just retaining employees after parental leave has saved FKA the equivalent of more than \$300,000 over three years.

FKA’s commitment to work-life balance won it an EEO Trust Work & Life Award in 2007. One member of the judging panel, Gary Saunders of IBM, said FKA makes good use of innovative ideas to help overcome a limited budget and rigid classroom hours. “They have as much flexibility as they can and there’s a strong commitment to developing people’s careers. To me they have a really good integrated culture.”

Job-share builds enthusiasm and commitment

COMPANY : Franklin Kindergarten Association

With three children of their own and a kindergarten full of them at work, two Pukekohe women have created a working arrangement that suits their employer and their families.

Nicky Nicholls and Hsiu-Ying Su have been job-sharing a kindergarten teacher's role at Pukekohe Central Kindergarten since October 2007 and find they have more enthusiasm for work and for home as a result.

Hsiu-Ying had been teaching full-time at the kindergarten for about a year when her husband became ill last year. As he had been looking after their three-year-old daughter during the day while working from his home office, Hsiu-Ying needed to create more time in her own day to care for her daughter.

She talked over her problem with Nicky who was then doing part-time administrative work and relief teaching at the kindergarten. Together they came up with a job-share suggestion which involved Hsiu-Ying working 0.4 of full-time and Nicky 0.6.

"Nicky and I suggested the idea to our head teacher, Sarmila, and this proposal had Sarmila's strong support. She then put forward the idea to our three Professional Practice Managers to get their approval. The Association suggested that we could try it out for two terms," says Hsiu-Ying.

For Nicky, the arrangement works perfectly. She has two children at primary school and wanted to work a few more hours while fitting her work around school times. She works mornings so her husband drops the children at school and their grandmother picks them up. Most days, Nicky is at home by the time they arrive.

Both women say that kindergarten teaching inevitably involves working longer hours than they are paid for but they are more than happy to put in the extra effort. "I couldn't have gone back full-time," says Nicky, "so this is perfect for me. I don't mind working a bit late every day."

Hsiu-Ying works afternoons and is enjoying having more energy for her work. "It's really empowering for me and good for my own well-being and for my family's well-being. I enjoy it more than full-time because I can do better quality work. The more I enjoy doing it, the better I do it which gives me a real sense of achievement."

The two women sometimes catch up with each other between shifts and all the kindergarten staff meet on Thursday afternoon when they share information and attend to administrative work. Hsiu-Ying and Nicky say there are no problems with continuity or communication, possibly because they are so well settled in the community at the

kindergarten. Nicky says that knowing all the children has made the transition to working more hours much easier.


As well as Nicky and Hsiu-Ying, the kindergarten employs one full-time teacher and the head teacher. Both are supportive of the job-share arrangement, saying it's good to have the different input and more ideas that Nicky and Hsiu-Ying together bring.

Hsiu-Ying completed her kindergarten teacher's registration earlier this year, something she says she couldn't have done while working full-time. One of her new goals is to do a course on working with bilingual children so she can be more supportive in a multi-cultural environment. "I'm setting myself other professional goals because that's how I keep myself motivated and improving," she says.

While Nicky is very happy with the job-share arrangement, she's looking forward to when her children are older and she can go back to full-time teaching.


Pukekohe Central Kindergarten is managed by the Franklin Kindergarten Association which won an EEO Trust Work & Life Award in 2007.

A toolkit of information and ideas about job-sharing is available from the EEO Trust website.



Job-sharing can seem the ideal way to cover a full-time role when people willing to work full-time are scarce. Good communication is essential to successful job-sharing and two women have found it works well for them and their employer.

PICTURED : Hsiu-Ying Su and her daughter



Flexible working arrangements have been instrumental in retaining women after parental leave. More than half the firm's partners/associates and solicitors are women.

Flexible working run-of-the-mill for many employers

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Act comes into effect on July 1, giving employees with caring responsibilities the right to ask to vary their hours or place of work.

While the new legislation will make little difference to the flexibility many New Zealand employers already offer, it is increasing public awareness of the benefits and challenges of workplace flexibility.

Under the legislation, employers must try to accommodate a request for flexibility but can refuse the request on a number of grounds including the impracticability of rearranging the workload or any clash with the collective agreement the employee works under. If the request is rejected, the employee can ask for the labour inspector's assistance and, if they are still unhappy, they can challenge the process the employer followed through mediation. In the last resort, the employee can take their application to the Employment Relations Authority.

In their 10-year history, the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards have showcased many employers that offer flexibility through formal and informal arrangements.

Last year's runner-up in the Large Organisation category, Anderson Lloyd Lawyers, offers a range of flexible working and other work-life initiatives to help retain staff and increase the numbers of women at senior levels.

Anderson Lloyd is based in the South Island and employs more than 140 people. More than a

Other men work flexibly to take their turn with childcare during school holidays or emergencies. Steelbro is another South Island company that proactively uses flexible working arrangements to retain its specialist staff. The company manufactures container handling equipment in its Christchurch plant, employing 105 staff.

Flexible arrangements pay off with staff retention at around 85% and the average tenure of production staff at seven years.

third of its staff are on some sort of flexible working arrangement like working school terms, job-sharing and compressed working weeks.

The flexible working arrangements have been instrumental in retaining women after parental leave. More than half the firm's partners/associates and solicitors are women. Many male staff also work flexibly and one senior male partner finds time in his working day to follow his passion for amateur theatricals.

The specialised nature of Steelbro's product requires a heavy investment in staff training so retention is all-important. The company offers staged return to work from parental leave and part-time hours for some staff who are over 65. Some of the older staff continue to work full-time hours but they know that if they wish to cut their hours the company will accommodate them.

The flexible arrangements pay off with staff retention at around 85% and the average tenure of production staff at seven years.

Diversity focus for the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards

The EEO Trust Work & Life Awards give employers who proactively support a diverse workforce the opportunity to build their employment brand. Work-life initiatives are one way of supporting diversity but this year's awards are open to entries for a wide range of diversity initiatives.

Offering initiatives to support employees to meet their personal commitments has been one very successful strategy used by leading employers to harness the talents of every single employee. Such work-life initiatives have enabled many people, particularly parents, to reach their goals at work and at home.

Since 1998, the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards have championed employers who lead the way in work-life strategies. They have recognised proactive employers for their innovative work-life initiatives which have become almost mainstream during a period of intense war for talent.

Entrants in the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards consistently report positive results, regardless of whether they receive an award. For example, Wellington IT consultancy Equinox entered the awards in 2006, an experience which was thoroughly beneficial according to Managing Director, Roger Dalgleish.

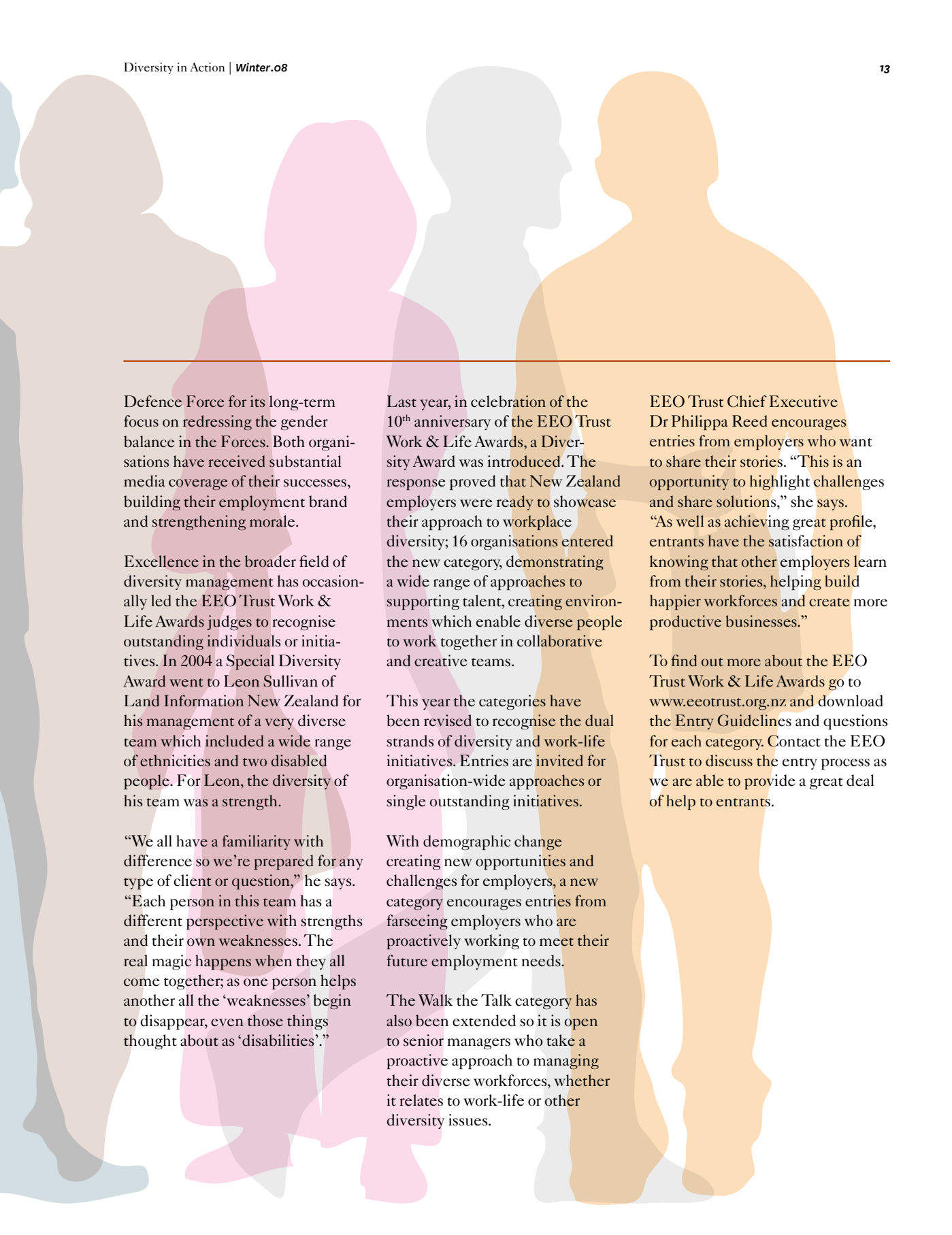
“We entered the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards to benchmark ourselves against similar sized organisations and because we realised that many of the things we ‘have always done’ at Equinox were in fact good examples of work-life balance,” he says. “A number of benefits resulted from entering the awards, including additional media coverage, a good feeling of pride in the company and positive and

supportive feedback from clients and business partners.”

Many companies have entered the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards several times as they refine their approach. For example, Strategy Recruitment Consultancy won an award after entering three times and Director Barry Brown is positive about the experience.

“Over a three-year period, Strategy continued to work on or develop new work-life initiatives which culminated in Strategy winning an EEO Trust Work & Life Award.”

The winners of last year's Diversity Award were Beca Transportation for its approach to recruiting traffic engineers from overseas and the New Zealand



Defence Force for its long-term focus on redressing the gender balance in the Forces. Both organisations have received substantial media coverage of their successes, building their employment brand and strengthening morale.

Excellence in the broader field of diversity management has occasionally led the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards judges to recognise outstanding individuals or initiatives. In 2004 a Special Diversity Award went to Leon Sullivan of Land Information New Zealand for his management of a very diverse team which included a wide range of ethnicities and two disabled people. For Leon, the diversity of his team was a strength.

“We all have a familiarity with difference so we’re prepared for any type of client or question,” he says. “Each person in this team has a different perspective with strengths and their own weaknesses. The real magic happens when they all come together; as one person helps another all the ‘weaknesses’ begin to disappear, even those things thought about as ‘disabilities’.”

Last year, in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards, a Diversity Award was introduced. The response proved that New Zealand employers were ready to showcase their approach to workplace diversity; 16 organisations entered the new category, demonstrating a wide range of approaches to supporting talent, creating environments which enable diverse people to work together in collaborative and creative teams.

This year the categories have been revised to recognise the dual strands of diversity and work-life initiatives. Entries are invited for organisation-wide approaches or single outstanding initiatives.

With demographic change creating new opportunities and challenges for employers, a new category encourages entries from farsseeing employers who are proactively working to meet their future employment needs.

The Walk the Talk category has also been extended so it is open to senior managers who take a proactive approach to managing their diverse workforces, whether it relates to work-life or other diversity issues.

EEO Trust Chief Executive Dr Philippa Reed encourages entries from employers who want to share their stories. “This is an opportunity to highlight challenges and share solutions,” she says. “As well as achieving great profile, entrants have the satisfaction of knowing that other employers learn from their stories, helping build happier workforces and create more productive businesses.”

To find out more about the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards go to www.eeotrust.org.nz and download the Entry Guidelines and questions for each category. Contact the EEO Trust to discuss the entry process as we are able to provide a great deal of help to entrants.



Leveraging workforce diversity adds value to business

Demographic changes and a long-running skills shortage have led to unprecedented diversity in our labour force. What is the impact on business and how can employers leverage their diverse workforces? And how relevant are these issues given the slowing economic growth and low business confidence?

The EEO Trust recently reviewed a wealth of international literature on how workforce diversity impacts on business outcomes and how that diversity can be best managed for business success.

The research found that the key potential benefits of workforce diversity are improved staff recruitment and retention, improved creativity, innovation and problem solving, and improved marketing outcomes.

However, achieving these benefits depends on proactive, skilled management. As EEO Trust Chief Executive Dr Philippa Reed says, “The old ways of doing things will not necessarily work in today’s rapidly changing labour market. Effective management of a diverse workforce depends on a real commitment to valuing the different perspectives that diverse people bring.

“With business growth slowing and spending likely to be squeezed, it is all the more important to inspire and engage staff.”

She says that the research found that a number of key factors are associated with positive business outcomes from diversity. “Leadership commitment, workplace culture, training and positive communication all help build an environment which supports diversity and reaps the benefits. It seems that business benefits also depend on having reasonably high proportions of diverse people at all levels of an organisation.”

However, researcher Dr Mervyl McPherson suggests that a key potential business benefit from diverse New Zealand workforces is in meeting skills shortages and matching the growing diversity of our customer base. “The move to a knowledge economy requires a highly educated and skilled workforce. Some of these skills are not available in New Zealand but many will be found in the emerging economies of Asia,” she says.

“In addition, new migrants bring relationships and expertise which could help employers build market share locally and internationally.”

The research found that being a diverse employer can also enhance business reputation, thereby attracting top employees, customers and suppliers. Many of the new labour force entrants, both young and old, and those with responsibility for children and other dependents will be attracted by flexible work schedules and other work-life initiatives.

There are also claims of greater creativity and innovation from diverse teams and that they are better problem solvers. Again, sufficient numbers of diverse people and proactive leadership are critical.

“Diversity in New Zealand workplaces is now a reality,” says Dr McPherson. “Workplaces that encourage positive communication, value difference and reward performance will make the most of their potential to better serve existing markets, tap new markets and catalyse innovative thinking.”

EEO Trust – Opening doors for HR people

With more than 15 years' experience working with employers with a commitment to equity, the EEO Trust is well placed to inform, inspire and connect its members.

Business & Research Manager at The Johnson Group, Melissa Alfonso Cruz, outlines some of the ways that membership of the EEO Employers Group has benefited this small recruitment company: “When we initially expressed interest in joining the EEO Trust, we were sent helpful material to guide us in the process. This helped us draw up our EEO policies and put them down concretely for our employees.

“The EEO Trust has also opened up several doors for us with regards to making connections or networking, as well as giving us a view into how other companies operate in terms of EEO guidelines.”

In order to build relationships between members around the country, the EEO Trust has set up Diversity Practitioners Groups which meet quarterly in the three main centres. Here, HR people share ideas and issues with other professionals with an interest in diversity issues. Contact EEO/ Diversity Advisor Anne-Marie Raleigh at the EEO Trust for more information.

The EEO Trust also holds a wealth of resources on EEO and employment issues. Anyone can browse the library database to see what resources are available on specific issues. Only EEO Employers Group members can borrow resources from the library. Information Specialist Renee Schick responds to specific information requests.

Members needing to brief managers or colleagues on EEO or diversity issues can download Powerpoint presentations from the EEO Trust website (www.eeotrust.org.nz) and tailor them for their own use.

Go to the EEO Trust's website to apply for membership or phone Client Liaisons Josie Falani and Joanna Nua for more information. Membership fees range from \$200–\$2000 depending on the number of employees.

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Valerie Bocarro
(09) 525 3023
vbocarro@eeotrust.org.nz
or go on-line:
www.eeotrust.org.nz
and go to News & Events,
Diversity in Action registration.



Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) means eliminating barriers to ensure that all employees are considered for the employment of their choice and have the chance to perform to their maximum potential. EEO practices include fairness at work, hiring based on merit and promotion based on talent. It concerns all aspects of employment including recruitment, pay and other rewards, career development and work conditions.

EEO strategies and sound HR practices enable employers to recruit the very best people from the diverse population, making the most of their skills, creativity and energy. Initiatives that encourage work-life balance are an important part of EEO as they enable people to perform to their full potential while still accommodating their commitments outside of work.

www.eeotrust.org.nz

Diversity in Action | *Winter.08*

To join the EEO Employers Group
admin@eeotrust.org.nz
Reference or resource inquiries
library@eeotrust.org.nz
Communications or media inquiries
jsmith@eeotrust.org.nz

EEO Trust office
Level 5, 56 Cawley Street,
Ellerslie, Auckland, 1051
Postal address
PO Box 12929,
Penrose, Auckland, 1642
Telephone (09) 525 3023
Fax (09) 525 7076