

Employee Welfare Timeline

How we have engaged with, and provided for, our colleagues since 1884



Oldham Street store, Manchester, 1898

1884

As Michael Marks expanded from his first market stall in Leeds, opening stalls in other market towns, he employed female assistants to staff the stalls. He put up wooden platforms for the women to stand on in the market halls so that their feet wouldn't get cold. He shared food and gave them Christmas presents. As he started to move from market stalls to Penny Bazaar shops, he provided gas rings on which the assistants could heat their lunches.



Bedford, 1909

1909

The first official staff training role was given to a Miss Gibbs as 'travelling manager'. Her role was to train a number of assistants to become staff manageresses as the positions came available.



Harrogate, 1929

1918

The first recorded Long Service Award was given. A colleague who had worked for the company for 25 years was given a gold watch and a cheque for £200.



Flora Solomon

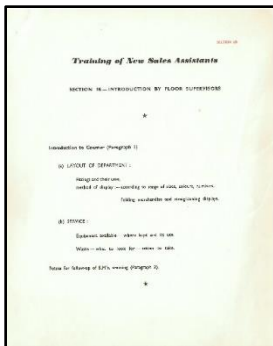
1933

Simon Marks met Flora Solomon at a dinner party – she was interested in the welfare of M&S colleagues and challenged him to do more for his staff.



Employees at Dymchurch Holiday Camp, 1930s

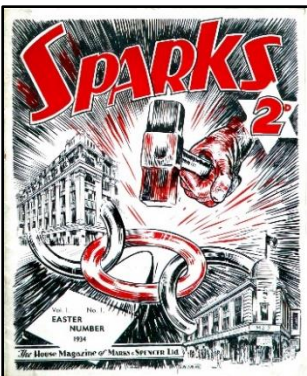
Flora Solomon established the new, revolutionary M&S Staff Welfare Service. Under her guidance, the Service introduced a health and dental service for colleagues, camping holidays, subsidised staff canteens, hairdressing, sports clubs and colleague rest rooms. The welfare scheme became one of the best examples of staff welfare in the UK.



Training document, 1930s

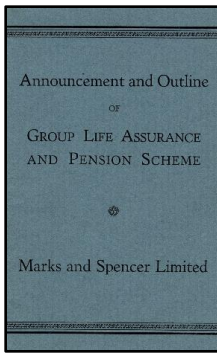
1934

A Training Department was created. In an article in the company magazine, Flora asserted that ‘training for the job is an essential part of any welfare scheme’.

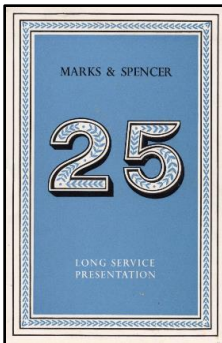


First 'Sparks' magazine, 1934

‘Sparks’ was launched the same year as a colleague magazine. It gave an overview of colleague activities, reports on company news and created a collective colleague community.



M&S Pension booklet



25 Year Long Service booklet



M&S colleague chiropody service



Sparks magazine, Summer 1937

1936

An M&S pension scheme was introduced alongside the M&S Benevolent Trust, which provided retirement benefits for those people outside the pension scheme.

1937

The Long Service Awards were officially launched. During this year, 29 colleagues completed 25 years' service, and were invited to Head Office for lunch and a cocktail party. The ladies were given a silver coffee service, and the men a gold watch.

1939

Chiropody services were provided for colleagues at subsidised prices. Chiropody was charged at the rate of one shilling per foot! Alongside our health and dental services, this helped M&S to care for colleagues' health, a decade before the creation of the NHS.

c1940

'The Rules of Health' was a booklet produced by the Staff Welfare Department promoting healthy living, including advice on food, care of the body, clothes and medicines, as well as information on National Health Insurance.



Bognor Regis team, 1940



Ealing Cafe Bar, 1940



Job advert, 1944



St. Michael News, June 1953

Second World War

Before the war broke out there were 465 trainee male managers at M&S - after the war started there were just 17.

Enlistment meant that more women were given new opportunities and were being promoted to management level, working alongside men in making management decisions.

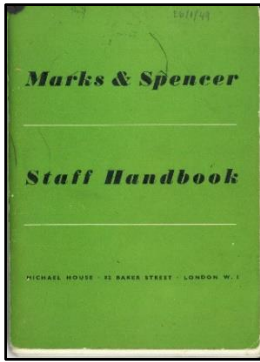
Flora Solomon was the driving force behind the government-sponsored British Restaurant system, which provided cheap, hot and nourishing meals for people disadvantaged by the war, including M&S colleagues. In 1946 Flora was awarded the MBE for her welfare services.

1940s

During the war M&S continued to promote women in the workplace. This 1940s job advert shows how M&S placed value on women as an important part of the workforce.

1953

Colleague magazine St Michael News was introduced. The magazine included details of current M&S products and fashion trends, as well as information on stores and colleagues.



M&S staff handbook, c1950s



M&S colleagues, 1971



Mobile breast screening unit, Jul 1976



M&S Leeds slimming club, 1984

1957

By 1957 over £35 per person was committed to staff welfare per year. Over £800,000 was spent on staff quarters, subsidised meals, health services and sport and social opportunities.

1965

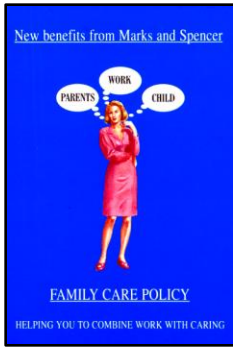
M&S introduced free cervical screening for women over the age of 35, extended to women over the age of 25 in 1967. Screening was not yet available on the NHS.

1976

M&S became the first company in Europe to introduce a mobile breast screening unit which visited stores nationwide. Female colleagues were still able to access this service for free at a younger age than was available on the NHS.

1980s

During the 1980s slimming clubs were set up to help M&S colleagues develop a staff community around healthy living.



Family Care Policy booklet, 1995



Pregnant employees, 1999



Marks & Start logo

1995

A new Family Care Policy was launched to help support colleagues with family and caring priorities. It included longer maternity leave and also paternity leave, part-time work options and dependency leave.

1999

M&S was selected as the flagship company for a leading UK charity on pregnancy health. We were selected for our pregnancy accreditation programme, excellent working conditions and policies for pregnant colleagues.

2004

The Marks & Start initiative is the biggest company-led work experience programme in the UK and Ireland. Marks & Start helps disadvantaged people who may be disabled, homeless, lone parents or young and unemployed to find work experience placements to help them into long term employment.

2006

M&S was voted one of the top 50 places to work in the UK in the Best Workplaces Awards 2006. We also received a special award for commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, for the success of the Marks & Start scheme.



Employee at work, 2006



Plan A, 2007

2007

Plan A was launched and included the award-winning Your Plan A Wellbeing website offering free health and lifestyle advice, access to healthcare services and health challenges.

Today M&S colleagues can also access a free physiotherapy service, free confidential 24/7 helpline and counselling and access to an in-house occupational health service.



Your M&S, 2012

2012

In 2012 M&S was named Responsible Retailer of the Year at the World Retail Awards 2012 for the third time (previously in 2011 and 2007).

The award was given to M&S as a company which delivers 'world class standards of best practice in corporate responsibility', this included the way that M&S engages with its employees.



The Times, 2017

2011-2017

We've been recognised in The Times Top 50 Employers for Women since 2011 and were one of only a few retailers to achieve this.

M&S has worked to drive gender balance at management levels, including the M&S Inspiring Women Network.



2017

2017 saw the first anniversary of our Be Yourself campaign aimed at celebrating colleague individuality.

We also recognised National Inclusion Week and World Mental Health Day. Our diversity and wellbeing teams joined forces to encourage people to talk openly about issues that are sometimes hard to approach.



Buddy Network

The Buddy Network was also established with the aim of giving colleagues with health conditions the chance to share their journeys and support each other's wellbeing. The group meets regularly for Coffee & Chat sessions.

2019

Our LGBTQ+ network helped M&S celebrate Pride events across the country, with store windows decked out to match our 'Be Yourself' theme. Groups of M&S colleagues took part in Pride parades in London, Leeds, Glasgow, Cardiff, Manchester, Chester and Liverpool.



Pride, Cardiff 2019

2020

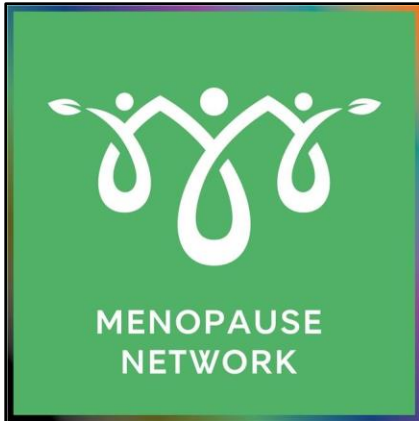
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we supported colleagues in all sorts of ways, from managing pay for self-isolating colleagues, supporting furloughed colleagues and providing equipment to support safe working.



Working safely, 2020



Neonatal leave, 2023



Menopause Network, 2025



M&S Baby Club online, 2024

2023

We announced our new Neonatal Leave which gives extra support to families of premature babies, including up to 12 weeks paid leave for parents whose baby requires specialist neonatal care.

In the same year, Yammer groups became Communities. Our diversity networks were migrated and updated, they now include the Culture and Heritage network - to provide a safe space for colleagues to discuss, question, challenge and take action against any racial, cultural or religious discrimination; the Health and Wellbeing network, a point of contact for colleagues seeking to connect about disability, mental health, and wellbeing-related concerns; the Menopause network, and the Family and Carers network.

2024

As well as an £89m investment in UK retail pay to at least £12 per hour, in line with the Real Living Wage, we announced significant improvements to UK maternity, paternity and adoption leave policies to support colleagues through life's big moments.

This included being one of the first retailers to introduce six weeks' paternity leave at full pay (previously two weeks at full pay), while almost doubling our maternity and adoption leave to 26 weeks – also at full pay – equating to a £5 million investment annually.



Straight to Stuart, 2025

2025

In 2025 to mark National Inclusion Week, colleagues submitted a wide range of ideas on how to make M&S a more inclusive place to work and shop.