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The law firm that gives mothers control over their work-life balance

Why Lucy Scott-Moncrieff decided it was time for a new way of working

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Lucy Scott-Moncrieff set up her pioneering practice so that she could continue working from home after the birth of her first son

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Forget brass plates on high street premises, or even vast gleaming glass corporate offices. The way of the future, at least

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kitchen table. Now it has 51 consultant fee earners working across the UK. The latest firm to join, last week, was C&S Solicitors, a specialist clinical negligence practice based in the Midlands.

“I set up as a sole practitioner about 30 years ago,” Scott-Moncrieff says, “just after my eldest son was born, focusing on mental health, mainly visiting people in Broadmoor. I didn’t have an office — I mainly worked from home.”

Scott-Moncrieff then met Tony Harbour, a local authority solicitor doing children’s work, who had the idea of the two of them going into partnership. “I didn’t want to go down the road of hourly billing, targets and the cost of setting up a law firm, so I thought, ‘Go the self-employed route.’ ”

So how does it work? Scott-Moncrieff Associates does now have an administrative hub in London with eight staff, but it has never been a place where everyone has a desk, she says.

Although it began with mental health, it now spans a range of work — private client (including wills and probate), personal injury, clinical negligence, company, commercial and civil legal aid, which still accounts for about 35 per cent of its work.

If a solicitor wants to join the practice in an area of work not covered, Scott-Moncrieff ensures that they identify another solicitor they know to provide support and mentoring. “It is essential that people have someone to talk to,” she says.

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solicitors.” She is thinking of taking a City office, however, because some lawyers have spent all their working life in an office and want to go on doing that.

“

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The practice, she says, attracts different kinds of solicitors: those disenchanted with mega-mergers or working in large corporate entities, or people wanting to make a lifestyle change. She explains: “There may be men who are retiring but are not ready to give up work: a lot of City firms rely on people leaving when they are not ready to do so, perhaps in their mid-fifties, and this kind of practice gives them that possibility.”

Then there are women on the “mummy track” who have children, but want the flexibility that a traditional practice does not provide.

Women account for more than half of new entrants to the legal profession and make up 61 per cent of solicitors on the roll. Yet fewer than one third of partnerships in the top 20 UK firms go to women. Part-time partnerships remain a relative rarity.

Partnership no longer has the appeal it did, she says. The partnership track involves a long-hours commitment that many women with small children find impossible to combine with childcare. “The highest ambition used to be to be a partner. That is no longer seen as necessarily what people want. People are thinking more of other ways of practising — sitting as judges, writing books.”

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The solicitors, called consultants, bill their clients and Scott-Moncrieff Associates takes 30 per cent, for which the firm assumes responsibility for all professional compliance, regulation and insurance. The consultants are not seen as sole practitioners by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

“Sole practice is extremely onerous,” Scott-Moncrieff explains. “So we deal with all the regulatory side, take as much of the unremunerated burden off people as possible, with a lot of technology to help them. They just run their practice.”



Mary Lowe enjoys the freedom of being self-employed
WARREN SMITH

Case study: ‘I work more than before’

Mary Lowe opted to join Scott-Moncrieff Associates so she could work from her home town of Lytham and still see her family.

“I became a partner at Blackledge and Co in Lytham, Lancashire, when I was 34. The firm then merged with Warnings, in Blackpool, when I was 40. There, I had 30 staff and two offices as part of a practice with five partners. I was in charge of staff, as well as being head of private client specialising in

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firm and make changes to the practice. Much time in a practice is spent managing the firm and staff, which I enjoyed, but it reduces client time considerably.

“So I decided I would rather practise from Lytham and wanted to give clients a full service, which Scott-Moncrieff allow you to do. You are self-employed and pay 30 per cent to the company, for which they assume responsibility for all SRA compliance, for insurance and for the IT and a website. I am able to concentrate on my clients.

“I do high-net-worth divorce work, having settled a case worth £660 million this year, and I act for a huge number of local people in cases that often involve substantial assets. I am also a solicitor for the elderly, preparing wills, probate, lasting powers of attorney and applications to the court of protection. I am executor, attorney and deputy for many local people, some of whom have lost capacity and I have to manage their property and affairs.

“I have a small consulting room in Lytham as well as working from home, as I don't wish opponents to attend my home address if they act in person. I have a superb personal assistant, who runs the office with me. She works 20 hours a week meeting and greeting clients, scanning, printing and dealing with emails. I have the advantage of both an office for the public and can work from home to concentrate on my heavy-duty files behind the scenes.

“I thoroughly enjoy the freedom of being self-employed. Being contracted to Scott- Moncrieff allows me to work around my family — I am a proud mum to three children — never missing school or sports events, never having to worry about school holidays.

MENU

THURSDAY



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Scott-Moncrieff has doubled my income.

“Two of my children work remotely for me to earn extra cash: my second daughter, who is 15, helps as a post girl, doing photocopying and so on after school and at weekends. My eldest daughter, who has just graduated, and her friend act remotely as legal secretaries for at least 50 hours a week.

“I have three very loyal staff and am extremely busy, but it has been the most rewarding decision of my working career and I would urge any other hardworking high fee earner to look outside the traditional partnership route.

“You need your own client base, although Scott-Moncrieff do refer work to you also. I am very fortunate that all my work comes from recommendations.”



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