Osborne Clarke Implements Mandatory Office Attendance Policy for Bonus Eligibility

International law firm Osborne Clarke (OC) introduced a new mandatory office attendance policy to determine bonus eligibility for its staff. Under the new policy, employees are required to be present in the office three times a week, as confirmed by the firm's Chief People Officer, Graham de Guise. He emphasized that the expectation is for employees to be in the office "more often than not," translating to a minimum of three days per week either at the firm's office or with clients.

The move to enforce office attendance directly impacts the criteria for qualifying for bonuses at OC. According to de Guise, meeting the minimum expectations set by the firm across various areas, which includes being present in the office as required, is essential for employees to be considered for bonuses. He did acknowledge that certain valid reasons might prevent some staff from complying with the mandatory policy.

OC recently unveiled its state-of-the-art headquarters office in Bristol, and de Guise extolled the benefits of in-person work, citing advantages like relationship-building, collaboration, idea-sharing, and fostering the firm's unique culture.

For employees who meet the office attendance requirement, there are potential rewards in the form of bonuses, including performance bonuses of up to 20% and a discretionary long-term incentive plan that offers up to 40% bonus paid over three years. Additionally, OC distributed a 4% profit share in June to eligible colleagues.

However, the mandatory policy has raised concerns among some employees, particularly those with existing childcare arrangements that might not align with the office attendance requirement. This has prompted discussions among OC insiders about potential job changes in response to the new policy.

Skadden, another major law firm, has also taken steps to increase office presence for its lawyers. They recently announced a change in their agile working policy, now requiring lawyers to spend four days a week in the office (excluding business services staff). Skadden's lawyers are known to receive lucrative compensation, with newly qualified lawyers earning £165,000 plus a bonus, leading some to view the policy as a Faustian pact.

Conversely, while OC and Skadden promote in-person work, other firms have embraced remote work. DAC Beachcroft and Irwin Mitchell stand at the forefront of the legal industry's flexibility spectrum, offering their staff the option to work remotely full-time.

DAC Beachcroft introduced its Flex Forward initiative in 2021, promoting a culture that supports individual work-life balance preferences. David Pollitt, Managing Partner at DACB, expressed the firm's trust in its colleagues to find their own balance and design a life that suits their needs. He emphasized that the future of work is evolving, and firms must adapt accordingly.

RollOnFriday, a legal news platform, conducted a poll in the past involving over 4,500 lawyers and law firm staff, revealing a strong preference for working from home for at least the majority of the week. Moreover, early results from the RollOnFriday In-House lawyers survey indicate that most clients are content with their lawyers working from home.

Many clients highlighted the advantages of remote work, such as fostering a more relaxed and balanced lifestyle for employees. Trusting lawyers to deliver results without being confined to their desks was a recurring theme in the clients' feedback.

Ultimately, the legal industry is witnessing diverse approaches to work arrangements, with some firms opting for compulsory office attendance to encourage collaboration and uphold their corporate culture, while others prioritize flexible remote work to promote individual well-being and work-life balance. As the landscape continues to evolve, law firms are reassessing their strategies to cater to the changing needs and preferences of their employees and clients alike.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.