



the sunday times 25 best big companies to work for

1 **Pets at Home**
Petcare retailer

TOP SCORES

My Manager	1st
Personal Growth	1st
My Company	1st

Male/female ratio	40:60
Average age	30
Staff turnover	12%
Earning £35,000+	3%



Taking care: Andrew McCracken with a veiled chameleon at the Fort Kinnaird branch of Pets at Home

PETS AT HOME shows its pedigree by being voted top dog in our Best Big Company to Work For competition, moving up from second place last year.

No other company on our list scores better for questions about their managers and colleagues, how they feel about the company, the opportunities for personal growth and the organisation's approach to giving something back.

Ranking second in our other three categories (Fair Deal, Wellbeing and Leadership), the specialist pet retailer records 48 top-two scores in our 70-point questionnaire, more than double its tally last year and three times that of its closest rival, Iceland.

Employees have more fun with colleagues than workers at any other firm on the list, returning a positive score of 85% and they believe the Cheshire-based firm which rehoused 57,000 animals last year, makes more of a difference to the world (78%) than any other firm in the competition.

"I absolutely love my job," says Claire Nixon, 34, manager of the Groom Room at the store at Fort Kinnaird in Edinburgh, where dog pampering includes facials. "It is not like work. It is the best job in the world."

If salon staff need help with a big newfoundland or a jittery four-legged client their colleagues on the shop floor are happy to lend a hand.

"We help each other out," says store boss Annie Campbell, who recently

won Retail Week's Scotland and Ireland store manager of the year award. "It is very much a team effort. You can't do it on your own."

Employees are excited about where the organisation is going (78%) and believe they can make a valuable contribution to the success (83%) of Pets at Home, which in 21 years has grown from a one-shop business to become the country's largest pet-care specialist retailer with more than 330 stores, 5,930 staff and a 14% slice of a market worth £3.5bn.

All staff, 92% of whom are pet owners, get training in pet care, products and the pets they sell, which depending on the size of the store, can range from pink-tongued skinks to rabbits, fish, snakes and tarantulas, and it's a benefit to them personally (79%).

"I have learnt a lot," says animal lover Kieran Lambert, who joined a year and a half ago after working in a curtain shop. "It is a lot to take in but what you get is valuable information," says the 27-year-old, who finds the experience he gains beneficial for his future, a view shared across the company (79%).

Staff earn as they learn under the firm's development programme, which links pay to levels of knowledge, and

they can gain a range of skills from qualifying to sell restricted medicines to being trained to microchip animals, while the firm's policy of promoting internally has seen 90% or more of assistant store managers and area managers rising through the ranks.

Louise Barden, 25, assistant manager at the Fort store, started on an eight-hour contract in Darlington nine years ago. "It was a weekend job to bring in a little bit of money to go on holiday with my friends and afford nice things," says Barden, who transferred to Edinburgh when she was studying for a degree in dance.

"The development of people is a fundamental part of a successful business," says new chief executive Nick Wood, who joined last June, replacing Matt Davies, who now runs Halfords.

Wood, previously the boss at American Golf, understands the key role staff play. "It can't be a successful business without great colleagues," say Wood, the owner of two bichon frise dogs. "The bit that is so fascinating around the business is the culture. I always think of the CEO at the bottom because the people who are the most important are the people who interact with the customer and clients."

Wood runs the firm on sound moral principles (77%), say staff, who are clear about what is expected of them (84%) thanks to managers who ensure they have the resources staff need to do their job (82%).

Almost two-thirds of employees earn £15,000 or less, reflecting the fact that more than half the staff work part-time,

and while it is not a fortune, workers at only one other firm are more content with their pay and benefits (70%).

Run on strong principles (85%) the organisation, which offers holiday workshops for children and hosts visits from schools, Cubs and Brownies in its stores, encourages charitable activities (91%) at work.

Last year the firm raised more than £1.6m for its Support Adoption for Pets charity, which also distributes cash to other animal charities. Fundraising activities included setting world records for the largest dog walk, the longest dog lead and the most dogs in fancy dress.

www.petsathome.com

Socially aware

% score for a firm having a strong social conscience		
		Page
1	Pets at Home	80.8 62
2	Goldman Sachs International	80.5 66
3	PwC	79.1 67
4	IHG	77.3 63
5	Accenture	77.2 69
6	McDonald's Restaurants	76.5 64
7	American Express UK	76.4 67
8	The Midcounties Co-operative	75.8 67
9	Ernst & Young	75.8 68
10	Zurich	75.6 71

Best for training

% score for training being of great benefit		
		Page
1	Pets at Home	79.4 62
2	IHG	76.0 63
3	McDonald's Restaurants	74.3 64
4	Marriott Hotels International	73.5 65
5	Bourne Leisure	72.7 64
6=	Goldman Sachs International	71.6 66
6=	PwC	71.6 67
8	Iceland Foods	71.4 63
9	Barchester Healthcare	70.8 72
10	Sytner Group	70.4 64

Lending a helping hand

% score for people going out of their way to help		
		Page
1	RSA Insurance Group	80.1 65
2	Pets at Home	80.0 62
3	Goldman Sachs International	79.4 66
4	IHG	78.3 63
5	EE	77.9 70
6	Bourne Leisure	77.8 64
7	American Express UK	77.4 67
8	McDonald's Restaurants	76.9 64
9	Sytner Group	76.6 64
10	Boots	76.5 72

Best for fair pay

% score for feeling fairly paid compared to colleagues		
		Page
1	Iceland Foods	75.4 63
2	Pets at Home	69.7 62
3	McDonald's Restaurants	66.8 64
4	Sytner Group	60.3 64
5	The Midcounties Co-operative	60.2 67
6	PwC	59.6 67
7	Ernst & Young	58.4 68
8	Whitbread	58.3 66
9	American Express UK	57.9 67
10	Marriott Hotels International	57.2 65

Most caring managers

% score for managers caring for staff as individuals		
		Page
1	RSA Insurance Group	79.3 65
2	Bourne Leisure	78.9 64
3	Pets at Home	78.6 62
4	IHG	78.3 63
5	Whitbread	76.4 66
6	Iceland Foods	76.2 63
7	Sytner Group	76.1 64
8	American Express UK	75.5 67
9	Marriott Hotels International	75.3 65
10	EE	74.6 70

Best for the buzz

% score for teams who give a buzz at work		
		Page
1	Bourne Leisure	75.6 64
2	IHG	74.7 63
3	Pets at Home	74.5 62
4	Sytner Group	71.5 64
5	Iceland Foods	71.2 63
6	Whitbread	70.2 66
7	Marriott Hotels International	69.5 65
8	RSA Insurance Group	69.1 65
9	McDonald's Restaurants	68.9 64
10	Goldman Sachs International	68.3 66

