

# BUILDING FLEXIBILITY INTO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

How to create part-time and flexible roles that work for teachers and schools



# INTRODUCTION FROM NOW TEACH

Now Teach's purpose is two-fold. We seek to attract experienced, talented professionals from a range of backgrounds into the classroom and we work to retain them in the system for the long term.

We believe that children and schools can benefit enormously from the skills, insights and enthusiasm Now Teachers have to offer. Historically speaking, no one has successfully managed to recruit experienced people into teaching and this is a colossal waste; particularly given life is getting longer and our career patterns are changing. We are living at the tail end of a world in which people will expect to – or want to – completely retire in their sixties. This is central to our proposition.

We work practically, helping applicants gain places on training and in schools, and provide structured support and training to complement their ITT during the exhilarating, often challenging, early years in teaching. To complement this, at a more strategic level, we work with our trainees and schools to better understand how the profession can support this growing pool of talent and ensure they stay.

Flexible working is fast becoming a strategic part of this work. Many Now Teachers have left senior roles in which they had considerable autonomy. They are used to having space for development, innovation and reflection on their work and performance. Some have families; others caring responsibilities and others still want to ring-fence time to pursue other interests. If schools want to attract and retain these professionals, and other talented individuals, they need to get better at offering the flexible and part-time working that other employers increasingly provide.

It's for this reason that we commissioned this project with Timewise. We wanted to really understand what practical help and guidance schools need. As well as talking to schools, we've gathered views from a number of organisations involved in teacher training and recruitment. This research has focused on understanding the barriers to flexible working in teaching, and potential ways to overcome them. We are grateful to Legal & General for their support in making this project possible. We would also like to thank everyone we spoke to and who contributed to this project.

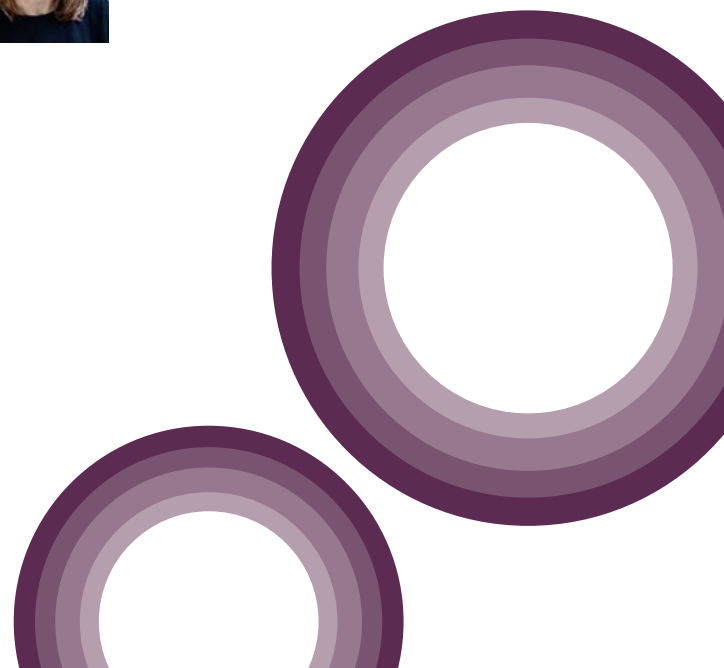
Teaching is acknowledged to be one of the most satisfying and inspiring professions there is; for many, it remains a vocation. But there is no question that the structures and demands of the profession are increasingly out of step with the modern workplace. Schools that can work with applicants and existing staff to offer flexible arrangements that work for the school, the students and the individuals, will be far better placed to attract and retain talented and dedicated people.

In an era of funding cuts and crippling teacher shortages, that should be a priority for all of us.



**Katie Waldegrave**

Co-founder and Executive Director,  
Now Teach



# FOREWORD BY TIMEWISE

The education system is all too frequently in the headlines, and rarely for positive reasons. From budget cuts and funding gaps to exam reform and the nature and form of inspections and accountability, there's a sense of a profession under serious strain, underpinned by reports of teachers leaving at an unreplaceable rate.

Research has highlighted a number of reasons for this attrition. 'Push' factors, such as long hours and ill-defined, expanding workloads, are encouraging teachers to look outside the profession. At the same time, 'pull' factors, such as family commitments and opportunities for better pay in other sectors, are proving tempting.

Clearly, schools are unable to match corporate salaries, or remove all of the administrative demands from teaching. But what they can do is support teachers to gain greater control of their time and their work-life balance. A key way to do so is to introduce the flexible working which many other professions take for granted.

While part-time roles do exist in some schools, they tend to be granted on an ad-hoc basis, in response to requests from valued employees. It's rare to find a school which is proactive about offering part-time and flexible roles, either to existing staff or potential recruits. If the teaching profession wants to compete for talented people, it therefore needs to take a more systemic approach to flexible working.

At Timewise, we have been working with organisations in a range of sectors for over 15 years, to identify the barriers to flexible working and to design innovative ways to overcome them. This collaboration with Now Teach has seen us work within the teaching profession to better understand how schools can proactively use flexible working and to identify the issues that stand in their way.

The project included interviews with members of SLT and staff in two academies, in which we listened to their views on the benefits and barriers to flexible working, and analysed their ideas on how the latter

can be overcome. We also consulted with staff from central functions of a leading MAT, and gathered views from a range of organisations with an interest in flexible teaching. This included ones which run teacher recruitment and returner programmes, timetabling software providers, and education-sector research-based organisations.

Additionally, we have reviewed existing data about flexible working which includes DfE statistics, NFER reports and a number of case studies. The quotes in this report, unless referenced, are taken from the in-school interviews.

Our recommendations set out clear steps that schools can take to deliver the flexible working that their staff want and need. It's no longer a nice to have; it's an expectation, on which the teaching profession needs to deliver.



**Charlotte Gascoigne**

Director of Research and Consultancy,  
Timewise Foundation

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The education profession is in the middle of a staffing crisis. Long hours, ill-defined and expanding workloads and opportunities elsewhere, are encouraging teachers to look outside the profession and putting potential candidates off.

While flexible working cannot tackle all of these issues, it has a big role to play in supporting teachers in gaining greater control of their time and work-life balance. However, just one in six secondary teachers currently work part-time. And in many cases, this is the result of a school accommodating a valued individual on request, rather than having a robust and proactive flexible working strategy.

With the demand for flexibility at an all-time high, schools need to develop a more systemic approach to flexible working. This will help keep experienced teachers within the profession and entice talented individuals in from other sectors, whilst providing career progression and a healthy work-life balance for all.

There are a number of barriers that stand in the way of a wider implementation of flexible working. These include:

- Perceived structural barriers such as timetabling, budget and workload.

- Attitudinal issues, such as a fear of opening the floodgates or being seen as unfair.
- Skill gaps, such as a lack of expertise in flexible job design and creating timetables that incorporate flexibility.

Timewise has developed a six-step framework which schools can use to help overcome these barriers, challenge outdated perceptions and create greater scope and opportunity for flexible teaching and management roles.

The process requires collaboration and willingness; clearing thinking and pragmatism; and a recognition that, like any change, it doesn't feel easy to do but can be managed. The detailed steps are provided in the section 'Recommendations for schools: six steps to success'.

While this framework offers an important first step towards delivering more, better flexible opportunities, more work needs to be done at a sector level in order to fully embed flexible working into the teaching profession. There are questions to be answered around the impact on student outcomes and whether there are cost implications for schools and the sector. Schools need to be supported and encouraged to carry out the work that this will entail.

# 1. FLEXIBLE WORKING AND THE MODERN WORKFORCE

## WHAT IS FLEXIBLE WORKING?

Flexible working is a catch-all term for a range of working patterns that do not fit into the traditional 9-5, five-day week. Successful flexible roles do not come about by accident, but are designed specifically to fit the needs of the individual and the organisation.

The three main elements that can be altered to make a role flexible are **where** the individual works (in one or more places, from home or alternative locations), **when** they work (for example, staggered start and finish times or compressed hours) and **how much** they work (such as part-time, job share or unpaid leave).

An important part of the flexible job design process is to consider which tasks can only be done by a particular individual, and which could be allocated elsewhere, and to whom. This is particularly relevant where a person's job has evolved over time, to include extra responsibilities which could be done by others, or which the job holder is overqualified for.



**27%** OF THE UK WORKFORCE WORKS PART-TIME



**63%** OF THE UK'S FULL-TIME WORKFORCE WORKS FLEXIBLY



**87%** OF THE UK'S FULL-TIME WORKFORCE EITHER WORKS FLEXIBLY OR WANT TO



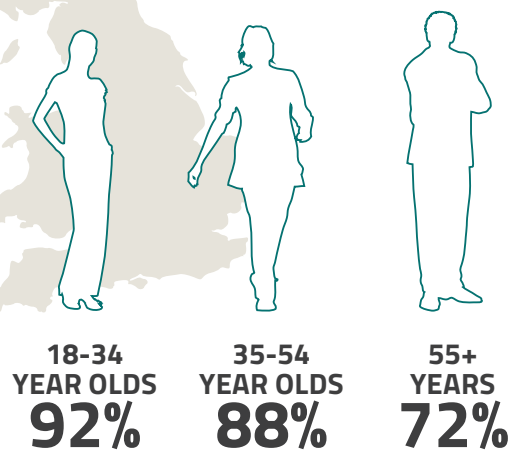
## WHO IS WORKING FLEXIBLY IN THE UK?

Flexible working is no longer for the minority. A quarter of the UK's workforce already works part-time, while nearly two-thirds of the UK's full-time workforce has some other form of flexibility. If we add in those who want, but don't currently have, flexible working, the proportion rises to nearly nine out of 10 UK workers.

Almost three-quarters of employers report that flexible working supports employee retention, motivation and engagement, while nearly two thirds say it helps with recruitment. Half of UK employers believe that flexible working impacts positively on absence and productivity. 96% of UK employers offer some kind of flexibility, as they recognise that it benefits both the individual and the employer.<sup>1</sup> Flexible working is no longer just an employee perk, granted at the manager's discretion to women returning from maternity leave.



### FLEXIBLE WORKING: YOUNGER WORKERS WANT IT MOST

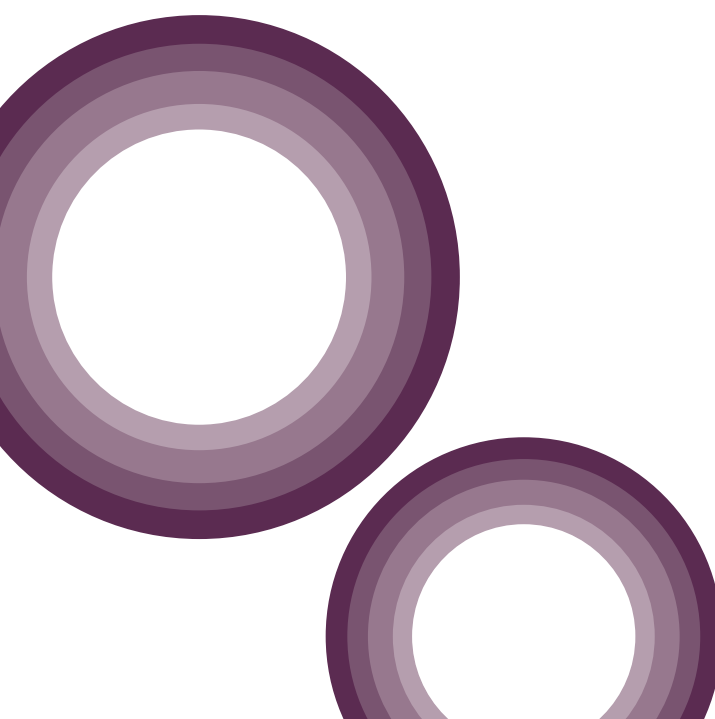


And while more women than men currently work flexibly, the gap is decreasing, and the demand from men is increasing. Today, 84% of male and 91% of female full-time employees either work flexibly or say they would like to.

The demand is high across all age groups, but is particularly high amongst younger workers. Their focus on well-being, equality and diversity are all factors in the value they place on flexibility. Millennials expect to have more control over the way they work: 84% of millennials envision taking significant breaks during their careers,<sup>2</sup> and 92% cite flexibility as a top priority when selecting a workplace.<sup>3</sup>

When schools are recruiting, or trying to keep hold of the teachers they have, they aren't just competing against other schools. They are also competing against other professions which are arguably better paid, less stressful and more open to flexible working.

1. Flexible Working Provision and Uptake, CIPD, 2012
2. Millennial Careers: 2020 Vision, Manpower Group 2016
3. The Future of Work – Jobs and Skills in 2030, UKCES



## WHO IS WORKING FLEXIBLY IN SCHOOLS?

According to DfE statistics, around 17% of secondary school teachers works part-time.<sup>4</sup> This compares with a national figure of 27% of workers working part-time, and is significantly lower than one would expect in a female-dominated profession: nationally, 42% of women work part-time. In primary schools, the figure is slightly better, with one in four primary teachers working part-time. And working part-time at a senior level is very rare: only 3% of heads do so, compared with 13% of directors and managers across the whole workforce.<sup>5</sup>

While part-time working statistics are readily available, other types of flexible working are harder to quantify, as much of the flexibility in where and when teachers work is informally agreed. Anecdotally, many schools have a number of informal arrangements, such as late starts or working partly from home, which often don't affect contractual agreements.

While there are many examples of individual teachers being accommodated in part-time work, it is hard to find schools which have taken a whole-school approach, and are willing to shout about their success and how they achieved it, in a way that would help other schools to overcome the barriers.



Around **17% of secondary school teachers work part-time.**<sup>4</sup> This compares with a national figure of 27% of workers working part-time.

**King's School in Winchester has more than a third part-time staff and uses split classes to good effect, with subject teachers saying this is their preferred option. The modern foreign language department has a high number of part-time staff and exam results are some of the highest in the school.**

Source: Flexible Working in Schools, Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools, DfE, 2017



4. Teacher Retention and Turnover Research, Interim Report, NFER, 2017

5. Part-time and Temporary Work by Occupation, ONS 2018 EMP10; All in Employment by Occupation, ONS 2018 EMP08

## 2. THE CASE FOR CHANGE: WHY SCHOOLS NEED TO EMBRACE FLEXIBLE WORKING

There is no question that an intense level of commitment is expected from teachers in term time. And while those who see teaching as a vocation may be prepared to embrace this intensity, it needs to be balanced with the expectations and needs of the workforce as a whole in order to avoid stress and burn-out.

UK workers are looking for flexibility for a huge range of reasons. If teaching doesn't provide it, people won't choose, or stay in, the profession.

Here are three core reasons why school leaders should build flexibility into their strategy.

### RETENTION

**Problem:** The 'brain drain' of teachers leaving the profession is widespread and well-known. And the lack of part-time and flexible roles has been identified as a key reason: many secondary teachers reduce their hours when they leave the classroom.<sup>6</sup>

Some subjects are particularly vulnerable: Science, Maths and language teachers have skills which are valued in other sectors, where pay is better and there is more scope for role flexibility.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the rate of teachers over 50 leaving has increased.<sup>8</sup> There may be a multitude of reasons behind this (such as workload, good pension schemes, caring for elderly relatives). But other professions, including GPs and bankers, have found that offering part-time work is a good way of retaining skilled and valued older workers.<sup>9</sup>

Teachers are much less satisfied with the amount of leisure time they have than comparable professionals. Only 47% of teachers report satisfaction with leisure time, while equivalent rates for nurses and police officers are 60% and 58% respectively. Former teachers report that their job satisfaction increases after leaving, as does their subjective well-being.<sup>10</sup>



The lack of part-time and flexible roles has been identified as a key reason for the teaching 'brain drain'. **Only 47% of teachers report satisfaction with their leisure time.**

**Solution:** In the UK workforce as a whole, 75% of employers believe that flexible working has a positive effect on retention, and 73% feel it improves staff motivation.<sup>11</sup> So secondary schools are missing a trick. Implementing part-time and flexible arrangements could decrease the number who choose to take part-time roles elsewhere because their teaching jobs are incompatible with their work-life balance needs.

6. Teacher Retention and Turnover Research – Is the Grass Greener Beyond Teaching?, NFER, 2017
7. Teacher Retention and Turnover, Interim report NFER, Oct 2017
8. Teacher Retention and Turnover, Interim report, NFER, Oct 2017
9. <https://www.bma.org.uk/collective-voice/policy-and-research/education-training-and-workforce/supporting-an-ageing-medical-workforce>; The Agility Mindset, Fiona Cannon, 2018 (Palgrave Macmillan)
10. Teacher Retention and Turnover Research – Is the Grass Greener Beyond Teaching?, NFER, 2017
11. Flexible Working Provision and Uptake, CIPD, 2012



## RECRUITMENT

**Problem:** As well as being hard to retain teachers, it's also hard to recruit new teachers. There are not enough people entering the profession to match the rise in student numbers and not enough former teachers are returning.

Recruitment data from the TES suggests that only 6.6% of secondary teaching jobs are advertised as part-time.<sup>12</sup> The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2018<sup>13</sup> shows that, for all jobs paid over £20k FTE, the rate of those open to flexibility is 11.1%.

The DfE's Return to Teaching initiative found that 46% of teachers who had taken a career break reported that a lack of flexible or part-time opportunities was a barrier to returning to the profession, after workload and outdated skills.<sup>14</sup>

**Solution:** Offering flexible options at the point of hire can increase the number of applicants. The Timewise Jobs board, which only advertises jobs that are open to flexibility, has an average of 10 applicants per job (across all sectors), compared with a national rate of less than 1.<sup>15</sup>

And flexibility is a particularly good way of enticing returners back to the profession: an NCTL pilot concluded that schools can attract more returners by offering jobs which are open to flexibility.<sup>16</sup>



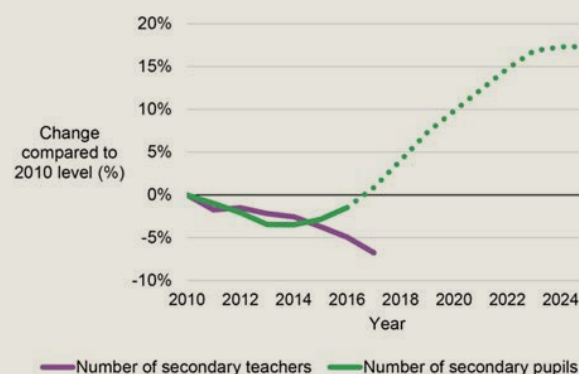
The DfE's Return to Teaching initiative found that **46% of teachers** who had taken a career break reported that a **lack of flexible or part-time opportunities** was a barrier to returning to the profession.<sup>14</sup>

## THE PROBLEM IN NUMBERS

- **Targets for the required number of secondary teacher trainees have been missed for six years in a row.**
- **The number of returners has increased only slightly since 2011, despite policy interventions offering support.**
- **The retention rates of early-career teachers (ECTs) have fallen considerably between 2012 and 2018.**
- **Around a quarter of full-time teachers (23%) would like to reduce their working hours, even if it means less pay, compared to 17% of similar professionals.**

Source: NFER Teacher Labour Market in England, Annual Report, 2019

**In secondary schools, the number of teachers continues to fall, despite the projected increase in student numbers, as shown in the graph below**



Source: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/news-events/nfer-blogs/latest-teacher-retention-statistics-paint-a-bleak-picture-for-teacher-supply-in-england/>

- The equivalent figure for primary schools is 9.7%
- <https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-jobs-index/>
- Exploring Flexible Working Practice in Schools, Literature review, DfE, 2019
- <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/job-applicants-per-vacancy-hits-record-low/>
- Flexible Working in Schools, Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools, DfE, 2017

## PROGRESSION

**Problem:** There is often a perception – and not just in the teaching world – that senior jobs can't be done on a part-time or flexible basis. In schools in particular, leaders feel the need to be constantly available to deal with whatever may arise during the school day. The low proportion of SLT members working flexibly or part-time means that there isn't a next step, or even a visible career pathway, for ambitious teachers who want or need to work in this way. Working flexibly or part-time is often seen as an obstacle to promotion.<sup>17</sup>

The result is that flexible and part-time teachers find it hard to progress. And the data around both the numbers of senior women in education, and the gender pay gap in the sector, suggest that it is particularly difficult for women to progress in this sector, despite the workforce being predominantly female.

**Solution:** Designing part-time and flexible roles at all levels in the profession will allow teachers who need to work flexibly to progress their careers. There are increasing numbers of examples of heads and heads of department working part-time or on a job-share basis.<sup>18</sup>

In many ways school SLT jobs are closer to senior management roles in other occupations than classroom teacher roles. The annual Timewise Power 50<sup>19</sup> showcases many senior leaders – including school heads – who work part-time and flexibly, and provides a great place for school leaders to learn from those in other professions.

"You should be able to manage your teaching career during different life stages."

**CLASSROOM TEACHER**

"We don't want teachers' careers to plateau."

**ACADEMY HEAD**

"If we can keep teachers by being flexible, students will benefit from consistency of teachers who are there from year 7 through to year 13."

**ACADEMY PRINCIPAL**

### GENDER AND PROGRESSION IN TEACHING

- In state-funded secondary schools, the average pay for female teachers is £2,900 per year less than the average pay for their male counterparts.
- Almost three-quarters of teachers are women, but only a third of secondary heads and two-thirds of primary heads are.

Source: Department for Education, 20 July 2017

- The most recent gender pay gap data suggests that 58 out of 100 employers with the biggest median pay gap are schools or academy trusts.

Source: TES analysis, 2019

17. Teachers in England's Secondary Schools, Evidence from TALIS 2013, DfE, 2014; Factors Affecting Teacher Retention, Qualitative investigation, DfE, 2018  
 18. Flexible Working in Schools, Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools, DfE, 2017  
 19. <https://timewise.co.uk/power-50/power-50-2019/>

# 3. WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO MAKING TEACHING FLEXIBLE?

Barriers to flexible working exist in all organisations. Some are structural, some are cultural, and some are simply down to a lack of awareness of alternative ways of working.

The barriers outlined below are drawn from in-school interviews and discussions with other parties as part of this research, and informed by pre-existing research.

## STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

There are a number of financial and operational considerations which need to be taken into account. None are insurmountable, but all need to be identified and acknowledged before schools can move forward.

- **Timetabling, staff-student ratios and cover.** The logistics of timetabling is often cited as the biggest obstacle to flexible working: 62% of secondary teachers say that timetabling is a barrier.<sup>20</sup> However, the fact that timetables and rotas exist provides a degree of predictability in teaching which is lacking in many other professions, including shift-based roles like nursing and doctors.
- **Budget.** The belief that flexible working is more expensive may originate in the common perception that job sharers need handover time, which creates a need to pay for 120% of a post instead of just one person. But there are lots of other options apart from job share – and there is no evidence from other sectors that flexible working is more expensive in the long run – especially when balanced against the cost of recruiting and training up replacement teachers.

In fact, existing evidence shows that flexible workers are more productive: 97% of managers said the quantity of work improved or stayed the same when workers moved to flexible working and 93% of managers said the quality of the work improved or stayed the same.<sup>21</sup>

- **Workload and the intensity of the school day.** The unacknowledged workload isn't specific to schools, but it is well-known that teachers work beyond their contracted hours. Staff worry that moving to part-time will mean a full-time workload for part-time pay, and that they will have to sacrifice their non-teaching time. And management fear that part-timers won't be prepared to work extra hours.

"You need to have enough teachers present in the school at any one time."

CLASSROOM TEACHER

"The workload is a barrier – you'd be paid part-time and still work long hours."

CLASSROOM TEACHER

20. Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey, NFER, 2018

21. Flexible Working and Performance, Cranfield University/Working Families, 2008

## CULTURAL AND ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

There are some widely held views about the infeasibility of flexible working within secondary schools. Some are based on anecdotal evidence (such as experience of a poorly-designed job share that didn't work well). Others are due to a lack of awareness that things can be done differently. They are no less powerful for being intangible rather than concrete.

- **Opening the floodgates.** Some school leaders worry that if they are proactive about offering flexibility, they will be inundated with requests. The unmet demand for flexibility is hard to gauge.
- **Fairness and “first come first served”.** Having allocated a number of flexible arrangements, some leaders believe there is no scope to allow any more. The timetable feels like a limited, closed system and the knock-on effect of accommodating one more request may be difficult to manage. Linked to this is the fear of unfairness – better to grant no requests than to have to unfairly refuse the third or the ninth or the fifteenth one.
- **Validity of reasons.** Some leaders see childcare as the only valid reason for wanting flexible working, and are unwilling to consider others such as supporting mental health or personal development.
- **Impact on students and student outcomes.** Teaching has long been regarded as a vocation, and teachers are expected to go the extra mile for their students, rather than put their own work-life needs first. Teachers fear that students will suffer if they are less available – and that parts of the job, including the vital role of pastoral care, won't get done.
- **Limits on progression.** Some teachers fear that flexible working arrangements are incompatible with progression, promotion or leadership roles.
- **Management capacity.** Managing a flexible workforce takes time: jobs need to be re-shaped, job holders need to work and be managed differently, and the timetable may need to be revised more frequently than the typical annual cycle.

“There’s not really a stigma, but you’d be less of an actor if you worked part-time.”

**CLASSROOM TEACHER**

“We’re supportive but how we support it is not widely broadcast. We don’t want to encourage it too much.”

**ACADEMY PRINCIPAL**



## LACK OF EXPERTISE IN HOW TO DESIGN FLEXIBLE JOBS

When a job-holder changes where, when or how much they work, there are implications for their colleagues, their department and the school community, as well as for themselves. A lack of expertise in adapting to these changes will act as a barrier to successful flexible working.

- Redesigning jobs is a particular skill, which needs to be supported by training, rather than simply being added to the head's already large workload. And schools have a particular challenge around flexible job design which is not faced by many other types of workers: teachers' jobs cannot be redesigned in isolation, because of the impact on the timetable as a whole.
- Building timetables around a small number of flexible arrangements is manageable; doing so across the entire school is a logistical challenge which requires technology that many schools don't have.



"The SLT supports flexible working, but the system doesn't accommodate it."

**ACADEMY VICE PRINCIPAL**

"You'll end up with 20% slivers of people's time."

**ACADEMY PRINCIPAL**

"We don't have the structures in place to ensure job shares work."

**CLASSROOM TEACHER**

"Individuals don't really come forward with how to do it."

**ACADEMY HEAD TEACHER**

# 4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS: SIX STEPS TO SUCCESS

There is no blueprint for turning out a perfectly-tuned flexible workforce. It is an in-depth process which will take thought, collaboration and training in order to be implemented successfully.

However, the benefits that flexible working can offer to schools mean that it should be a strategic priority. It doesn't have to be done all at once, but it does need to involve key stakeholders and lead to meaningful change.

A recent DfE review of the literature on flexible working in comparable sectors highlights the importance of senior managers in making flexible working possible and positive. The review also cites the need for consistency in communication and behaviour, and emphasises that flexible working must be positively framed by senior leaders.<sup>22</sup>

The following six-step process, adapted from work which Timewise has done over many years in other sectors, offers a framework for schools that are serious about creating flexible opportunities for their staff. Timewise has helped organisations in a range of sectors build more flexibility into their workforce – you can read about these in our reports.<sup>23</sup>

“You’d need to think through what is required. It’s complicated.”  
**ACADEMY VICE PRINCIPAL**

**(i)**  
**BUILD A TEAM TO LEAD AND DRIVE CHANGE**



**(ii)**  
**DETERMINE FEASIBLE GOALS**



**(iii)**  
**COMMUNICATE CONSULT AND CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS**



**(iv)**  
**EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR JOB DESIGN & TIMETABLING**



**(v)**  
**PILOT YOUR CHOSEN APPROACH**



**(vi)**  
**INTEGRATE FLEXIBLE PRINCIPLES ACROSS THE SCHOOL**



22. Exploring Flexible Working Practice in Schools: Literature review, DfE, 2019

23. <https://timewise.co.uk/research/>



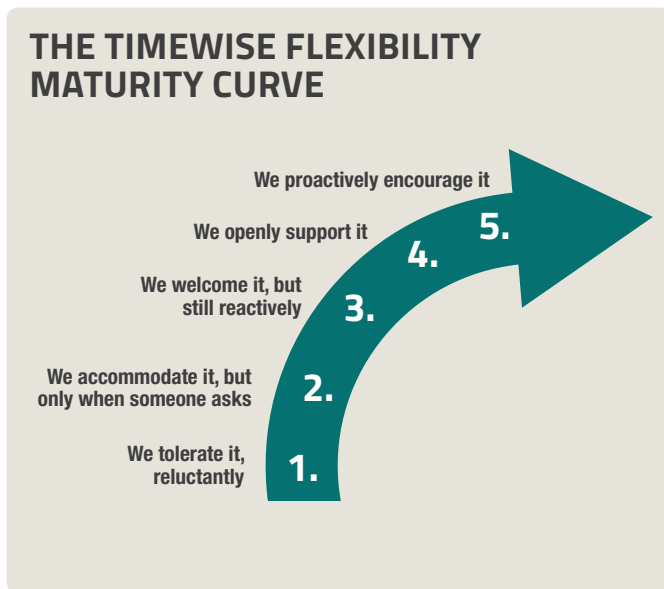
## (i) BUILD A TEAM TO LEAD AND DRIVE CHANGE

- Bring together a small working group. Choose enthusiasts and sceptics from a range of roles – including the individual responsible for timetabling, members of the SLT, a head of department, a head of year and a classroom teacher, as well as perhaps governors or parents. They will bring a range of perspectives and ideas, as well as acting as advocates. If you want to make an impact, the head must be part of this group.
- Build your school's business case (additional costs vs projected savings, impact of staff numbers, etc) for flexible working and how it fits in with the school development plan. Consider your particular barriers (structural, attitudinal and/or how to design flexible jobs) and how they could be overcome.
- Discuss how flexible working aligns with your school's values, to tease out concerns and aspirations. These will inform your policy, guidelines and how it works in practice.
- Look at your current flexible working policy and how it is implemented. Think about your current request process and how well it works, but also what other opportunities you might want to create to discuss flexible working, such as your hiring process or your annual review process. Don't underestimate the importance of informal discussions around flexible options.





## (ii) DETERMINE FEASIBLE GOALS



- Establish where your school currently sits on the Timewise Maturity Curve. Take an honest, self-critical approach; you need to be clear about your starting point before you can move forward. At number 1 on the curve, you do the legal minimum; at number 5 you are openly publicising your commitment to flexible working, proactively asking staff and candidates about their work-life balance needs, and tackling flexible timetabling across the whole school.
- Agree which step on the curve you can realistically aim for. This includes thinking about how you'll tackle flexible working for existing staff, flexible hiring and opportunities for progression on a part-time or flexible basis. How proactive do you want to be? Do you want to take a more passive approach (responding to requests if they arise) or actively encourage more flexible working?



## (iii) COMMUNICATE, CONSULT AND CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS

- Identify the key stakeholders whose support and understanding is essential, including not just staff, but also governors and parents.
- Map out what the communication needs are for each group. Do you need their input or do they just need to be informed?
- Identify the cultural barriers in your school. Are your stakeholders concerned about student outcomes? Or is the perceived cost of flexible working a bigger issue? Do they understand how the workforce has changed, and what teachers' expectations are? Do they fear the floodgates opening? How will you tackle these perceptions?
- Get a sense of what the unmet demand for flexible working is amongst the staff. This could be achieved via focus groups or a staff survey. Make it clear that this is a litmus test to inform your thinking, not a vote.
- Bring together some different groups of people to think creatively about what the problems are and what solutions might be possible.





## (iv) EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR FLEXIBLE JOB DESIGN AND TIMETABLING

Flexible job design involves considering where, when and how much people work – and how any changes to this affect the responsibilities, activities, outcomes, and skills of the whole team, not just the job holder.

The role of a teacher has a degree of predictability, repetition, clarity of task and outcome which many jobs don't have, and which are essential in determining what flexibility is possible. Workload and intensity may still be an issue, but thinking through when, where and how much people work is a good starting point. This is covered in detail in section 5, 'Flexible job design for teachers and schools'.

"We always consider what people have, and may need, in our planning. We don't want to deny requests."

ACADEMY PRINCIPAL



## (v) PILOT YOUR CHOSEN APPROACH

Once you have decided on an approach that you want to pursue, it's important to test it out and see how well it works. Set clear aims and success criteria. Here are two examples.

### RECRUITMENT

**Aim:** To attract more and better quality candidates for a Maths teacher vacancy.

**Pilot:** Advertise the role as being open to flexible working. This doesn't mean the successful candidate has to work flexibly, but it will widen your pool of applicants.

**Considerations:** What flexibility is possible? See the next section 'Flexible job design options for teachers and schools' for ideas.

**Measurement:** The quantity and quality of applicants and how successfully the role is filled.

### FEASIBILITY OF LATE STARTS

**Aim:** Allow the flexibility for late starts so that teachers can drop their own children at school.

**Pilot:** Move form-time to just after lunch or some other point in the day.

**Considerations:** How many late starts will you be able to offer? How will this affect registration administration and pastoral time? Will it impact on learning time for lesson 1?

**Measurement:** Whether students are adversely affected by the change, and whether it has a positive impact on staff.



## (vi) INTEGRATE FLEXIBLE PRINCIPLES ACROSS THE SCHOOL

As you become better informed about what works and what is possible, start thinking about how you can move your school up the maturity curve for each of the following groups:

- **New staff:** Advertise jobs as flexible, and have a proactive conversation during the interview. Remember to be clear about what the person needs to bring to the role, and where flexibility is and isn't an option. By being open to flexibility, a wider range of candidates will come forward and you can work through what is possible together.
- **Existing staff:** Face to face meetings with staff offer a good opportunity to work through any flexibility they might need, or to get early insights into what options they might want in the future.
- **Staff who want to progress:** What scope is there for flexible working at a senior level? In theory, the managerial and administrative aspects of senior and middle leadership roles should lend themselves to flexible working. Look at how this could work in practice and encourage talented staff who work flexibly to apply for more senior roles.

Making sure that opportunities for career development are built into part-time and flexible roles will help part-time and flexible workers gain the experience and expertise they need to take the next step. Using part-time or flexible members of the team to act as mentors and role models to their colleagues is particularly effective, as it increases awareness of what is possible.

**At St Cuthbert Mayne in Torquay, almost a third of the workforce is part-time and the school is keen to dispel myths around flexible working. As one middle leader says, "I became much more robust and creative in my organisational arrangements and commitment and contribution to the school."**

Source: Flexible Working in Schools, DfE, 2017

### WHAT DO TO WITH REQUESTS IN THE MEANTIME

If you have a number of flexible requests on your desk right now, and granting them is not particularly easy, you can take some interim steps while you refine your flexible working approach:

- Have a candid conversation with the individuals involved.
- Explain that, if you are going to be able to make flexibility possible, you'd like it to be fair across the school.
- Ask individuals for their ideas about how it could work, for themselves, their class and their department, and how they can make sure it won't have a negative impact on the school.
- If you know you cannot say yes straight away, tell them what you are planning to do about flexible working more widely.
- Discuss what other options might work for them in the meantime.



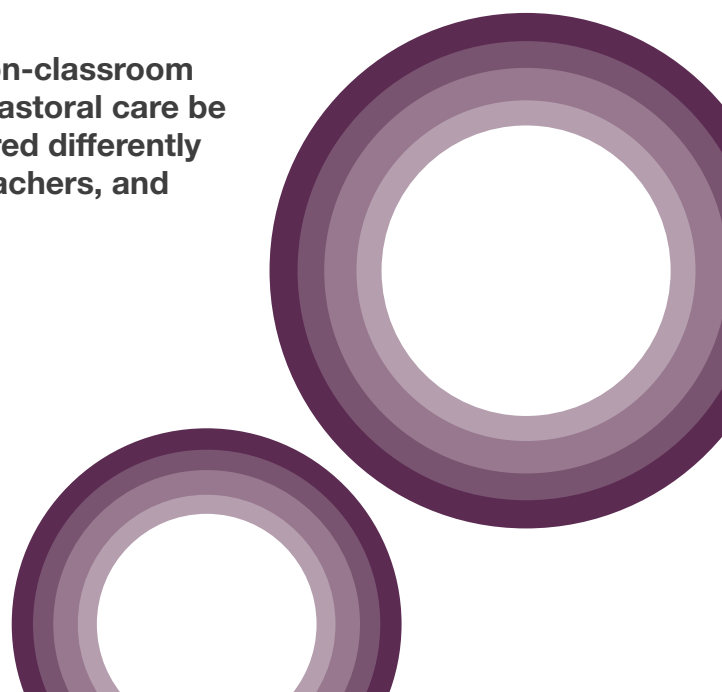
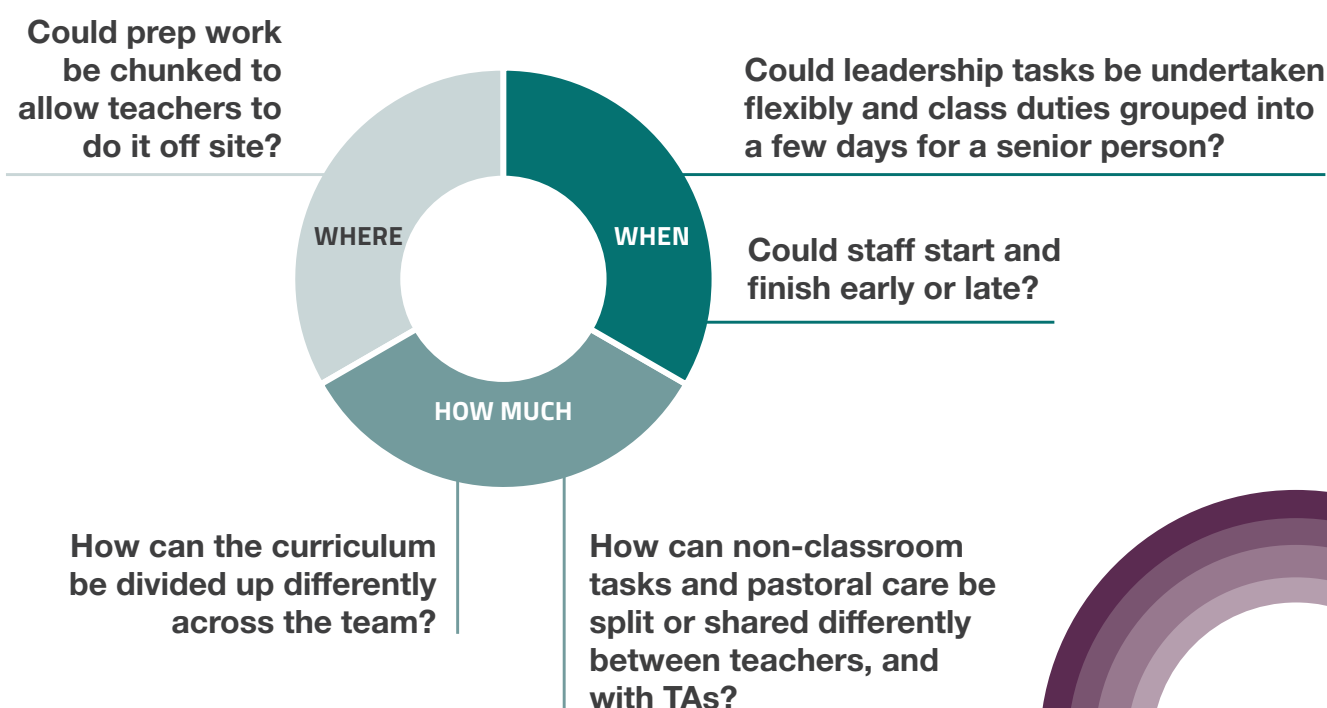
# 5. FLEXIBLE JOB DESIGN OPTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

Any change to a classroom teacher’s job – cutting down the job to suit a part-time teacher, or rearranging when the work is done to suit a full-time one – impacts on the timetable. A good starting point is to consider all the elements of the job, including those which are timetabled and those which aren’t.

It is important to note that, when a teacher’s timetabled hours are reduced, the non-timetabled tasks should be reduced proportionally, or consideration be given to whether this is possible.

Whatever options you explore, it will be critical to move the discussion from the table onto the timetable. Speak to timetabling software providers; many of them will offer demonstrations and run through potential options, to help you gain an understanding of how to integrate flexible arrangements into a pre-existing process of allocating and scheduling classes.

Here are some of the options to explore.



## REDESIGNING WHEN PEOPLE WORK

Some staff want to work full-time, but with some variation from the standard school timetable. In practice, in schools, this means either organising the timetable to allow a later start time or earlier finish time on certain days, or compressing a full timetable into fewer days. Sometimes, an early finish just a couple of times a week can make all the difference to a staff member who wants to collect their own children from school.

While this is logistically complex, it is possible. Ask your staff to collaborate with each other to work out solutions for themselves: this is commonplace in other rostered environments such as nursing.

Consider different options around when duties and tasks are carried out, and who else could be doing other duties which fall into the start or end of day slots. For example:

- Some teachers can start later on some days if you rethink who needs to run form time and assembly. Can you move form time to later in the day, or reallocate it to other members of staff, experienced TAs, or SLT members? How much pastoral care actually gets done during early morning form time, and could it be done better at other times or by other people? How many teachers are actually needed in assembly to meet staff/student ratios?
- Challenge some of the assumptions around directed time, to allow teachers to work later in the evening rather than at school at the end of the school day.
- Some teachers can leave early on some days if you rethink what can be taught and by whom at the end of the day and who can supervise after-school clubs.
- Redistribute the supervision of breaks and after-school clubs, as well as lessons, to enable a teacher to work a compressed, but still full-time, week.



“The vast majority of teachers will find workable solutions to any flexible arrangements if they are trusted and empowered to do so.”

**HEAD, ELLEN TINKHAM SCHOOL, EXETER<sup>24</sup>**

“The tight curriculum structure means we already have a timetable to work from, so allowing teachers to work flexibly should be easier than in other jobs.”

**MATHS TEACHER**

24. Flexible Working in Schools, Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools, DfE, 2017

## REDESIGNING WHERE PEOPLE WORK

Most of a teacher's job has to be based at the school. But some tasks, such as marking and report writing, could be (and often are) done remotely. Again, the challenge is the timetable, so it is important that you have identified all the elements of the job, and which ones can be done remotely. For example:

- Redistribute planning and admin tasks so they can be done offsite – for a whole day or half day, or even a couple of hours to avoid rush hour.
- Include time that teachers need to be available on site in the timetable, to ensure the right staffing ratios onsite.
- Use technology to enable access to staff meetings for those working off-site.
- Allocate a teacher's free periods into a single day so they can work from home one day a week.

"You should be able to organise the timetable so that people teach four days a week, and can work at home for the last day."

**HEAD OF YEAR**

"The world doesn't fall apart if we are not there. We just need to think through the detail of what is needed and possible."

**HEAD OF YEAR**

## REDESIGNING HOW MUCH PEOPLE WORK

This refers to staff who want to work – and earn – less. It's important to remember that not all part-timers are looking for whole days off. Depending on their non-work requirements and the length of their commute, some can be more flexible about working part of all five days, rather than three or four full days.

Part-time and job share are traditional routes to working less. There are standard ways to structure these, but they can also be tackled more creatively if you consider duties and tasks across the whole team. For example:

- Consider how a subject can be split: English into Language and Literature; Science into the three individual sciences; History by topic or period. Teachers often worry about the impact on continuity for students, but it's equally possible that, as staff specialise in their preferred area, students may benefit from greater expertise. Edval has a number of very good handbooks, including 'Improve Split Classes with Smarter Timetabling'.<sup>25</sup>
- Differentiate between a reduction in hours and a reduction in responsibilities, especially for management roles. And when a part-time teacher is promoted and takes full accountability for the additional responsibilities, this needs to be reflected in their pay.
- Use experienced TAs and/or other subject teachers whose hours are under-allocated to split a class differently.
- Use teachers with expertise and enthusiasm outside their normal subject to teach an additional subject.

"We have two teachers who do a job share and it's more than two part-time staff. They spend time planning and for handovers and it's worth it."

**CLASS TEACHER**

25. <https://www.edval.education/resources/ebooks/>

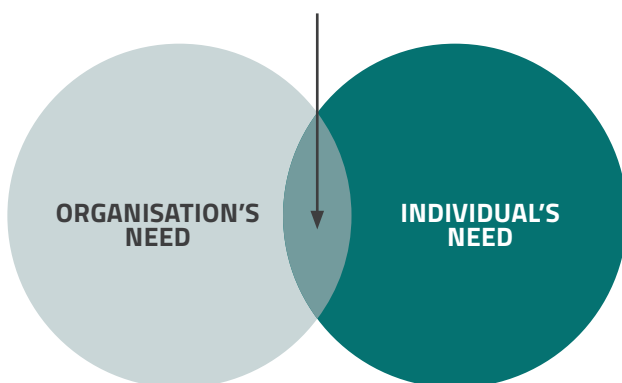
# 6. ADVICE FOR TEACHERS AND APPLICANTS

The lack of advertised flexible and part-time roles in the teaching profession can make it difficult for those who want or need to work flexibly to find the right one. For similar reasons, the competition for roles that are advertised in this way is likely to be fierce.

These principles have been created to help teachers improve their chances of securing a part-time or flexible role.

## BEFORE YOU APPLY

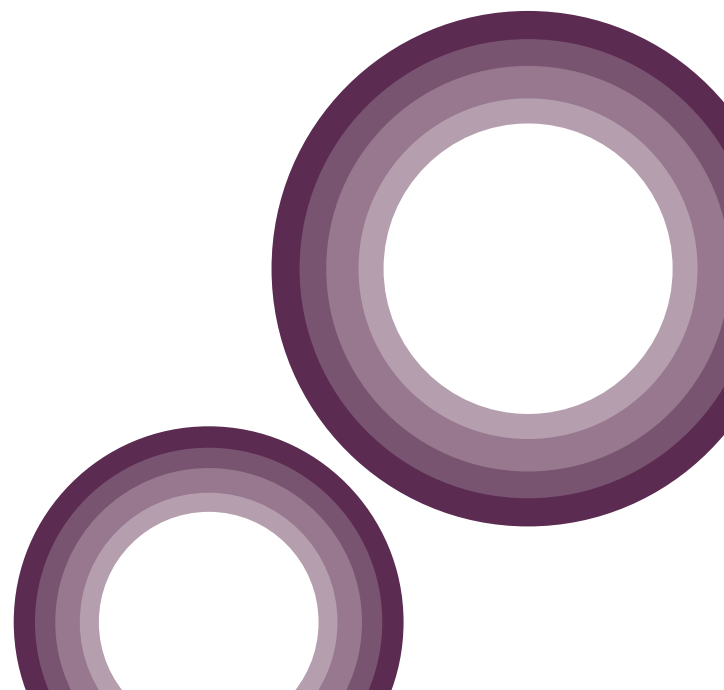
**FLEXIBILITY WORKS BEST WHEN BOTH SETS OF NEEDS CAN BE MET**



- Do your homework. If you haven't worked flexibly before, find some case studies of teachers who do, and read up on the principles and practice of flexible working. Being properly informed is an important first step towards getting the right result.
- Identify your necessities and nice-to-haves. Think about what you can't manage without, and what you would be prepared to compromise on.
- Create your case. Identify any concerns the school may have and think about how you could overcome them. Be clear about how your proposed arrangement could benefit the school.

## WHEN YOU APPLY

- Lead with your skills and experience, just as you would with any application. You need to show that you are a strong candidate who matches their criteria and will be an asset to the school.
- Don't mention flexibility at this stage, in your letter or CV. Even if the role is advertised as flexible, this isn't the right time to focus on it.
- Give it a shot. If the role isn't advertised as part-time or flexible, that shouldn't stop you applying. If you are an outstanding candidate, the school may be prepared to accommodate you.



## AT AN INTERVIEW

- Lead with your skills and experience. As with the application, the interview is about persuading the panel that you are the best person for the job, not about your desire for flexibility.
- Think about when to mention flexibility. You need to establish your credibility and what you will bring to the role and the school. Flexibility might come up naturally during the conversation or you might be asked about it. If not, when it's your turn to ask questions, ask a few others first, and then raise it as a point for discussion.
- Take an open approach to discussing it. State that you are really enthusiastic about the school and the role, and would like to know how much scope there is for flexibility.
- Be prepared to be flexible in return. For example, if it is a part-time role, and you can be flexible about which days you can work, that's likely to be useful.
- Accept the limitations of flexibility. Some forms of flexible working will be harder for schools to manage.
- Play the long game. One approach is to suggest a trial period and commit to reviewing it. You can also put in a formal request for flexible working after six months in the role.

"It's difficult to ask because of the nature of the job."

**CLASSROOM TEACHER**

"We always consider people's needs when planning ahead."

**HEAD OF ACADEMY**



# 7. AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Whilst this report has explored some of the key areas for focus within individual schools, there is a great deal of work to be done at a sector level by the DfE and other stakeholders if flexible working is to be properly embedded into the teaching profession. We recommend, and we are actively exploring, further research and analysis into the following areas:

- **The impact on students whose teachers work flexibly.** Does it have an adverse effect on continuity of learning? Is there any benefit in splitting the role or the curriculum differently? What impact do split subjects have on student outcomes?
- **The extent to which flexible jobs could impact retention and recruitment in a school and across the profession.** Will more opportunities for flexible arrangements encourage a teacher to stay in their job? Will more teachers move across and between schools depending on the flexibility on offer? To what extent will it attract more returners back into the classroom, or encourage people to consider teaching as a profession who otherwise would not apply?
- **Timetabling.** To what extent is timetabling an obstacle or are the pre-existing processes and software adaptable to more flexibility?
- **The financial implications of flexible working.** What effect does it have on the staffing bill, including agency costs? Does it have a positive impact on sickness and absence? Does it improve retention and so minimise recruitment costs and upheaval?

Please get in touch if you are interested in investigating any or all of these areas further.





# CONCLUSION

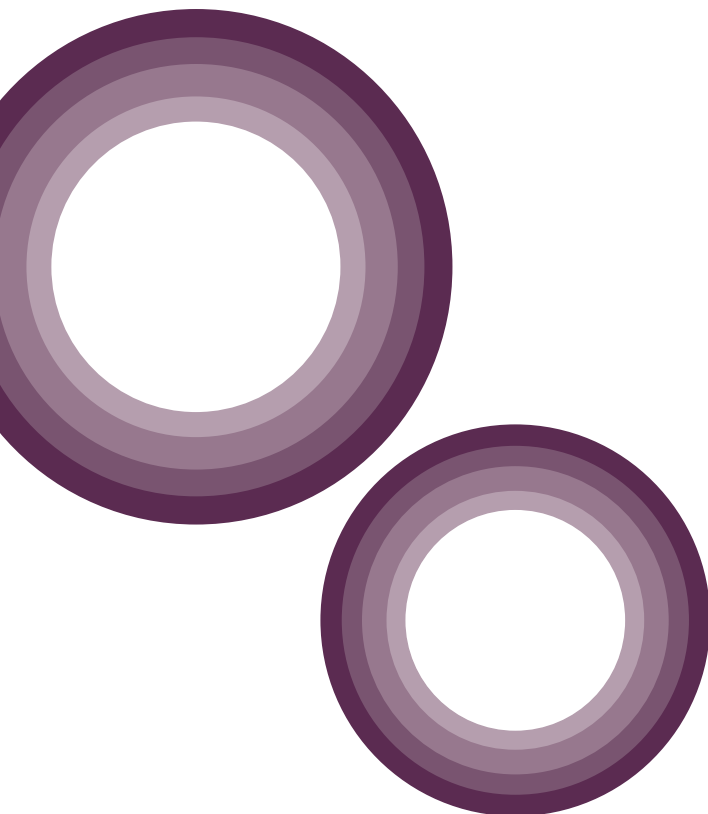
The competence, goodwill and dedication of the workforce continues to sustain the teaching profession. However, schools are lagging behind workplace trends and employee expectations around flexibility, with serious results.

As staff shortages become increasingly widespread, schools that want to attract and retain talented staff need a new approach. They need to move from offering flexibility to a few valued employees, to a more strategic, systemic approach that meets the requirements of schools and staff alike.

While the role of the leadership team will be critical to creating momentum, this work will require the input, support and commitment of all members of the school community. Expectations need to be realistic, responsibility shared and the system needs to work for everyone.

The framework for change set out in this report offers a clear set of actions to start the process. While lasting change cannot happen overnight, designing, piloting and implementing flexible solutions are important initial stages of developing a truly flexible workplace culture.

Flexible working can't address all the issues schools currently face, but it can play a huge part in keeping experienced teachers inside the profession, enticing talented individuals from other sectors, and providing work-life balance that will keep them happy and healthy. It's time for all schools, whatever their shape or size, to take the first steps towards embracing flexible working.



**timewise**  
TALENT THROUGH FLEXIBILITY

Timewise is a multi-award winning social business and leading change agent that works to unlock the flexible jobs market in the UK. We share market insights on flexible working, job design and flexible hiring; deliver training and consultancy to help employers attract and develop the best talent; and conduct research such as our annual Flexible Jobs Index. We also run Timewise Jobs, a jobs board for roles that are part-time or open to flexibility.

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