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Embracing Flexible Working at Wycombe High School

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Wycombe High School, an outstanding girls' school in Buckinghamshire, has been at the forefront of developing and implementing a flexible working strategy. Collaborating with the DfE Flexible Working Ambassador MAT and School for the South East, Wycombe High School has embraced innovative practices to enhance the work-life balance of its staff.

Challenges

For Nicola Renyard, Headteacher of Wycombe High School, the opportunity to shape the experience of working in education was seen as unique and vital. Education, unlike many other fields, offers the potential to balance work with other interests, and flexible working is central to achieving this balance. The ethos at Wycombe High, "we look beyond," challenges the myths about the rigidity of education, demonstrating that outdated models can be redefined.



Facing significant challenges in retention and recruitment, which are particularly pronounced in Buckinghamshire, Wycombe High School needed a strategy to attract and retain the best candidates while ensuring their professional satisfaction and growth.

Approach

Elements of flexible working were already in place at Wycombe High for all staff members, but their strategy aimed to catch up with what was already happening operationally. They have implemented a range of flexible working practices, including:

- Remote working for part of the week or for fixed periods.
- Part-time roles, including leadership responsibilities.
- Flexi-time with core hours shifting according to roles.
- A small number of job shares.
- Phased retirement for several staff members.

The approach was pragmatic and consultative, engaging staff throughout the process and embedding flexible working into recruitment processes, including tagging job adverts with flexible working options. The message is clearly getting through, with candidates now proactively asking about flexible working during interviews.

In facing their main challenges of retention and recruitment Wycombe High School aims to:



Improve the overall experience of work, Wycombe High School wanted their staff to feel professionally satisfied and invested in their personal and professional development.



Act as a role model in addressing the gender equity in the education sector, particularly bearing in mind their status single-sex girl's school.

Outcomes

Wycombe High School has already seen some positive outcomes with staff reporting higher levels of job satisfaction and whilst they are still gathering data to fully measure this, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. One key outcome has been an increase in the number of applicants for certain roles; candidates have cited that they only applied for the role because it was advertised offering flexible working opportunities.

The Future

The school is now moving forward with incorporating flexible job design requests into the annual cycle, ensuring that flexible working remains a core part of their approach. One of their next steps is ensuring consistency across the staff as they implement these changes, highlighting the need to have clear systems, structures, and processes in place to support flexible working, such as how part-time colleagues are managed on phone lists or within other operational systems. In addition, the school is making sure that there is continued staff involvement with a flexible working staff focus group continuing to meet once per half term to focus on other aspects of flexible working. It's a big piece of work, but so far, they have been bold in tackling the core components and made significant strides in ensuring the most important elements are in place.



Wycombe High School's forward and strategic approach to flexible working has made significant strides in ensuring they are setting a benchmark for others to follow.