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Flexible Working Programme



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Integrating Flexible Working into the Recruitment Process: Enhancing Employee Retention for Long-term Success

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Following a webinar with NowTeach, the panellists have shared their experiences, as well as the benefits, of flexible working to aid recruitment and retention within the teaching profession:

Hannah Duncan:

It is widely documented in the literature about flexible working in schools that one of the biggest barriers is negative attitudes of school and MAT leaders. These include:



In secondaries struggling with timetabling to accommodate the flexible working requests.



Financial barriers (e.g. NI for 2 teachers and paid handover time for job-shares)



Perceiving flexible workers as less ambitious



Worry that offering flexible working will 'open the floodgates' and they won't be able to operate the school

However, one key benefit to enabling flexible working is retention of talented, experienced staff through:



Having role models at all levels, from class teacher to head teacher supports those wishing to progress in their careers to envisage how it could work when juggling their wider commitments/ wellbeing and staying in the profession.



Encouraging gender-neutral, reason-neutral approaches (Timewise, 2023) to flexible working in schools can really help all feel it is for them, not just women returning from parental leave.



Reducing stigma around flexible working is another important strategy to support progression while working flexibly, encouraging staff to feel it is acceptable to begin the conversation about working flexibly. Schools need to be creative with job-design and approaches to find solutions that work for the school and the individual.¹

¹ Timewise (2023) A Question of Time: Experiences and perceptions of part time working. Available at: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/a-question-of-time-whats-happening-with-part-time-working-in-the-uk/> (Accessed: 6 March 2024).¹

Michael Haddon from Hampstead School:

Hampstead School is very open to senior and middle leadership posts being held by staff who work flexibly, as they believe it helps ensure the retention of the most experienced and impactful staff. Several members of the Senior Leadership Team already have flexible working models, as do several Heads of Faculty. Their position is to always explore what would be the best possible outcome in terms of provision for our children.

"Hampstead School recognises that a better work-life balance can improve motivation, performance and productivity of staff members. We see flexible working as a way to boost employee wellbeing and reduce stress. Hampstead School are committed to considering any flexible working arrangements, balancing the needs of both the school and the employee. We are delighted that the vast majority of flexible working requests result in an agreement and are usually followed by a trial. In many cases, trials are successful and then become permanent arrangements".

For example, if a part-week staff member was promoted to a full-time permanent TLR then we would try to accommodate a job share or consider other bespoke changes. This could involve organising a time-limited TLR on a related school improvement project. These offer other staff in the relevant department career progression opportunities and bring a higher level of focus and drive to key facets of our school.

Now Teach:

Now Teach support experienced professionals in transitioning to one of the most vital careers – Teaching. Since 2017, they have helped over 1,100 career changers, particularly in STEM subjects, join the profession through personalised recruitment and wraparound support during QTS and ECT stages. Their network of like-minded individuals provides inspiration, practical solutions, and ongoing guidance, creating a supportive community for new teachers.

Retention is a core focus of their work, and they recognise the importance of balancing professional progression with flexible working arrangements. Many of their teachers train part-time and later request part-time or flexible teaching and leadership roles. This flexibility is essential for sustaining their commitment to the profession while accommodating personal and professional needs. Recent research from the DfE showed that 57% of teachers in the profession are more likely to apply for roles in schools that position themselves as open to flexible working.

In a recent poll of 250 Now Teachers, 85% agreed that flexible arrangements could help ease the teacher retention crisis in England by making teaching more attractive. These arrangements include:



Four-day weeks



Career breaks



Shortened days



Time away from the classroom to plan appropriately

One Now Teacher - Bill Toong - spoke during the webinar about his own experience with flexible working, whilst carrying out the role of Head of Economics and Business. As a career changer who came from the corporate world and experienced having to spend many of his weekends at work, he moved to this flexible working arrangement after completing his ECT for a better work-life balance teaching.

Bill Toong:

In terms of why flexible working is a priority for Bill:

- ✓ *At my age, I find a full-time teaching role from Oct to Apr (from May onwards I benefit from gained time) to be mentally and physically exhausting. So, having completed ECT I immediately requested a 4-day week (0.8) and when I moved schools a year ago I made this non-negotiable.*
- ✓ *I have other priorities that I use the 3-day weekend to accomplish e.g. keeping the family "plates" spinning, monitoring investments, tax planning and other longer-term thinking. There's also the regular Friday golf game that helps regulate my mental well-being.*
- ✓ *Regarding teaching, as a profession, if we are to compete with private corporations / the civil service, which both allow working from home, then notwithstanding the face to face nature of teaching, we should try to embrace flexibility, otherwise well qualified candidates facing a choice will simply choose elsewhere.*

By fostering opportunities for career development alongside flexible working, Now Teach aim to make teaching a viable and rewarding long-term career for those entering from other professions. This approach not only enhances teacher retention but also ensures schools benefit from the expertise and dedication of these highly motivated individuals, ultimately improving outcomes for students and the education system as a whole.