



# Thought piece – Overcoming the challenges of flexible working in schools

*Lindsay Patience & Lucy Rose – Flexible Teacher Talent*

Lindsay Patience and Lucy Rose are cofounders of Flexible Teacher Talent and authors of *Flex Education: A guide for flexible working in schools*, they are also working with Capita on the Department for Education's Flexible Working Programme.

Lindsay has worked in London secondary schools since 2006 and first joined the senior leadership team in 2011. After having her first child in 2016 she was shocked by the lack of flexible opportunities available and since then has been working to develop flexible working opportunities in the education sector in order to retain talented teachers and leaders. She currently teaches A-level Economics part-time.

Lucy has been teaching since 2004 in a variety of middle and senior leadership roles. After having her son, she was disappointed to find resistance to flexible working and a strong culture of presenteeism which was difficult to navigate. She left full-time teaching after her daughter was born and during this 'break', she retrained as an English specialist, became fascinated by timetabling possibilities and met her co-founder Lindsay at the Innovation Series. Lucy works at a life-friendly London secondary school.

In this thought piece, Lindsay and Lucy discuss overcoming the challenges of flexible working in schools.

The urgency for schools to adopt flexible working policies has never been greater. With the upcoming employment law changes in 2024, driven by the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act of July 2023, schools must adapt. The Department for Education is investing significant resources to guide schools towards flexibility, through a funded programme of support.

## Redefining educational flexibility

In a rapidly evolving job market, the education sector must embrace flexibility to remain attractive and competitive. While headteachers acknowledge the inherent limitations of flexible working in schools, the benefits outweigh the challenges. This is why many leaders are now beginning to tailor flexible working arrangements to meet the unique needs of their schools.

Flexible working in education is not limited to job shares or part-time positions. It goes beyond catering solely to parents seeking a work-life balance. School leaders know that concessions such as early finishes, late starts, working from home, and informal arrangements offer flexibility. Some schools are offering occasional personal days, timetable planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time at home as well as encouraging informal arrangements. They recognise that small changes in a teacher's schedule can significantly impact their wellbeing without disrupting the day-to-day school operations.

There is a growing understanding that the challenges addressed by flexible working are the very priorities that schools face daily. For school leaders, the top concern is ensuring that schools are adequately staffed with qualified, effective teachers who can serve students. Flexible working is a valuable tool in achieving this goal. It's not an additional,

insurmountable issue but a core part of the solution. As a profession, teachers are known for their problem-solving abilities, and flexible working is no exception.

### Embracing contextual solutions

Implementing flexible working policies cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Each school has unique circumstances that influence the challenges they face and the benefits they can derive from flexibility. What works for a primary school may differ significantly from a small village school or a special needs school. Embracing these contextual nuances allows schools to develop creative and effective solutions.

We strongly recommend that leaders draw on the support of their successful peers to design their own solutions for their unique school context. The more we hear from headteachers who are committed to bringing about these changes, the more convinced we are that leaders who take the time to understand what motivates their employees will retain a body of loyal staff that will create a transformative impact on children's lives. Recognising how even a minor adjustment for a staff member can significantly boost their loyalty and commitment to their profession and the school, can be incredibly powerful for the entire school community.

### Celebrating successes

At Flexible Teacher Talent, we believe in finding the sweet spot between data, facts, and success stories to convince school leaders of the benefits of flexible working. By sharing stories of success and celebrating institutions where flexible working is embraced, trusted, and valued by both staff and management, we can inspire and motivate leaders to pave the way for a better future.

To learn more about embracing flexible working policies and effecting positive change in your school community, please reach out to us at [flexibleteachertalent@gmail.com](mailto:flexibleteachertalent@gmail.com).