



Benefiting from flexible working

PLEASE NOTE

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) **Act** received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023 and is expected to come into force in 2024. This will introduce new protections for employees and new requirements for employers in relation to statutory flexible working requests. This collection of resources will soon be updated in line with the new legislation.

About this resource

Implementing flexible working brings benefits to schools/settings and trusts including special schools, alternative provision, and pupil referral units.

1. Supporting recruitment and retention
2. Promoting wellbeing and improving work-life balance
3. Reducing absences and improving productivity
4. Promoting an inclusive workplace and supporting equal opportunities and diversity
5. Becoming attractive workplaces
6. Supporting pupil outcomes by promoting recruitment and retention of experienced staff



The evidence



1. Supports recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders



- In 2019, three quarters (76%) of surveyed teachers reported that they would be more likely to remain in the profession long term if they could work flexibly. (CooperGibson Research, 2019. [‘Exploring flexible working practices in schools’](#)).
- In 2021, 82% of surveyed leaders (in schools that offer flexible working) agreed that it had helped to retain teachers and leaders who might otherwise leave (IFF Research, 2021. [‘School and College Panel: December 2021’](#)).
- It promotes wellbeing – which is key to retention. A majority of surveyed education professionals (59%) had considered leaving the sector in the past academic year due to pressures on their mental health and wellbeing ([Education Support, 2021. ‘Teacher Wellbeing Index’](#)).
- It helps retain experienced staff, supporting succession planning. (CooperGibson Research, 2019. [‘Exploring flexible working practices in schools’](#)).
- The recruitment market is challenging and employees increasingly expect to work flexibly. NFER data suggests that in 2021/22, nearly half (44%) of similar graduates worked mainly from home, up from 15 per cent in 2018/19. ([NFER, 2023. ‘Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report.’](#)).
- In 2021, 53% of leaders surveyed leaders said that flexible working helped to attract a greater number of candidates (IFF Research, 2021. [‘School and College Panel: December 2021’](#)).

2. Promotes wellbeing and work-life balance



- 85% of leaders surveyed in 2021, in schools offering flexible working, agreed that it had a positive impact on overall teacher and leader wellbeing. (IFF Research, 2021. [‘School and College Panel: December 2021’](#)).
- Nearly three-quarters of senior leaders who had implemented flexible working in their school (74%) felt that these arrangements had helped staff to manage their workload/work-life balance, 89% of teachers agreed with this statement. (CooperGibson Research, 2019. [‘Exploring flexible working practices in schools’](#)).
- Flexible working is a core pillar of the [Education Staff Wellbeing Charter](#), a set of commitments from DfE, Ofsted, and schools and colleges to protect and promote the wellbeing of staff.

3. Helps reduce absences and improve productivity



- Among schools that offer flexible working, the majority (74%) surveyed agreed that flexible working improved the overall productivity of teachers and leaders. A majority (58%) also agreed that flexible working helped to reduce absences (IFF Research, 2021. [‘School and College Panel: December 2021’](#)).

4. Promotes an inclusive workplace and supports equal opportunities including career progression for women



- Female teachers and those with parental or caring responsibilities are more likely to report working flexibly ([School Workforce Census, 2022](#); IFF Research, 2023. [‘Working lives of teachers and leaders – wave 1’](#)).
- Supporting flexible working enables women to remain in the workforce and has the potential to reduce the gender pay gap (CMI and Government Equalities Office, 2020. [‘Flexible working: A guide to flexible working for senior leaders and managers’](#)).
- Among schools that offer flexible working, 50% of surveyed leaders said that flexible working had helped to create a more diverse teacher and leader workforce (IFF Research, 2021. [‘School and College Panel: December 2021’](#)).

5. Helps schools/ MATS become more attractive employers



- Among schools that offer flexible working, 53% of surveyed leaders said that flexible working helped to attract a greater number of candidates (IFF Research, 2021. [‘School and College Panel: December 2021’](#)).
- In the Department’s Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders Survey, those working flexibly were more likely to report feeling satisfied all/ most of the time with their job and feeling valued by their school. Those working flexibly were also more likely to report feeling their manager was considerate of their work-life balance and that they were trusted to work independently (IFF Research, 2023. [‘Working lives and teachers and leaders – wave 1’](#); IFF Research, 2021. [‘School and College Panel: December 2021’](#)).

6. When implemented effectively, flexible working supports pupils



- It reduces turnover, enabling the retention of quality teachers which support pupil outcomes.
- In a recent piece of qualitative research, interviewed leaders noted that flexible working helped retain good staff and improve teacher wellbeing, which were perceived to ultimately lead to better pupil outcomes (IFF Research, 2023. [‘Flexible working in schools: exploring the costs and benefits’](#)).
- A 2022 survey of parents and secondary pupils explored their perceptions and experiences of job-share teachers. The majority of surveyed parents (62%) reported that this arrangement had either a positive impact or null impact on their child (Kantar, 2023. [‘Parent, Pupil, and Learner Panel 22/23 November wave’](#)).



Contact us

If you have a query regarding the flexible working toolkit please contact [DfE's flexible working team](#). If you have suggestions on resources we could develop as part of our toolkit, please [contact Capita](#).

