

News story: Leading organisations pledge to boost flexible working in schools

Pledges to create more flexible working opportunities in schools have flooded in following the government's first Flexible Working in Schools Summit, which took place in October.

More than 60 pledges have been made by businesses, schools and education organisations since the summit. They include the Times Education Supplement creating an award to recognise the schools with the most progressive working practices, the Teacher Development Trust providing guidance for schools on part-time staff and Barclays hosting an event for school governors and staff to show how flexible working can be implemented in practice.

The pledges made at the Summit – which was co-chaired by General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders Geoff Barton – are part of the government's commitment to recruiting and retaining great teachers, as well as tackling the gender pay gap by encouraging employers to support alternative ways of working.

Education Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities Justine Greening said:

Flexible working opportunities will help us to make the best of all of the talent and dedication already in the profession. Great teachers are at the heart of our plans to offer every child a world class education and it's really encouraging that so many organisations have already started to take action.

Flexible working is already happening in many other sectors – it's vital we ensure it is happening in our schools too so we continue to attract the best and brightest into teaching. And, given this disproportionality affects women, it's a smart way to help close the gender pay gap.

The October summit brought together teaching unions, school leaders and business professionals and asked for each organisation to offer at least one pledge of action. Since then, 67 pledges have been made to raise the profile of flexible and part-time working and to ensure opportunities to work flexibly are available across the profession. The pledges include:

- Microsoft will extend its partnership with WomenED to share best practice on flexible working online and at events;
- The Times Educational Supplement will ensure that all job adverts on its website clearly display whether the school will accept job-share or flexible working solutions;

- The Chartered College of Teaching has set out plans to create a model of how flexible working can be implemented for all members of staff, to help educate school leaders;
- The National Education Union will promote the advantages of flexible working in schools and encourage them to extend its availability – using social media to gather and promote case studies;
- The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) will work to endorse and encourage flexible working options to its members;
- The Teaching Schools Council will work with teaching networks to bring about cultural change in the profession by addressing barriers to flexible working;
- Barclays will host an event for school governors, senior school staff and members of the Department for Education to showcase its Dynamic Working Campaign;
- Teach First will use its ‘Innovation Series’, which generates innovative ideas to tackle educational inequality, to explore ways to introduce more flexible working in schools; and
- WomenEd will work with the Association of School and College Leaders and the Chartered College of Teaching to develop cases studies of successful working practices that they will share with the sector.

Individual schools and academies are also taking action to prove that leaders across the country have the power to make a real impact at a local level too. This includes:

- Southwark Teaching Schools Alliance, and Reach2 have committed to identifying and sharing best practice around flexible working
- Matrix Academy Trust has committed to a review of its recruitment strategy by August 2018, to ensure teachers working there are supported to work in a flexible way; and
- Marsh Green Primary School, Kings School Winchester and The Laurus Trust have committed to ensuring that job adverts and promotional material explicitly state that posts are open to flexible or part time working.

The pledges announced build on the commitments made by the government at the summit, including:

- Updated guidance on ‘Flexible working in schools’ to include information dispelling common myths about flexible working and case studies from schools who are putting the policy into practice;
- Promoting flexible working opportunities when developing the new Teacher Vacancy Service;
- A one-year pilot of a revised model of the Leadership Coaching Pledge for women teachers including extra support for part-time workers and people returning to teaching after a break.

The government is tackling the issue of flexible working as part of its wider plan to ensure schools can recruit and retain the teachers they need. Flexible working can particularly support female employees in the workplace and help to tackle the gender pay gap, which is 18.4 per cent nationally and stands at 4.8 per cent for secondary school staff and 1.9 per cent for primary school and nursery staff.

As well as requiring all employers with 250 or more staff to report their gender pay gap and bonus gap, the government has introduced 30 hours free childcare, shared parental leave and support for returners to help tackle the gap.

Hilary Spencer, Director, Government Equalities Office, said:

Lots of sectors are grappling with how they can make flexible working really work for them and their employees. We think that it has huge potential in education to unlock talent for both female and male teachers, helping them to balance their careers and their family life. So we welcome the pledges made and hope that it will encourage other schools to think about how they might offer more flexible working opportunities.

Wendy Papworth, Director of Global Diversity and Inclusion at Barclays, said:

Barclays are keen to support other employers in creating more flexible working practices which are good for individuals, the people they serve and the organisation as a whole.

Dr Kate Chhatwal, Executive Director of Southwark Teaching School Alliance and Co-founder of the Leading Women's Alliance said:

Too many talented teachers and leaders are lost from the school workforce because they don't feel their job is compatible with family life. A 2015 survey of school leaders, conducted by one of our partners, revealed that women were delaying or sacrificing having children because they didn't feel they could be a good mother and a good leader. Others choose to leave the profession.

We need to be better in schools at creating the cultures and practices that enable flexible working. That takes determined leadership, which values the impact staff make over the hours they work – without compromising on pupil outcomes. In Southwark, we have several high-performing schools led by co-headteachers and more finding innovative ways to support flexible working.

These examples and others shared at the Flexible Working Summit show what is possible. The next step is for this successful practice to be shared and implemented more widely. Both Southwark Teaching School Alliance and the Leading Women's Alliance are committed to playing their part in making that happen.

Vivienne Porritt, National Leader of WomenEd, said:

WomenEd supports fully the DfE drive to increase flexible working

in our schools for all staff. On behalf of our network of women leaders, we have pledged to develop case studies that show how flexible opportunities support better retention of leaders and improve outcome for pupils.

Rob Grimshaw, chief executive of Time Educational Supplement, said:

We fully endorse the Department for Education's drive to promote flexible working and welcome the Secretary of State's personal commitment to an initiative that promises to make a real difference to teachers. We recognise the crucial role flexible and progressive working practices must play if we are to meet the surge in demand for secondary school teachers in the next decade. Tes education sector data show that a growing number of schools are offering flexible roles but compared to other sectors, we still underperform. Schools that lead the way in offering flexible, part-time and job-sharing roles can be attractive to teachers who may otherwise consider leaving the profession or to those who have left and would consider returning.

Claire Walker and Hannah Essex, Directors of Communications for Teach First:

It's great to see so many organisations taking flexible working seriously and momentum building across the education sector. The more schools can do to support flexible working, the easier it will be to attract and retain a wide range of talent. People from all backgrounds and circumstances have qualified as teachers through the Teach First programme. But the education sector can still do more to make sure schools attract a whole range of great people and keep them in the profession, helping to ensure a brilliant future for every child. This is why this initiative from the Department for Education is such an important first step

Cassie Buchanan, headteacher at Charles Dickens Primary School, London, said:

It is brilliant that the Department for Education and Justine Greening are leading the way and promoting the importance of flexible working. We really value the opportunity to hear about the range of options open to schools – and what is achievable.

For us, flexible working is allowing our staff team to lead full lives and work for us. I want to be able to retain good, ambitious teachers, to support staff pursuing postgraduate degrees or other interests, and to acknowledge that the impact of each employee is not based on how many hours they are in the building but on how effective they are and how well our children are doing.

We could all do more and, for Charles Dickens Primary, our pledge centres on communicating the importance of flexible working to our parent community. Parents of pupils need reassurance that a great job share team can often bring an even richer learning experience and faster progress for their child benefits from the best and often complementary qualities of two teachers instead of one.