

# [News story: New support for flexible working in schools pledged at summit](#)

Education Secretary Justine Greening today (30 October) brought together leading figures from the education sector and the world of business at the first Flexible Working in Schools Summit, which aims to boost support for flexible working in the teaching profession.

Speaking at the ARK All Saints Academy in Camberwell to representatives from the teaching unions, Teach First, and leading businesses including Microsoft and Barclays, the Education Secretary announced new pilot programmes to look at ways of supporting and employing teachers flexibly, and enhancing coaching schemes for women working in education.

Co-chaired by Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, the summit is part of the government's commitment to recruiting and retaining great teachers and tackling the gender pay gap by encouraging employers to support alternative ways of working.

The summit comes days after the Prime Minister called on businesses to improve workplace equality by advertising jobs as flexible unless there are solid business reasons not to.

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

Teachers are at the heart of our plans to offer all children a world class education. It is important that we recognise there are many great teachers who would welcome a more flexible workplace, whether as parents themselves who want more options on how and when to return to the workplace, or for staff later in their careers who may also want to better combine staying longer in the profession with other interests. Progress on more flexible working is great for schools who can keep their valued teachers and great for teachers who can stay in the profession.

This 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 pledges we have made today show that we are determined to leave no stone unturned to make the best of all of the talent and dedication in the teaching profession.

The government will be working in partnership with the unions and leading organisations from across the education sector to promote flexible working

across the profession. The plans announced at today's summit include:

- a pilot programme to look at how schools are already bolstering the careers of part-time teachers, so recruiting best practice can be shared;
- a pilot to strengthen the Women Leading in Education coaching offer, so women can continue to get the professional development support they need; and
- update existing guidance on flexible working, to help make it easier for schools to know what works.

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.

Alongside these announcements, the government will publish a new myth buster to help answer any questions school leaders may have around recruiting for roles with flexible hours. The need to include more part-time or flexible vacancies will also be considered as part of the proposals for the Teacher Vacancy Service.

Hannah Essex and Claire Walker Directors of Communications at Teach First said:

Flexible working and part-time opportunities for teachers and school leaders has the ability to not only improve their work-life balance, but also has the potential to attract former teachers back into the profession – addressing significant supply problems.

The sector should always be looking for ways to make the profession more attractive by understanding the individual needs of teachers and also understanding the benefits of flexible working, particularly job sharing, to the workplace. This is why at Teach First we will help to develop ideas through our Innovation Series, supporting our community to find new ways to break down the barriers to flexible working in schools.

Dame Alison Peacock chief executive of the Chartered College of Teaching said

It's great to see the Department for Education consulting with the profession about flexible working. I would like to use this opportunity to think about how we can take a much more open and flexible view on teaching careers as a whole.

We need to be more responsive to the needs of teachers throughout their working lives. At the moment we see teaching careers in a binary way, where you make a lifelong commitment to the profession and are 'in' or 'out'.

But we must start to think about how we facilitate teachers to move into and out of the profession at different points in their lives. We must find ways to keep the door open to those who want to return to teaching, making sure there is adequate support and opportunities for those who want to take a break from teaching. It is only in this way that we can help teachers pause their career, not leave it.

Today's summit follows the Secretary of State's speech at the Teach First conference last month, where she confirmed the 25 areas that would be selected to run a pilot programme to reimburse student loan repayments for modern foreign languages and science teachers in the early years of their careers, as well as two new projects that will receive a share of the £75 million Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund.