

Help shape the future of Business Gateway

News story

HM Land Registry has launched a new Business Gateway community to support recent investment in application programming interface (API) technology.



Existing Business Gateway customers, and those who could benefit from the service, are invited to join the Business Gateway community and help shape the roadmap over the next 2 years.

We want to engage with the full range of customers who regularly complete land and property transactions. This includes banks, lenders, government institutions, technology platform providers and conveyancers. We'll invite members to raise topics for discussion, share thoughts on what the priorities for change look like and agree further forums, one-to-one discussions and focus groups.

We launched Business Gateway in 2010 to offer customers seamless integration with our services. Almost 2,000 customers use Business Gateway and in April 2021 we saw 11 million requests through the channel.

The use of technology has changed a great deal in the last decade and continues to change as new solutions come into the market. We want to upgrade the Business Gateway service to meet those changing customer needs, and work with the community to define a service that supports further streamlining and automation of the conveyancing process.

As an organisation that embraces Agile technology development, we've committed to putting our customers at the forefront of design. Researchers are working alongside product managers and technologists to make sure new services and service improvements meet the needs of our diverse range of customers. Launching the community to help guide the next phase of development for our Business Gateway services ensures this practice remains at the heart of the work.

The roadmap will be published in the next few weeks for all customers to review, which will help inform everyone's budget and planning processes.

Find out more and [join the Business Gateway community](#).

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Scottish Secretary Alister Jack comments on the Queen's Speech

News story

Alister Jack, Secretary of State for Scotland, comments on how the Queen's Speech will deliver for Scotland as we Build Back Better from the pandemic.



This is a Queen's Speech which delivers for people in Scotland, and right across the United Kingdom, as we focus entirely on recovering our economy and our public services from the devastating effects of the Covid pandemic.

The Prime Minister and the UK Government have been working tirelessly on the pandemic, putting in place an unprecedented level of financial support, and securing millions of vaccine doses for people in all parts of the country. At all times we have prioritised both lives and livelihoods.

The UK Government will continue to lead our recovery from the pandemic, as we Build Back Better and level up opportunities right across the UK.

We will continue to support top level R&D, encourage our businesses to innovate, and create vital new and green jobs. We will invest directly in Scotland's communities, building on the success of our

£1.5 billion City Deals programme with Freeports, better connectivity, and a new UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

And Scotland's businesses will continue to benefit as, outside of the EU, we strike new trade deals around the world.

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Whites Meadow Primary School

Background

White Meadows is a 3-form entry community primary school based in Littlehampton, in one of the most deprived parts of West Sussex. The infant and junior schools were amalgamated in 2011, at which point they were both in special measures. It currently has just under 100 teaching and support staff.

Challenge

While the shortage of teaching staff has been a national issue for many years, recruitment and retention is more difficult for schools in deprived areas. Additionally, a legacy of being in special measures makes the situation more difficult, even when a school is starting to improve. This is a challenge which the leaders at White Meadows have sought to tackle through their flexible working strategy.

Changing the culture

Over the last 8 years, leaders at White Meadows have used flexible working to attract and keep a group of passionate, resilient teachers who relish the challenges of their roles and are prepared to go the extra mile to support their pupils.

The drive for flexible working was initially led by the school's headteacher (now its executive head), who set out to create a culture in which people's lives did not take second place to their jobs. In practice, this meant taking the approach that they would try to accommodate flexible working requests, for whatever reason.

How they fulfilled this promise

Leading from the top

The school's leadership team openly champions flexible working, the current

headteacher worked a 4-day week in her previous role as the school's deputy headteacher. As a result, staff are confident that they can be honest about their need for flexible working.

Taking a proactive approach

Staff who are due to take maternity leave are asked about their return plans before they go, giving the school time to work out the best way to accommodate their wishes. Flexible staff are celebrated, not tolerated. Candidates are told about the flexible approach during their tours of the school.

Taking time and care with job design

Leaders work hard to match part-time roles and partnerships with staff needs and personalities, as well as the needs of pupils.

Championing the benefits

Leaders are open about how the school benefits from flexible working. For example, they are positive with staff and parents about how job shares provide a 'fresh' teacher part-way through the week, as well as providing some pupils with a mid-week chance to start again. As a result, parents are generally supportive.

Making the most of staff members' outside interests

One part-time teacher runs the education unit in a local museum for the rest of her working week. The school has built strong links with the museum as a result and asked the teacher to use her experience to write the school's history curriculum.

Being flexible about flexible working

Leaders are careful not to assume that staff will work outside of their part-time arrangements, for example, if staff attend inset days on their scheduled day off, they are given the time back. Staff are allocated 3 days personal leave to allow them to attend their own children's school events or take care of other personal priorities.

Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19)

Leaders have noted a number of ways in which COVID-19 has changed working practices for the better.

As the school is part of a national academy trust (Reach2), leaders and staff were previously required to travel around the country for trust-wide meetings. These have been moved online, which benefits both staff and budgets, and will hopefully continue to some degree.

The school has embraced technology during lockdown, using a platform called SeeSaw to set work and engage with pupils (for example, posting videos of the nursery teacher reading stories online). They will continue to use SeeSaw to

set homework and believe this technology could also support teachers' ability to work remotely in the future.

Outcome

The school's positive approach to flexible working means that it is no longer seen as something just for staff members who are parents, and has resulted in a number of interesting developments.

For example:

- there are currently 3 job share partnerships, including the year 1 team leaders
- a number of staff work part-time in a role designed to cover colleagues' planning, preparation and assessment time
- 2 year 6 teachers don't have a class of their own, but instead work a 0.6 contract spread across 5 mornings, taking smaller groups, set by ability, for further stretch and challenge
- 2 higher-level teaching assistants are working part-time while they study for university degrees

Staff retention has increased, with the number of leavers dropping from 16 in 2015 to 8 in 2018 and just 3 in 2019. Anecdotally, the improved well-being of the staff body has also been noted.

Headteacher Rebecca Misselbrook says,

Teachers and school support staff tend to be caring, family-oriented, values-driven people, they wouldn't choose this profession otherwise.

So it's important that school leaders allow them to provide the same care and attention for their own families and personal lives as they do for their pupils.

Flexible working allows our brilliant staff to balance the challenges of their role with the rest of their lives, and we benefit from this as much as they do. It's simple, really, if you keep your staff happy, they will stay.

United Learning

Background

United Learning is a large group of schools with over 80 primary and secondary schools across the UK, predominately academy schools and a smaller number of independent schools.

Part-time rates for teachers across the trust are similar to national averages, but vary greatly from school to school, with some schools taking a more proactive approach than others.

Challenge

United Learning's leadership sees a role for their trust in addressing recruitment and retention challenges. They are specifically working to attract and keep high quality teachers, as well as increase numbers of teachers in subjects where graduates are in high demand.

Additionally, the trust is keen to ensure that it is an inclusive employer with a diverse employee body, a minimal gender pay gap and a set of working practices which work for all.

In 2018, the trust's leaders carried out a strategic planning exercise which identified that flexible working could address both these issues. As a result, they sought to improve the understanding and implementation of flexible working across the trust, through a 2-stage project.

Process

Stage 1

From the end of 2018 to spring 2019, the trust carried out a review of policies and guidance related to flexible working across the group.

This included:

- rewriting the trust's flexible working policy, highlighting the role of informal dialogue and proactive leadership to inform decisions and move away from a request-response model
- new tools and guidance for leaders and staff on how to plan and discuss flexible working options
- training for the HR team, carried out by Timewise, providing the skills needed to support and drive conversations about flexible working
- sharing of best practice across the trust, including video case studies from headteachers with a good record for enabling flexible working, and a discussion led by a school with a high proportion of flexibly-employed staff

Stage 2

Starting in October 2019, United Learning launched a research project with 7 volunteer schools which demonstrated positive attitudes towards flexible

working.

This included:

- an introductory meeting to bring the schools' leaders and HR teams together, encouraging inter-school dialogue and sharing of best practice
- training and workshops for headteachers, delivered by Timewise, including a focus on the role of job design and how to use it successfully
- in-depth training on adapting the timetabling process to incorporate flexible working, including a practical 'how to' session delivered by a school which excels in this area

Progress was then reviewed and priorities set for the next steps in January 2020.

Areas for further exploration included:

- building flexible working into recruitment plans
- creating a more systematic approach to staff consultation
- exploring how to consolidate planning, preparation and assessment time to allow remote working
- scheduling of meetings and pastoral time to support staggered start and finish times.

Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The COVID-19 pandemic began midway through stage 2. The unexpected challenge of providing distanced teaching and learning for pupils put some of United Learning's plans on hold.

However, the move to remote education for many pupils also created an opportunity for schools to explore the techniques and technology required to make remote schooling – and remote working – work. The experience also removed some of the perceived barriers, and highlighted other possibilities, such as using IT to allow remote access to team meetings.

United Learning and its member schools will be incorporating what they have learned into their post-COVID-19 strategic planning.

Examples of good practice in United Learning schools

High Hazels Academy

High Hazels Academy, a primary school in Sheffield, has undergone a transformation as a result of implementing flexible working. With staff turnover above trust and national averages, the school's leadership team undertook a programme of initiatives, including mentoring, continuing professional development (CPD), succession planning and flexible working.

Having actively engaged with United Learning's guidance on flexible working, and taken part in the training and support they were offered, the school's leaders have been able to increase opportunities for flexible working across all staff groups.

They are now taking an even more proactive step by recruiting new staff on a flexible basis. This, in turn, has increased the school's diversity and improved the inclusion and well-being of staff.

The school's headteacher, Asma Maqsood-Shah, believes that strong communication has been central to the success of their new flexible working strategy. She has built in a system for 2-way feedback around every aspect of the school, so that the senior leadership team can be clear about the impact on staff.

Following the new approach, part-time teacher rates are now higher than the national average and, according to the annual staff survey, engagement has increased from 68% in 2017 to 89% in 2019. Voluntary staff turnover rates have reduced significantly in the same timeframe, dropping from 12.2% to 2.5% in 2019 for Key Stage 1, and from 10.9% to 4.9% for Key Stage 2, and recruitment costs have reduced accordingly.

Only 2 years ago, the school needed to recruit between 6 and 8 teachers a year. In 2020 just 2 new teachers have been needed.

Shoreham Academy

Faced with a high proportion of teaching staff who were approaching retirement, the senior leadership team at Shoreham Academy have taken a proactive approach. They have actively encouraged those who were considering stepping down to opt for phased retirement, which allows them to continue working in a part-time role and draw part of their pension. This has helped the school to retain these teachers' experience and skills, and support their wellbeing, whilst simultaneously reducing budget costs.

Flexible working is now available to all staff, at every level, and the school's leaders are rarely unable to meet a staff member's needs. Part-time teacher rates are above the national average, and informal flexibility is also treated positively, with staff members willing and able to cover for each other when needed.

From September 2020, the school's vice principal will be working 3 days per week, passing on some responsibilities to the assistant principal. This will in turn support the assistant principal's CPD and the school's succession planning.

Guildford High School

Guildford High School's approach is driven by the headteacher's belief that outstanding schools are built on outstanding teachers, and that retaining them is a clear priority. Under her leadership, the timetabling process is not based on part-timers working a specific number of days, but instead on

the days they wish to be in school. Their contracts are built around timetabling software. Teachers are given clear expectations about what is possible, so that everyone knows where they stand.

For example, it is understood that part-time core subject teachers will have to be in school across 4 days each week. Teachers in other subjects may be able to consolidate their teaching time together and so have fewer days on site. Additionally, if they are willing to teach a limited number of year groups, they may be able to reduce their role even further. For example, a science teacher was able to create a one-day-per-week pattern by opting to teach only biology to pupils in years 7 to 9.

As a result of this experience in implementing flexible working, as well as a proactive approach to technology, the impact of COVID-19 was less disruptive than it might otherwise have been. The school used Microsoft Teams to deliver remote lessons during lockdown, and was able to support other schools with their virtual provision.

The experience has reaffirmed the headteacher's view that flexibility enables rather than hinders outstanding teaching. She also believes it has opened up more opportunities for flexible working.

Outcome

In addition to the case studies noted above, and despite the impact of COVID-19, United Learning is already seeing a range of benefits from their flexible working project, at a trust-wide level.

Schools with high rates of part-time staff are reporting improved retention of talent and more efficient staffing costs, and the teacher turnover rate is declining across the trust as a whole. The trust's HR business partners also report that the new policy is facilitating more positive and constructive outcomes for flexible working requests across all schools.

High Hazels Academy headteacher Asma Maqsood-Shah says,

Despite previously being anti-flexible working, I am now a passionate advocate. It has made such a difference to retention and morale and, ultimately, to the children.

Additionally, the gender pay gap for United Learning Academy schools is reducing, and analysis by the trust suggests that greater flexible working for school leaders and teachers is a factor. Data from United Learning's Gender Pay Gap Report 2019 suggests that there is a correlation between the reduction in the pay gap and an increase in flexible working in the workforce overall, for teachers and for women in senior roles.

The trust has put in place a range of mechanisms to continue sharing learnings and good practice, including case studies, a dedicated information area on the intranet, and training for HR business partners and school HR

staff. A new recruitment and retention best practice handbook is currently in development.

Chancellor sees Plan for Jobs in action at local brewery

- The Chancellor visited Pillars Brewery in London as they gear up for the return of indoor hospitality next week
- our Plan for Jobs is working: almost 2 million fewer people are expected to be out of work than initially forecast
- the economy grew by 2.1% in March, an optimistic sign of recovery

As new figures show the economy grew by 2.1% in March and performed better than previous forecasts for the first three months of the year as a whole, Rishi Sunak visited Pillars Brewery in Walthamstow to see how they are preparing for the reopening of indoor hospitality next week and responding to an increase in demand for their products as the economy recovers.

Like many other businesses in the food and drink industry, Pillars have taken advantage of several aspects of the support available under the Government's Plan for Jobs including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and local business grants. Pillars are also recruiting a Kickstarter under the Government-backed scheme to help young people find new jobs.

On the visit, the Chancellor was welcomed by co-founders of Pillars Brewery Gavin Litton and Omar Razaq, who spoke to the Chancellor about their business and showed him how the brewing process works.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

It's great to see businesses like Pillars who have been supported by the government through the pandemic get back on their feet as the economy begins to recover.

Despite a difficult start to the year, the figures released this morning showing economic growth in March are a promising sign of things to come.

Our Plan for Jobs is working – following the comprehensive package we put in place, almost 2 million fewer people are expected to be

out of work than initially forecast, and the UK economy is in a strong position to grow quickly as we emerge from the pandemic.

Even with this positive news, we know that many businesses and people still need our help, and that's why I want to reassure everyone today that our Plan for Jobs will continue to create, support and protect jobs in the coming months. We have extended the self-employed and furlough schemes until September whilst schemes like Kickstart are already helping to create thousands of new jobs for young people – it's great to see companies like Pillars creating jobs under this scheme.

As we cautiously reopen the economy, I will continue to take all the steps necessary to support our recovery.

Pillars Brewery said:

It was great to welcome the Chancellor to Pillars Brewery today and talk to him about the challenges our business has faced, and how we've found reopening so far. It's been a relief to welcome our staff back from furlough and we are also recruiting new team members through the government's Kickstart scheme.

Today's visit comes as ONS GDP figures, released this morning, show that GDP grew by 2.1% in March. This morning's release also showed that GDP fell by 1.5% in Q1 2021 – significantly better than the 3.8% fall the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast in March. Last week, the Bank of England upgraded their forecast for the UK economy and are now expecting that the economy will return to pre-pandemic levels by the end of this year.

Established in 2016, Pillars was the first craft lager brewery in London. Pillars recently scored a Gold Medal Award for their Icebock in the 2021 London Beer Competition, and their three core lagers (Hop Lager, Helles and Pilsner) were awarded silver.