



Flexible working:

Why it matters and what you can do about it

With the DfE promoting flexible working as a solution to recruitment and retention challenges, what action do you need to take?

What is flexible working?

Flexible working arrangements enable staff members to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work. Flexible working includes:

- Part-time roles and job shares
- Remote or off-site PPA time
- Ad-hoc personal days or schedule adjustments
- Compressed hours (e.g. working full-time hours but over fewer days).

It's not just about working fewer hours – it's about rethinking how and when staff work to better support retention, wellbeing, and school improvement.

Why does it matter?

Leaders and governors have a strategic role in setting the culture and priorities of a school. Flexible working is no longer a 'nice to have'. It's a key tool to:

- ✓ Address recruitment and retention challenges.
- ✓ Support staff wellbeing and mental health.
- ✓ Enable progression for parents and those with caring responsibilities.
- ✓ Strengthen leadership sustainability.
- ✓ Reduce reliance on agency and supply staff.

What the evidence says

- **46%** of teachers and leaders currently have some kind of flexible working arrangement in place.
- **65%** say they wouldn't feel confident requesting one.
- **61%** believe working flexibly would limit their career progression.
- Lack of flexibility is a key reason **women in their 30s** leave the profession.
- Some schools are seeing savings and improved retention from **four-day week models (paid for five)**.

Sources: [Working lives of teachers and leaders: wave 3 summary report](#), [Missing Mothers](#) and [Schools' responses to financial pressures](#)



What flexible leadership can look like

We have a large leadership team and from a budget perspective, we're able to offer them all flexible working which has made a huge difference. And our head is four days a week. The deputy is substantive head on the day that she's not in, and will by and large just deal with everything.

If you have a structure like that, you can definitely make people feel empowered to take decisions. We've done a lot with both the governing board and leadership team to give people confidence. They know that the head is still there to check in with, but are happy to just get on with things. (Chair of Governors, Hackney)

Flexible leadership works when:

- There is a clear structure and succession plan.
- Trust and autonomy are built into the leadership culture.
- The governing body actively supports alternative working patterns.

Questions for leaders and governors

- Are we proactively offering flexible working, or waiting for staff to request it?
- Do staff feel safe and supported in asking for flexible arrangements?
- Is part-time or job-share leadership a visible, viable option?
- Could flexible working help us reduce recruitment costs, improve wellbeing, or manage absence?

Actions for leaders and governors

- **Champion a culture shift:** normalise flexible working, especially at leadership level.
- **Review policy and practice:** ensure flexible working is included in recruitment, retention and staff wellbeing strategies.
- **Hold others to account:** ask how flexible working is being considered and implemented.
- **Model flexibility yourselves:** promote diverse leadership approaches and inclusive governance.

Reading and resources

- [DfE flexible working toolkit](#)
- [Example flexible working policy](#)
- [Get help with flexible working in schools](#)
- [How do teachers feel about their working life?](#)
- [Responses to financial pressures](#)
- [Teacher recruitment and retention](#)
- [Teacher retention: are 30-something women at risk?](#)
- [You can't turn off the machine: investing time in school leadership](#)

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