



Department
for Education

Flexible working in schools: exploring the costs and benefits

Research Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) has committed to promoting flexible working within schools. The [Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy](#) (January, 2019) set out DfE's commitment to support schools to implement flexible working and to establish a culture that values flexible working at all career stages. The schools' white paper [Opportunity for All](#) (March, 2022) reinforced this commitment. To support this, DfE commissioned IFF Research to explore the perceived financial and non-financial costs and benefits of teachers and school leaders working flexibly compared to traditional working patterns.

40 in-depth interviews were undertaken with headteachers and deputy heads in schools in England, all of whom worked in schools where flexible working was used in some form by teachers and/or leaders.

Findings

- An overriding theme was that the benefits of flexible working were generally seen to outweigh the costs, as leaders felt that flexible working helped retain good staff and improved teacher wellbeing, which was perceived to ultimately lead to better pupil outcomes.
- The reported costs and benefits varied considerably depending on the flexible working arrangement in place with each staff member.
- However, overall, leaders reported that their schools do not explicitly measure or track the financial costs or benefits of their flexible working provision. As a result, the research is limited in the extent to which it can be used to quantify the quantitative costs and benefits associated with flexible working.
- School leaders reported that while financial considerations were a factor in decisions to allow/promote flexible working in the school, the most important factors related to pupil experience, and the practicalities and logistical concerns of running their school.
- A key theme in the interviews was that costs of flexible working tended to be seen as financial (albeit hard to quantify) while some of the benefits tended to be seen as non-financial or qualitative (such as improved staff wellbeing and retention, fewer sick days, and a better pupil experience). This was true even where identified benefits could have a potential financial angle, such as reduced recruitment costs.
- Leaders were aware of financial costs associated with flexible working arrangements, even though these were generally not measured. These included

an increased wage bill associated with part-time working, a longer timetabling process, extra line management, and planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. Many respondents reported that they did not specifically identify financial savings from flexible working.

Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned IFF Research to explore school leaders' views on the perceived costs and benefits of teachers and leaders working flexibly compared to traditional working patterns. In line with DfE guidance,¹ flexible working arrangements were defined as teachers and/or leaders working in any of the following ways:

- Part time: working less than full-time hours. Not all teachers who work part time choose to do so. This may be linked to subject and timetabling requirements, particularly if they teach subjects for which there is low demand. Employees can work full time but still have flexible work arrangements in place.
- Job share: two or more people doing one job and splitting the hours.
- Occasional ad hoc personal days: employees able to take personal days outside of school holidays.
- Occasional ad hoc start/finish: employees able to start or finish outside of timetabled hours.
- PPA (planning, preparation, and assessment) time offsite: employees able to complete their planning, preparation, and assessment tasks offsite.
- Time-off-in-lieu (TOIL): paid time off work for having worked additional hours.
- Home/remote working: the employee carries out work off site.
- Phased retirement: gradually reducing working hours and/or responsibilities to transition from full-time work to full-time retirement.
- Annualised hours: working hours spread across the year, which may include some school closure days, or where hours vary across the year to suit the school and employee.
- Staggered hours: the employee has different start, finish, and break times.
- Compressed hours: working full-time hours but over fewer days.

This research builds on the December 2021 wave of the School and College Panel (SCP), a twice-termly panel survey run by IFF Research on behalf of DfE. Respondents to this research were recruited from SCP panellists. Relevant results from the December 2021 wave of the SCP are referenced throughout for context.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2#defining-flexible-working>

Research objectives

The research was designed to address the following questions:

- What are the immediate financial costs and benefits associated with implementing different flexible working patterns in schools, including estimates of the time and expenses that schools require to recruit and manage flexible working staff (such as drawing up contracts, timetabling, career development, line management time, providing Continuing Professional Development, ensuring handover etc.)?
- What are the longer-term financial implications of implementing flexible working, including less tangible outcomes (such as perceived costs and/or benefits associated with staff wellbeing, and spend on recruitment and teacher supply across the school)?
- What is the decision-making process when considering whether to accept or decline a flexible working proposal from an existing member of staff or to recruit someone on a flexible working basis?

Methodology

In total, 40 in-depth interviews were undertaken with headteachers and deputy heads in schools in England (conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams), with each lasting around 30 minutes.

In the December 2021 wave of the SCP, school leaders were asked about the flexible working arrangements offered in their schools, and if they would be willing to assist in follow-up qualitative research. Those that opted in were invited to participate in an interview.

Quotas were put in place to ensure that evidence was gathered from different types of schools and from schools with a variety of flexible working arrangements in place. All participating schools had at least one teacher or leader who worked flexibly. The main sub-groups can be seen in Table 1 and a full breakdown of respondents can be seen in Appendix 1.

As seen in Table 1, the quota for Free School Meals (FSM) was set at 50% from quintiles 1-3 and 50% from 4-5, which creates a higher proportion of disadvantaged schools in the sample than in the population. Although not a large bias, it is worth noting this when considering the findings in this report. The findings from the SCP have indicated that

schools with a higher proportion of pupils eligible for FSM are more likely to have negative views regarding flexible working².

Table 1: Information about participating schools (total = 40)

Primary School	Secondary School	Academy	Non-Academy	Free School Meals Quintile 1-3 ³	Free School Meals Quintile 4-5
17	23	19	21	20	20

Proforma

A short proforma was developed to capture key financial information relating to flexible working practices in schools. This was sent to respondents prior to their interview so that they could consider their responses, discuss with colleagues if necessary, and collect and compile the information requested. There was variability in the level to which respondents were able to complete the proforma, which will be discussed in the chapter 'Measured Financial Costs'.

A copy of the proforma is provided in Appendix 2.

² For example, in the December 2021 SCP school leaders with the highest proportion of FSM eligible pupils were *less* likely to agree that flexible working has had an impact on various positive measures including improving the overall productivity of teachers and leaders (63%, compared to 81% of leaders in schools with the lowest proportion of FSM eligible pupils) and on reducing absences (47%, compared to 65%).

³ Free School Meal Quintiles refer to five evenly sized groups, based on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) in each school. Group 1 are schools with the lowest proportion of FSM eligible pupils and group 5 the schools with the highest proportion.

Interpreting the findings

Given the small sample size, the research should not be used to draw definitive statements on the average costs and benefits associated with particular types of flexible working. The research was intended to be exploratory and to provide further understanding of the nature of the costs and benefits of having staff working flexibly, including specific examples of financial costs where possible.

A common theme identified throughout the research is that leaders were rarely logging or tracking longer-term impacts of flexible working. In addition to this, many of the longer-term impacts identified (such as improved staff retention) were not considered in terms of financial savings. This leads to a skew whereby leaders are more likely to report shorter-term costs (which are easier to identify and quantify) rather than longer-term potential savings. This potential bias in the reporting of costs should be considered throughout the report and is discussed further in the chapter 'Measured Financial Costs'.

Job shares are discussed frequently throughout the report, and this was often the first form of flexible working which came to mind when leaders were reflecting on the costs and benefits of flexible working. Just over half (25 out of 40) of leaders interviewed currently had a job share in place, meaning a number were reflecting on previous experiences or hypothetical benefits and challenges. This does not mean, however, that job shares were the most commonly offered form of flexible working (more schools in the sample had staff who worked part time, had PPA time offsite, and had occasional ad hoc starts/finishes).

In a small number of cases, respondents conflated job shares and part-time working. The lines became blurred for some where two members of part-time staff may each have taught the same class at different times although were not officially working as a job share. In these instances, respondents spoke interchangeably about the two different types of flexible working.

As this was a small-scale qualitative project, the sample was not designed to be representative and the findings presented are instead indicative. Quantifying responses was therefore inappropriate. Terminology used throughout the report refers to rough numbers of respondents reporting each theme. 'Some' or 'a number' refer to more than one respondent but a minority overall, while 'many' or 'often' refer to less than a majority but nearer half of respondents. 'Most' refers to a sizeable majority of respondents.

Flexible working policies and arrangements

Formal policies

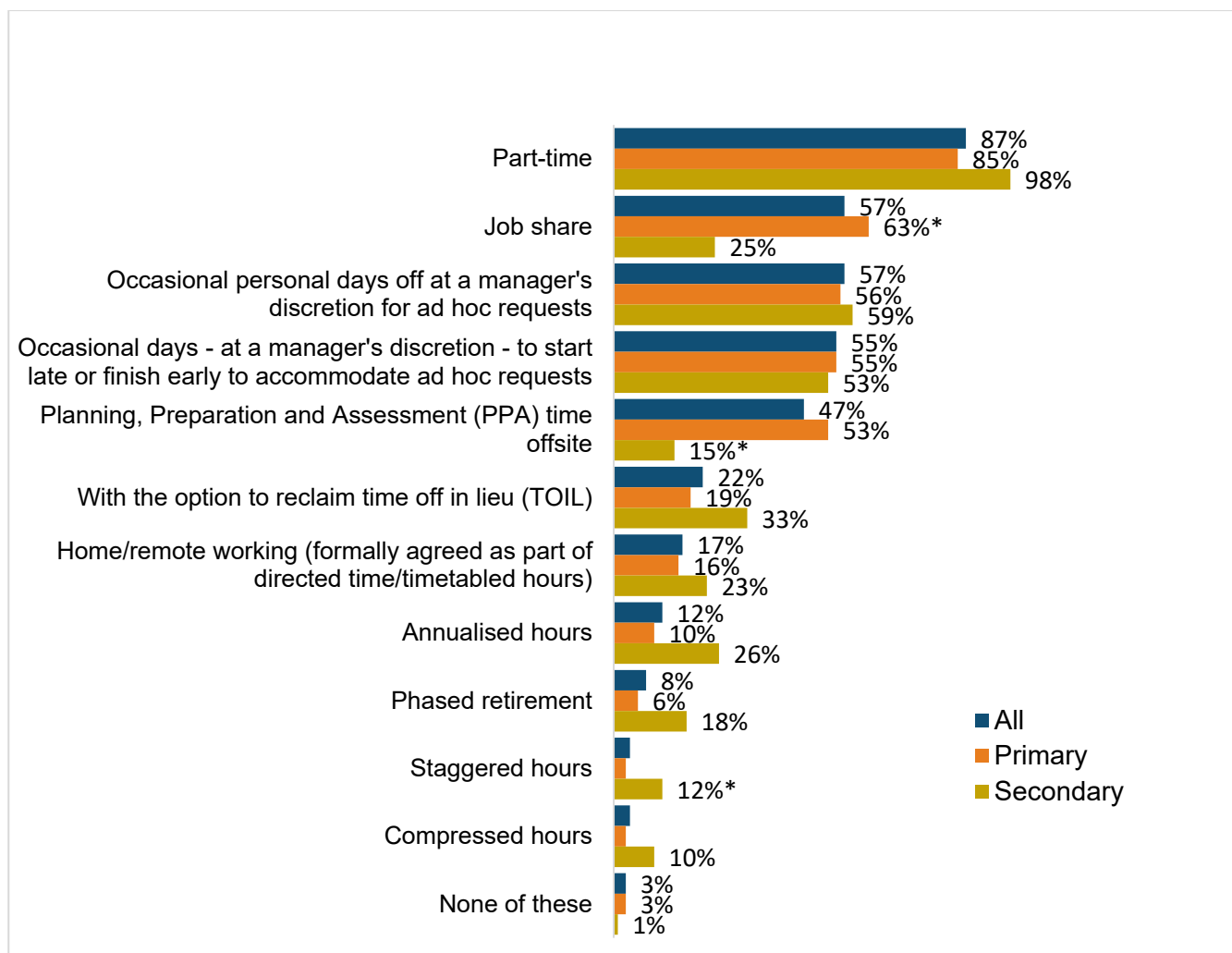
A large majority of school leader interviewees did not have a formal flexible working policy in place in their school. This was true of 31 of the 40 interviewed schools. The others tended to adopt protocols as outlined in their Local Authority's or academy trust's policy rather than having their own specific policy. This was only the case for one school.

Respondents tended to consider forms of flexible working in two categories: those that are built into contracts, particularly part-time working and job shares, and additional arrangements that are not written into contracts, such as ad hoc days off or ad hoc adjusted hours.

Current offer of flexible working arrangements

For context, Figure 1 shows the use of flexible working arrangements in schools more broadly.⁴

Figure 1: Forms of flexible working used by any teachers and/or leaders in the respondent's school (December 2021)



Source: School and College Panel, December 2021 survey. Sample of leaders (n=622).

*Indicates a higher statistical difference between primary and secondary.

Part-time working was common, although most respondents reported that they did not actively recruit part-time teachers except where a subject did not have the pupil demand to warrant full-time hours (examples given included religious studies and certain languages).

⁴ This is taken from the December 2021 wave of the SCP, from which the interview respondents for this research were sampled.

More often, part-time workers were existing members of staff who had requested reduced hours. This was primarily due to a change in their family situation, most commonly teachers returning from maternity leave and wanting to work fewer days.

Job shares were less common. The consensus among respondents was that they were difficult from an administrative point of view and respondents were concerned that they could lead to worse outcomes for pupils compared to the consistency of one member of staff. However, respondents were willing to keep existing job shares as a good way to retain valued staff; they would rather keep staff in an arrangement that is not viewed as optimal from a financial and organisational perspective than lose staff from the school.

A handful of schools had formalised extra days to be used outside of normal holidays. This may be a half or full day for staff to use at their discretion, providing cover had been arranged.

The one form of flexible working that some respondents said they would never consider for teachers and leaders was compressed hours. The rationale was that staff need to be available at particular set times to be able to fulfil their role and safeguarding responsibilities. A couple of schools, however, did have arrangements with some teachers for compressed hours to help them with caring responsibilities.

“Although the teachers have a defined set of hours that can be directed, so many of those hours would happen outside of the day that there would be a huge cost impact if you were to say we’re going to let you do those hours outside...there’s the expectation of a week of contact hours, and you can’t compress contact hours because the kids are coming in at set times.” *Secondary non-academy deputy headteacher*

Respondents gave similar reasons as challenges to other forms of flexible working in schools, such as working from home or PPA time offsite. However, leaders did note that they would be willing to consider these if cover could be provided. In general, flexible working arrangements were less common among members of the senior leadership team than among teachers.

Decision-making process for agreeing flexible working

Nearly all school leaders in the sample reported having reactive approaches to flexible working; they would respond to requests rather than proactively implement and advertise flexible working.

Respondents explained that the decision about whether to grant a flexible working request was predominantly made by considering the practicalities of the request and

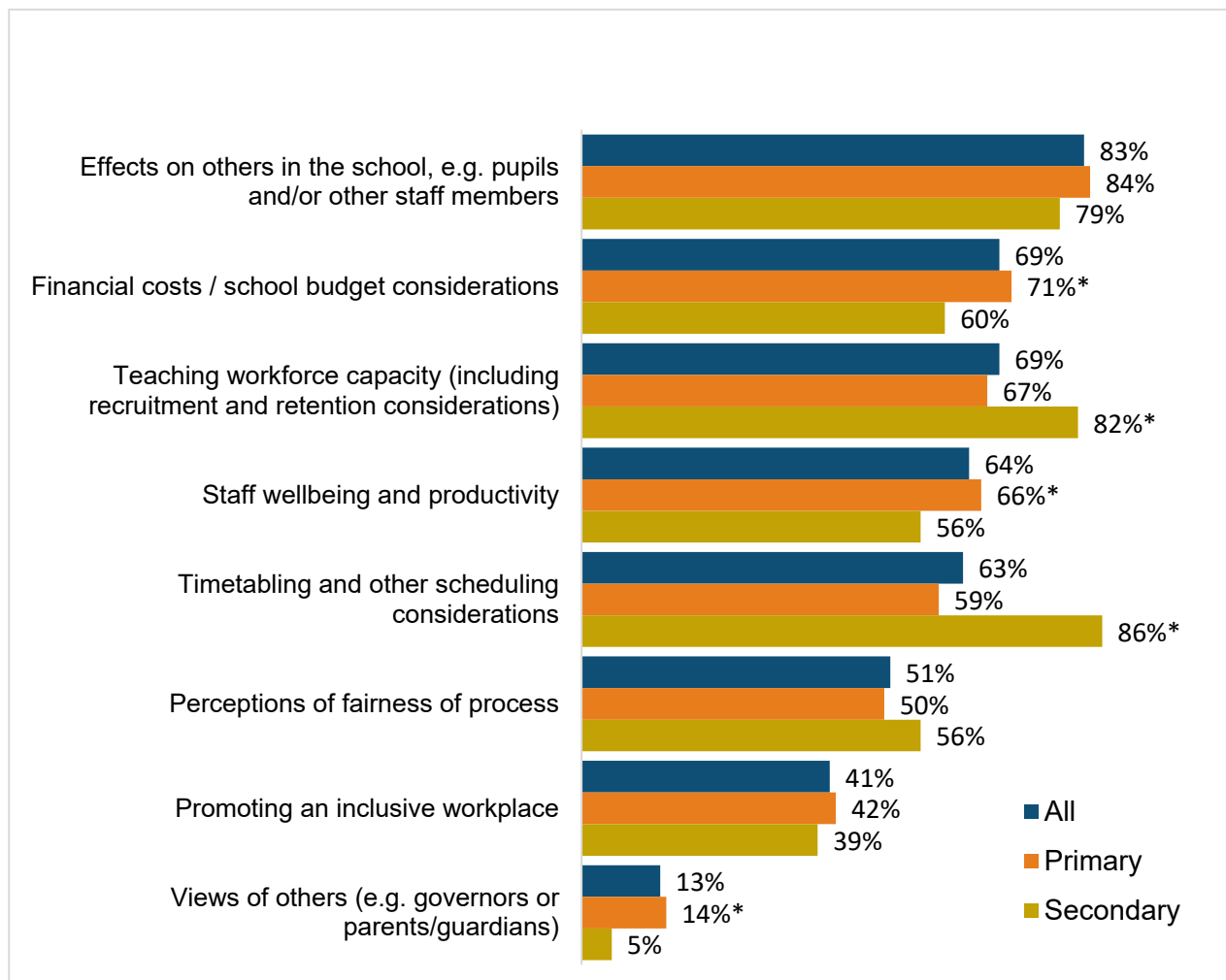
whether the school could accommodate it with no or minimal disruption to pupil experience. The overriding view of the school leaders was that they would support flexible working requests where possible, balancing the needs of the individual with those of the wider school community.

“There’s a clear understanding amongst staff that what we’re promising is parity of process not parity of outcome. We treat every application the same, but we can’t say that everyone would get the same decision.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Financial considerations were rarely the primary factor when making these decisions, instead teaching standards and pupil experience were cited as the most important factors.

Figure 2 provides broader context around the factors considered when deciding whether to agree flexible working within schools, taken from the December 2021 SCP. This again broadly reflects the answers given in the interviews.

Figure 2: Factors most important to school leaders when considering whether or not to allow teachers and leaders to work flexibly [Prompted] (December 2021)



Source: School and College Panel, December 2021 survey. Sample leaders (n=622). *Indicates a higher statistical difference between primary and secondary.

Promotion and advertising of flexible working

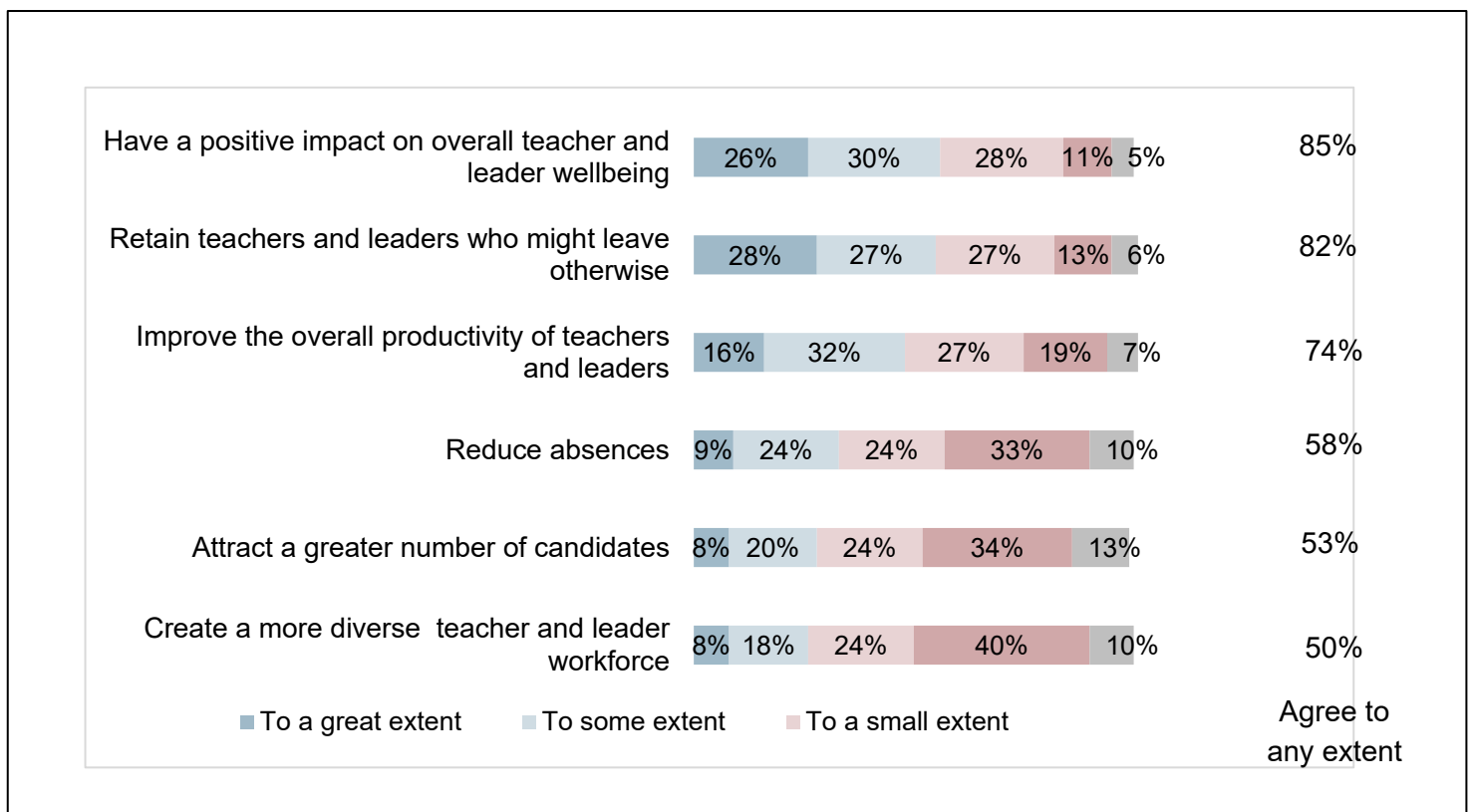
Most respondents did not actively promote flexible working opportunities for (potential and current) staff and leaders. These respondents felt that flexible working could generate problems and administrative burden; while it was felt that these could be overcome, there was no desire to proactively incur them.

There were exceptions to this view. For example, one school incorporated flexible working into their wellbeing policy, which they actively promoted. The headteacher reported that this had a positive impact on morale and believed it was a useful tool in recruiting new, high-quality staff. They felt it was particularly appealing to younger, highly motivated staff.

Benefits of flexible working perceived to be non-financial

For context, leaders whose schools offer flexible working were asked about the associated impacts in the December 2021 wave of the SCP. The majority agreed that flexible working had positively impacted on overall teacher and leader wellbeing, and that it had helped retain teachers and leaders who might otherwise leave (see Figure 3). Almost three-quarters also agreed that flexible working had improved the overall productivity of teachers and leaders. These findings echo the benefits cited by leaders in the interviews.

Figure 3: Extent to which school leaders think offering flexible working has had an impact (December 2021)



Source: School and College Panel, December 2021 survey. G4: Panel B schools that offer flexible working (n= 518).

In the interviews, leaders were asked if there were any perceived positive or negative impacts of flexible working besides the financial implications. It is worth noting that there were inconsistencies in what leaders considered to be a financial benefit or not. For example, some discussed staff retention as a benefit of flexible working without considering its budgetary implications, while others thought of staff retention as a financial benefit because it cuts recruitment costs.

Respondents highlighted the importance of good time management and good communication from all staff to avoid negative impacts (particularly in ensuring consistency for pupils). When these are both in place, leaders felt there were a number of benefits, as discussed below.

Staff wellbeing

Most leaders reported that flexible working has a beneficial impact on staff mental health and general wellbeing. This was reported to have a positive knock-on effect on motivation, morale, and reduced sick leave; leaders felt that happy and motivated staff were able to do their job more effectively and provide a better experience for the pupils. Improving work-life balance was reported to be a key driver for many teachers who want to work flexibly.

“Benefits [of flexible working] are mental health and [staff] wellbeing and giving them as much control over their working life patterns as possible.” *Primary academy deputy headteacher*

“I think it [flexible working] could make the transition back from maternity leave slightly easier, which then helps with wellbeing.”
Secondary non-academy assistant headteacher

Leaders tended to consider improved staff wellbeing as a core, long-term benefit of flexible working.

Respondents mentioned that accepting requests for flexible working made teachers feel valued and helped to build a positive staff atmosphere. This was particularly the case for ad hoc requests which helped to alleviate ‘pressure points’ in the work-life balance of staff. Though staff often felt the benefit of these forms of flexible working in the short-term, leaders felt that the schools would reap the long-term benefits.

“Their [staff] loyalty to us as a leadership team, that’s an intangible benefit.” *Secondary academy deputy headteacher*

“Where the savings possibly could be found is on staff absences in the long term - things like stress and sickness.” *Primary non-academy deputy headteacher*

Staff retention

Respondents mentioned retaining good and valued staff as a key benefit of, and reason for, providing flexible working. This is supported by the December 2021 survey evidence,

referred to previously, where 82% of leaders agreed that flexible working helped to retain teachers and leaders who might otherwise have left the profession.

Leaders reported that some of their staff may not have been able to stay in their roles if they had not been allowed to work flexibly, saving schools the time and resource of finding and training new staff.

“It’s about retaining those people with good skills and not letting them leave the workforce.” *Primary academy headteacher*

“We want you to work here, so we’ll do what we can to keep you here.” *Secondary academy assistant headteacher*

One deputy headteacher acknowledged that allowing flexible working had helped them to retain skilled members of teaching staff who are able to support high-needs pupils.

“Our governors... are very financially heavy [i.e., conscious] and there is a cost to having flexible working, so I do appreciate that they think we could save money if everyone was full time. We have to give them the argument that some of our very skilled, highly qualified teachers, our bread and butter, who are very good for our school, would leave.” *Primary academy deputy headteacher*

Respondents felt that granting flexible working requests was one of a limited number of tools they had at their disposal to help with staff retention.

“We have tight pay scales, it’s a challenging job, so offering flexibility is one lever we have to help keep good people.” *Secondary academy deputy headteacher*

“Flexible working is a beneficial approach to retaining high-quality staff who may have previously been disadvantaged due to their previous commitments.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Some felt that staff retention had a positive impact on building a stable school culture, and that having staff stay for a long time was an attractive prospect from a recruitment perspective. They felt there were benefits to the school in terms of saving on recruitment costs and that it was attractive to candidates to see that staff stayed in the school for longer, but that it was hard to quantify this in monetary terms.

Recruitment

Recruitment of high-quality teaching staff was also noted as a benefit of flexible working. For context, within the December 2021 SCP survey, over half of leaders (53%) said flexible working helped with attracting a greater number of candidates for job advertisements.

One interview respondent, a deputy headteacher at a non-academy primary school, said that the evolving nature of flexible working within their school had enabled them to bring in 'new ideas, new talent, and 21st century skills'.

However, offering flexible working arrangements to *attract* good staff was a less important factor to respondents than *retaining* them. Most leaders said they would not openly advertise the ability to work flexibly but would instead consider it on a candidate-by-candidate basis, if raised, in order to attract teachers they were interested in hiring.

"No, we do not advertise it. It's more something that gets discussed at a later point." *Secondary academy deputy headteacher*

"I'm not sure I would actively promote [flexible working] because I've got to have the children at the centre of all my decision-making."
Primary non-academy headteacher

Better arrangements for covering absences

Some leaders also found that a culture of flexibility facilitated the use of existing staff rather than external supply staff to cover absences. A teacher working part time or in a job share can sometimes offer flexibility and cover for another teacher who is ill, instead of the school having to rely on and resource supply staff for cover. This also allows greater consistency for pupils as they are taught by a familiar member of staff.

"Having someone ready who knows the children, who knows the school, understands the policies... ready to step in for the sake of consistency for the children... they know who's coming and the parents know as well so that is a huge advantage. All this brings about consistency in learning, consistency in impact; the school day runs well. There was a time in the country there was a shortage of supply...we're lucky to have this in-house flexible worker." *Primary non-academy deputy headteacher*

Some leaders also mentioned that having a higher headcount through employing some part-time staff as opposed to full-time staff increases the breadth of experience and expertise in the school workforce. They felt that this creates the opportunity for skill-

sharing, notably from more experienced staff who may remain in their role longer. As a result, some school leaders found that this had allowed the school to put on more extracurricular activities and gave a larger pool of candidates to draw upon for pastoral roles.

Negative impacts of flexible working which are perceived to be non-financial

Communication and working together

Leaders reported that communication was a common challenge with flexible working and could require time and effort. For example, having part-time staff or job shares makes arranging all-staff meetings difficult, and also makes sharing information among staff harder.

“The staff meeting now becomes redundant and is no longer a way that you can train or communicate to people because there's going to be a portion of your staff who will not be in work at the staff meeting.”

Primary non-academy deputy headteacher

Some respondents also felt that communication between flexible workers could be a challenge but was vital for teaching consistency and for pupil experience.

"The communication between the teachers has to be absolutely on point to make sure that the handovers are done thoroughly." *Primary non-academy headteacher*

A small number of leaders reported flexible working can lead to tensions within the school workforce because it is perceived to place additional burdens on those working full time, for example needing to cover for staff who work flexibly.

“It’s really hard on those of us who sustain full time to then have to accommodate people who haven’t... Sometimes the people who come off worse are my full-time staff, they’re almost penalised for being full time!” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Other logistical factors

Respondents often cited logistical challenges as reasons why they would not advertise new positions as suitable for flexible arrangements or actively promote them to existing staff. This was mainly the case for more formalised patterns of flexible working, such as part time and job shares, as most leaders accepted that more ad hoc forms of flexible working were easier to manage as a school.

Respondents commonly highlighted issues around timetabling, continuity for parents and pupils, and additional line management.

“In terms of [...] the relationship with parents, the consistency of information being shared, this is a difficulty [of flexible working].”

Primary non-academy executive headteacher

“You can reduce the workload for one, but it just adds a load more to somebody else and pushes them over the edge.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

A number of respondents cited logistical challenges as a particular barrier for leaders working flexibly, as they would potentially miss key briefings and training sessions.

“If you have someone who isn’t in every day, they do miss CPD [continuing professional development], they miss management. If they are not in for briefings first thing in the morning that also needs dealing with.” *Primary academy deputy headteacher*

Often, where respondents were negative about the logistics of flexible working, they pointed towards external pressures they felt as school leaders, including financial constraints and the culture of the education sector.

“I would love to be able to be more flexible as an employer. However, the antiquated education system, the exam system, all of the systems that are in place in education, do not suit flexible working.”

Primary academy headteacher

“If [two teachers job sharing] were paid at the same rate, it would cost more money... and as a school, we do not have extra money.”

Primary non-academy headteacher

Of those in the sample, primary school leaders tended to focus more on financial restraints preventing them from offering flexible working, whereas secondary leaders focused more on the logistical challenges that can arise from doing so.

However, a number of leaders noted that their school had become more accommodating after the growth in flexible working arrangements during the pandemic, which helped make leaders more aware of how they could increase flexibility within their workforce and overcome some of the associated logistical challenges⁵.

⁵ For context, in the February 2022 wave of the SCP, a minority (12% of all school leaders) reported they had become more likely to accept flexible working requests now, compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“[The pandemic] did show that there was some potential for more flexibility in the teacher role.” *Primary academy headteacher*

Consistency

Some leaders felt that some forms of flexible working can have a negative impact on pupils due to a lack of teaching continuity or consistency, which they viewed as particularly important for younger pupils and for those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). Job shares - or in some cases part-time teaching - can mean that children are taught by more than one teacher, and some respondents reported that this can be disruptive and a less cohesive learning experience for pupils. The quality of learning can suffer if flexible working arrangements are not properly managed.

“When things are handled differently, the parents and the children really struggle with that.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Some respondents felt that parents dislike flexible working because they prefer to communicate with the same teacher consistently. Where there are job shares - or in some situations with part-time teachers - they may need to speak to more than one member of staff. This was mentioned more frequently by leaders in primary than secondary schools.

“They like dealing with one person and for that person to be available all the time. But they’d also like that person to be available 24/7. It’s about managing expectations.” *Primary academy deputy headteacher*

However, others felt that parents do not have an issue with flexible working if their expectations are managed, and that they are appreciative of the lower staff turnover that flexible working can facilitate.

“These days when there is more flexible working in society at large I don’t think there’s that expectation that their child has got one teacher for the entire year. I think they’re just very glad that we’ve got a stable workforce. We don’t have the staff turnover that other schools have.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Measured Financial Costs

Overview of the proforma exercise

The proforma, outlined in Appendix 2, was designed to collect detailed information on financial costs and benefits associated with flexible working. More detail can be found in the appendix.

Responses to the proforma exercise

Almost universally, leaders reported difficulty providing at least some of the financial data on the proforma, and for many leaders this was the first time they had reflected on the financial costs and benefits of flexible working in this level of detail. Several did report finding the exercise interesting and surprising and saw the benefits of monitoring this information more closely in the future.

“It has been handy to look at the form to be honest. Perhaps it will be something we need to look into in the future. It may need to be something we need to be more careful and accurate about.” –
Secondary academy deputy headteacher

The main challenges with filling in the proforma fell into three broad categories:

- Time costs and savings were not tracked or logged by schools
- Financial costs were found to be much more tangible and easier to measure than benefits
- The costs and benefits varied considerably depending on the unique flexible working arrangement in place with each staff member

Each of these are discussed in further detail below.

Time costs and savings are not tracked by schools

Typically, discrete costs, such as the costs of an additional person attending a training session, the cost of advertising a job, or the cost of paying National Insurance, were relatively easy to assess. However, leaders found estimating the financial cost of staff time, including their own, much harder. Indeed, the additional cost of staff time was often not considered at all when completing the proforma. For example, some leaders stated that extra time spent on timetabling as a result of having flexible workers was ‘free’ to the extent that timetabling was part of someone’s job role, and it was simply a case of this task taking more time.

Similarly, leaders often explained that they did not think of their own time in terms of a direct financial cost, and just worked the hours needed each week in order to get tasks done. For example, if an additional two hours were needed for managing teachers each week due to flexible working patterns, this would be absorbed into their leadership time. Respondents also found it particularly difficult to identify the additional management hours resulting from flexible working where it had been operating for multiple years.

Financial costs are easier to measure than benefits

Respondents found it easier to measure financial *costs* compared to benefits. As many of the financial savings resulting from flexible working were typically long term (e.g., better staff retention), they were often felt to be too hard to quantify and not considered when the proforma was being completed.

When discussing recruitment costs and savings, for example, leaders would often cite the costs of recruiting an additional staff member (in the case of a job share), and could detail the cost of job advertisements, recruiter fees, HR resource, and onboarding costs. However, when prompted to think of the financial *savings* associated with the retention of staff and reduced recruitment costs, few could give a figure for these savings. Even when such savings were realised (for example, an acknowledgement that a member of staff had been retained longer due to flexible working) it was difficult for leaders to estimate the costs that would have occurred if they had left. There were many unknown variables, including:

- The amount of time and advertising necessary to find a suitable replacement
- The length of time the replacement would have stayed
- The management and training the replacement would have needed

For these reasons, while the upfront costs of flexible working were commonly detailed on the proforma, the potential future benefits were less frequently considered, leading to an overall skew in the data collected from leaders towards costs. For some schools, the only financial benefit of flexible working leaders cited was a saving on supply teacher costs.

Costs and benefits vary on a case-by-case basis

When completing the proforma, those who considered and were able to give costs almost exclusively did so for part-time working and job shares specifically, despite being prompted to consider all types of flexible working. This was generally because part-time working and job shares were perceived to be the only types of flexible working with a significant, measurable financial impact. The costs of allowing time-off-in-lieu (TOIL), for example, were seen to be negligible, as were the costs of remote working (if no additional technology had to be provided to staff).

Even while considering part-time working or job shares specifically, the estimates of net costs and savings varied greatly. On the one hand, if a subject did not have the pupil demand to warrant a full-time teacher (for example, in specialist subjects like music or modern foreign languages), allowing a part-time working arrangement would be financially beneficial for the school, as the teacher could be paid only for the hours that they are needed.

On the other hand, if two people worked in a job share there were associated financial costs to the school compared with employing one full-time member of staff. These costs are detailed below, and these individual flexible working arrangements were associated with net costs.

Even in cases where leaders detailed the financial implications of job shares, estimates varied greatly depending on the specific nature of the job share and factors unique to the school. For example, costs varied depending on:

- Contract arrangements (for example, having to pay both staff members to be in for one afternoon a week for planning time)
- The salary band of the staff in the job share (depending on their base pay there could be National Insurance costs or savings associated with this arrangement)
- Whether or not training was budgeted per person
- Whether recruitment was carried out in-house or by an external agency

For these reasons, determining the cost of flexible working was highly nuanced and varied widely not only from school to school, but also between different arrangements in place within one school. This variance can clearly be seen in the completed proformas in Appendix 3, which show the responses from three different non-academy primary schools.⁶

Financial costs and savings reported by schools

When completing the proforma, leaders were asked to estimate the costs and savings associated with flexible working in seven key areas:

- Recruitment costs
- National Insurance or pension contributions
- Financial costs or savings related to line management, school management time, lesson planning, timetabling, etc.

⁶ Responses from 3 different non-academy primary schools are given as examples to demonstrate the variance between similar types of schools. A large amount of variance was also seen when comparing the responses of academy schools.

- Staff training / CPD
- Other staff costs
- Costs of drawing up different types of contracts
- Expenditure on supply teachers

Leaders were also asked to detail other financial costs or benefits/savings. However, they typically felt the seven key areas listed above adequately covered all the costs and savings associated with flexible working and did not list others.

Some leaders did not identify any financial savings as a result of flexible working, for example one respondent felt that:

"None of them have a saving implication. It is cheaper for a school to have a full-time member of staff." *Primary academy deputy headteacher*

Table 2 summarises the range of responses received in completed proformas; each area is then discussed in more detail.

Table 2: Summary of financial costs and benefits of flexible working, by area

Area	Cost	Saving
Recruitment costs	Some: £0 (in house) Others: £120 - £500 per recruit	
National Insurance or pension contributions	Some: cost up to £4,000	Others: saving up to £3,843
Financial costs or savings related to line management, management time, timetabling etc.	Hard to quantify and very dependent on unique arrangements	
Staff training / CPD	Additional staff to attend training and attend INSET days c. £195 - £1,000 pp/pa	
Other staff costs	The biggest cost came from increased PPA/ handover time for job shares (usually an additional half-day per week)	
Costs of drawing up different types of contracts for different working arrangements	Negligible, typically £30 - £40 per contract	
Expenditure on supply teachers		Estimates ranging from £0 - £10,000 per annum

Recruitment

Additional costs resulting from flexible working were nearly always associated with job shares and their resulting additional headcount. However, job shares were not always considered an additional recruitment cost, either because one or both of the job share partners were existing members of staff (e.g., changing working arrangements following maternity leave) or because such recruitment was part of the school's HR function. Only a few mentioned additional costs of extra time spent interviewing.

Respondents using agencies found it fairly easy to estimate a cost per recruit (with values ranging from £120 to £500). For most schools using an agency for recruitment, recruiting two new members of staff for a job share was associated with double the cost of hiring one new full-time member of staff.

Some schools reported that they paid for a 'package', so the number of staff they recruited each year did not have any financial impact.

“There has been no impact [on recruitment costs] as we sign up to a package. The only exception is for leadership positions which have to be paid for additionally. We do pay for the advert, but if we get two flexible workers from one advert there is no additional cost.” *Primary non-academy deputy headteacher.*

As previously mentioned, respondents found recruitment costs much easier to quantify than recruitment savings, and leaders were unable to estimate a figure for potential future savings on recruitment due to improved staff retention as a result of flexible working.

National Insurance and Pension Contributions

As with recruitment costs, the impacts of flexible working on National Insurance and pension contributions (both costs and savings) were almost exclusively associated with job shares.

As shown in Table 2, for some schools flexible working resulted in an increase in National Insurance and pension contributions (of up to £4,000 per annum), and for others a saving (of up to £3,843 per annum). This was largely dependent on the pay scales of the members of staff working flexibly.

“To work this out I chose two part-time teachers who could potentially make one job, compared to someone who does work full time. This costs approximately £200 more a month, so £2,400 per year in total.” *Primary academy headteacher*

“We are currently saving £3,843 (per year) because the two people working part-time doing a job share are on different pay grades. We’ve found this before too when doing a job share, it tends to work out cheaper in terms of National Insurance and pension contributions” - *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Line management and timetabling

As previously discussed, the costs of management time were the hardest for leaders to quantify. Where cost estimates were given, these varied widely between schools. In some cases, this was negligible. For example, one school had two members of staff working a four-day week and reported no additional cost in terms of line management or training.

However, schools with several members of staff working flexibly, and particularly those accommodating job shares, cited a significant time cost associated with timetabling and line management.

“I can't give you a cost [for] that [additional management time] but the fact that I spend a lot of my hours doing it means it's probably quite cost-heavy.” *Primary academy headteacher*

“For 12 teachers working flexibly...this is about 20 extra hours [of line management] each a year – so a cost around £12,000...£1,000 per staff member.” *Secondary non-academy headteacher*

Staff training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Staff training was consistently mentioned as a cost, with costs of up to £1,000 per person per annum cited. These costs were often directly related to the number of staff on payroll, and where schools paid per person to attend training, two people in a job share would result in double the costs compared to one full-time staff member. Additional salary costs were also associated with paying teachers to attend INSET days.

Leaders reporting no or negligible additional training costs often used training packages, paying per cohort trained rather than per person or allocated training spend/budgeting at the school level rather than per person.

Again, leaders typically cited immediate outgoing costs and were not able to quantify potential savings in this area. Potential savings include retaining staff in the longer term, meaning knowledge acquired through training is preserved and training does not have to be repeated due to high turnover.

"Very difficult to quantify in financial cost... but you don't have [the] loss of efficiency of training up somebody new when you keep someone on a flexible working basis." *Secondary non-academy deputy headteacher*

Other staff costs

The biggest 'other' staff cost cited was in relation to job shares requiring 'overlap time' in which two members of staff on a job share were both being paid to be work at the same time to allow for a handover.

"£1,500 due to two part-time staff having an afternoon - weekly - working together to make sure the learning is in-line". *Primary non-academy headteacher*

"A £6,383 cost for PPA cover ensuring both job share teachers could cross-over." *Primary non-academy headteacher*

In some cases, an overlap between two members of staff on a job share was unintentional and resulted from the school being unable to hire a second member of staff on the ideal contract split.

"We had a member of staff on a 0.6 contract, we couldn't recruit for a 0.4, so have ended end up with 0.5 and 0.6." *Primary academy deputy headteacher*

A small number of schools reported increased costs relating to wellbeing and 'entertainment', however these were typically negligible.

"Very minimal, just some extra beverages in the staff room." *Secondary non-academy headteacher*

"£292 cost for a wellbeing afternoon (to attend a wedding or visit a relative)." *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Costs of drawing up different contracts

Drawing up contracts was one of the only areas that leaders were consistently able to provide figures for, with costs below £100 per person, typically between £30 and £40 per contract.

"When our deputy dropped a day, it cost us £34 to change the deputy's contract plus £39 to make a contract for the new person." *Primary academy headteacher*

Expenditure on supply teachers

Expenditure on supply teachers was commonly cited as a saving resulting from flexible working; where mentioned, respondents explained that teachers working flexibly were more easily able to pick up cover while another member of staff was absent.

The amount of savings was very variable, ranging from a net zero cost to a saving of up to £10,000 per annum (cited by a leader of a large primary school with 12 members of staff working flexibly). There was a consensus among respondents that using an existing member of staff to cover staff absence was obviously cheaper than using an agency supply teacher.

“When we have had COVID absences for example, we have been able to ask flexible working teachers [working part-time hours] to work (additional or different) days to cover. This is useful and they already know the school and the pupils. The only cost is when one of the people on a job share is ill, and we have to ask and pay the other to cover their days. This is good for continuity for the children but costs the school money.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

“[Flexible working has made] no difference [to costs] as we only use supply to cover illness, and this comes from internal support staff that cover lessons.” *Secondary academy Assistant headteacher*

"The school probably saves around £5-6k a year on this [supply teacher costs] by having flexible working." *Primary non-academy headteacher*

An exception was that some cited costs resulting from allowing staff to take ad hoc time off in which case the school needed to recruit supply teachers to cover them. For most respondents this reduced expenditure on supply teachers was the only area where flexible working was associated with a financial saving to the school.

School leaders' views on overall costs vs. benefits

When asked whether the costs of flexible working outweighed the benefits, most leaders considered this as a balance between a positive wellbeing benefit and a negative financial cost. For the most part, respondents thought the benefits outweighed the costs, due to the benefits for staff which they felt ultimately led to better pupil outcomes. Indeed, the impact on pupils was commonly the first and overriding consideration when assessing any flexible working request.

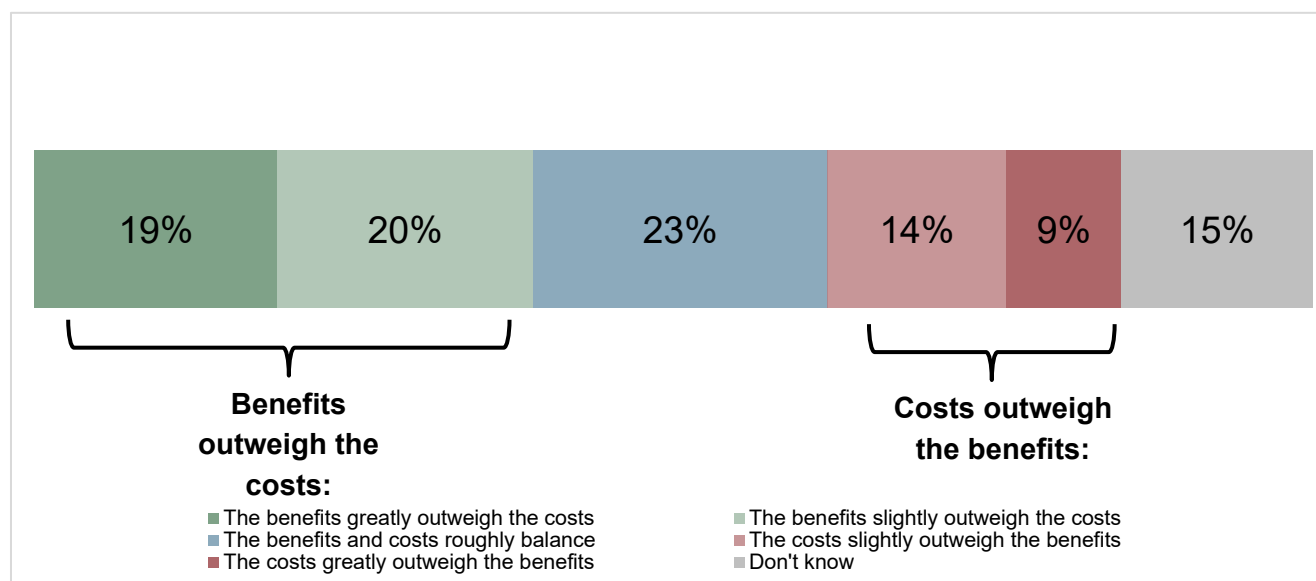
“If the staff teams are happy, that’s going to have a positive impact on student outcomes. That is vital.” *Primary non-academy deputy headteacher*

For the most part, when the logistical challenges of flexible working could be navigated, school leaders were willing to try to do so.

“The aim is always to say ‘yes’, when we can... if things can be done to enable [flexible working] without a negative impact on education, we would.” *Secondary non-academy headteacher*

The December 2021 SCP survey provides further context, as shown in Figure 4; it found that more leaders (39%) reported that the benefits of flexible working outweigh the costs than reported the costs outweighed the benefits (23%). Overall, more respondents reported a net *financial* cost than a net financial saving from flexible working. However, few based this on specific, detailed cost analysis, as previously discussed.

Figure 4: School leaders' views on the extent to which the benefits of flexible working outweigh any costs (December 2021)



Source: School and College Panel, December 2021 survey. Sample of leaders (n=622)

Conclusions

The benefits of flexible working were generally seen to outweigh the costs - leaders generally felt that flexible working helped retain good staff and improved teacher wellbeing, which was seen to ultimately lead to better pupil outcomes.

Flexible working can help to retain staff and meet recruitment challenges – leaders generally felt that flexible working is positive for staff, improving their work-life balance, reducing burnout, and in turn reducing staff turnover. Indeed, many felt that flexible working would be vital in years to come to help mitigate teachers leaving the profession.

“There may be a massive recruitment problem – [the] sector needs flexible working to help... it’s all very complicated and not just financial.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Maintaining high-quality education is at the forefront when leaders make decisions regarding flexible working requests – flexible working requests were generally considered on a case-by-case basis and only permitted if perceived as beneficial (or at least not detrimental) to pupils.

“If we can accommodate flexible working, then we absolutely do and will. When it starts to be at the detriment of learning, that’s when we need a conversation.” *Secondary academy assistant headteacher*

Financial constraints can be a hindrance to schools improving their approach to flexible working– many leaders pointed out short term financial costs associated with flexible working (even if there may be longer-term financial benefits or savings), which can provide a challenge for schools given their budgetary constraints.

“If they [two teachers job sharing] were paid at the same rate, it would cost more money...and as a school, we don’t have extra money.” *Primary non-academy headteacher*

Flexible working can create logistical challenges – leaders cited a number of logistical challenges associated with flexible working, such as increased time spent on line management and timetabling. Generally, the resulting increase in workload was seen as acceptable if flexible working led to improved outcomes for staff and pupils. However, on some occasions, logistical challenges prevented schools from accepting flexible working requests.

“I like the idea in principle but I’m not sure it always works in practice.”
Primary academy deputy headteacher

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Profile of participating schools

Table 3: Respondents by flexible working type

Type of Flexible Working	Schools offering / using each (total = 40)
Part time	38
Planning, Preparation, Assessment (PPA) time offsite	32
Occasional ad hoc start/finish	30
Job share	25
Occasional ad hoc personal days	24
Varied hours, at least one of: Annualised hours, Staggered hours, Compressed hours	16
Home/remote working	15
Time-off-in-lieu (TOIL)	13
Phased retirement	12

Table 4: Respondents by geographical region

Region	Number of schools (total = 40)
East Midlands	4
East of England	7
London	4
Northeast	3
Northwest	3
Southeast	8
Southwest	3
West Midlands	3
Yorkshire and Humber	3

Appendix 2 – Blank proforma

Potential areas of financial costs or savings	What are the <u>financial costs</u> across the school per annum?	What are the <u>savings / financial benefits</u> across the school per annum?
Recruitment costs (e.g., these may increase if you need two staff on a job share rather than one working full time, or decrease due to improved staff retention because of flexible working arrangements)	£	£
National Insurance or pension contributions (e.g., if you need two staff on a job share rather than one working full time)	£	£
Financial costs or savings related to line management, management time, timetabling , etc. (e.g., if you have a higher headcount through having staff working flexibly)	£	£
Staff training / CPD	£	£
Other staff costs (e.g., entertainment, wellbeing, etc)	£	£
Costs of drawing up different types of contracts for different working arrangements	£	£
Expenditure on supply teachers (e.g., less staff absence as a result of having flexible working arrangements)	£	£
Other financial costs (please specify)	£	
Other financial benefits/savings (please specify)		£

Appendix 3 – Example proformas

Primary non-academy

Area	Costs	Saving
Recruitment	£241 per candidate	
National Insurance / Pension contributions	£277 per annum	
Line Management / Timetabling etc.	£2,500 per annum	
Staff training / CPD	£500 per annum (external courses, not CPD)	
Other staff costs (wellbeing etc.)	Cost of PPA is higher with more staff – unable to quantify	
Drawing up different types of contracts	N/A – included in HR costs (single cost for the school not impacted by number of staff members)	
Expenditure on supply teachers		£6,000 - £7,000 pa
Other costs	£1,050 staff insurance per annum	

Primary non-academy

Area	Costs	Saving
Recruitment	£500 per job advert by the LA	
National Insurance / Pension contributions		Around £3,000 per annum across the team
Line Management / Timetabling etc.	Added up how long it takes us to do the timetable: £1,500	
Staff training / CPD	If staff claimed for INSET days £3,500 per annum	
Other staff costs (wellbeing etc.)	£200 a year for providing coffee etc	
Drawing up different types of contracts	All contracts / payroll £172 per person per annum. Factor of 5 compared to if they only employed full-time staff	
Expenditure on supply teachers		Has saved £300 per day on agency fees

Primary non-academy

Area	Costs	Saving
Recruitment	“No obvious recruitment cost” - current teacher working flexibly was already known to them as a supply teacher	
National Insurance / Pension contributions		“Currently saving £3,843 because the two people doing a job share are on different pay grades” ⁷
Line Management / Timetabling etc.	“This is difficult [to quantify]. In timetabling, there is no added cost. In terms of line management, it's a few additional management meetings throughout the year, but [I] don't feel this is significant”	
Staff training / CPD	5 training days throughout the year, have to pay for part-time staff to attend – 1 weeks extra pay	

⁷ Though not clarified on the form, the interviewer's inference is that one is a newly qualified teacher (NQT).

Area	Costs	Saving
Other staff costs (wellbeing etc.)	£200 a year for providing coffee etc	
Drawing up different types of contracts	Contract variation costs £34, new contract costs £39	
Expenditure on supply teachers		Unable to quantify – but have used staff working flexibly to cover sick leave. This is cheaper than paying for an agency supply teacher, but still a cost. On the other hand, supply cover is seen as “free” if a full-time staff member can take the lesson instead.

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