



Understanding the factors that support the recruitment and retention of teachers – review of flexible working approaches

Mixed methods review

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Executive summary

This mixed methods review was commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in spring 2023. The review explores the nature and prevalence of flexible working for teachers since the Covid-19 pandemic, identifies examples of promising flexible working practices, and considers indicators of impact. It includes a rapid evidence assessment, analysis of the latest School Workforce Census data, teacher job adverts and school flexible working policies, as well as interviews with experts. The focus is on teachers in England. It also explores how such flexible working approaches could be successfully implemented and evaluated in future to support teachers' wellbeing, job satisfaction, and, ultimately, recruitment and retention.

Summary of key findings

The following general questions were the focus of this review. These are listed as expanded research questions on page 7.

Do flexible working approaches support teacher recruitment and retention? Do such approaches have other impacts and is there any differential impact?

Overall, there is a lack of robust evidence on the impacts of flexible working yet considerable perceptual evidence that flexible working can support recruitment, retention, and workforce stability. There is also perceptual evidence that suggests flexible working could contribute positively to:

- wellbeing and job satisfaction;
- attendance, productivity, and motivation;
- capacity, expertise, and diversity; and
- career progression, succession planning, and reducing the gender pay gap.

However, school leaders also report negative impacts in terms of increased costs and concerns around lack of consistency for pupils. Overall, there is very limited evidence on the differential impacts of flexible working. However, there are indications that disadvantaged schools may have less positive perceptions of flexible working and be less likely to adopt such working practices. Also, flexible working is more common among female and primary school teachers and some forms of flexible working appear to be more appealing and beneficial to different groups of teachers and at different stages of their lives.

What types of flexible working approaches have been implemented in schools and how prevalent are they in different education systems?

The main type of flexible working in schools is part-time working, although a minority of teachers work flexibly in other ways including phased retirement, flexible hours, personal days, and remote working. Flexible working is more common among primary teachers than secondary and appears to be less common in schools serving more disadvantaged communities. There appears to be a higher level of interest in flexible working among teachers than is reflected in teacher job adverts.

What enablers and barriers are identified to implementing flexible working approaches for teachers?

There are numerous challenges to flexible working—including leadership attitudes and school culture, timetabling, financial costs, staff availability, and workload—yet successful flexible working approaches can be enabled by supportive leadership and culture, a whole-school, proactive approach, effective

communication, fairness, and transparency, creative timetabling, clear and accessible policies, managing and defining responsibilities and workload, and access to training, tools, and guidance. Leadership and creating a school culture that values staff and prioritises staff wellbeing emerged as being crucial to successful flexible working practices, and underpinned the other factors.

How could the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention be evaluated and what are the methodological considerations?

There is a paucity of evidence measuring the causal impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention by analysing the counterfactual impact in the absence of such practices. More robust evidence could be generated by evaluating the effect of flexible working practices on recruitment and retention outcomes, as well as proximal outcomes (such as teacher wellbeing), via longitudinal and quasi-experimental designs (QEDs—with a comparison group). A major challenge will be isolating the effect of flexible working and defining and measuring flexible working practices.

Implications for policy and practice

Flexible working practices appear to play an important role in improving teacher recruitment and retention; perceptual evidence indicates that offering flexibility is associated with several positive teacher outcomes. The implementation of flexible working practices could be supported through the provision of training, tools, and guidance as well as support programmes and networks that facilitate effective implementation and the sharing of good practice. Given current recruitment and retention challenges, it is important for schools to think about practices that may help to retain teachers. The review shows clearly that teachers value flexibility and suggests that schools are likely to benefit in terms of retention if they make proactive management of flexibility a priority, especially as part of an overall leadership approach that is supportive of staff.

Implications for research

The evidence from this review has implications for future research. The following approaches should be considered:

- evaluate the outcomes of schools that are involved in programmes supporting the implementation of flexible working in comparison to similar schools that are not involved (for example, using a QED);
- measure teacher recruitment and retention and pupil achievement outcomes in national datasets—such as the School Workforce Census and National Pupil Database—in relation to measures of the extent of schools' flexible working, which could be derived from a large-scale survey; however, there are significant limitations with this approach: it will be challenging to isolate the effects of flexible working practices from more general, positive leadership practices that also lead to teacher recruitment and retention;
- conduct a pilot evaluation of a programme that supports the implementation of flexible working in schools—this could also explore evidence of promise, implementation factors, and the feasibility of outcome measures and usefully address a gap in the current evidence base by exploring pupils' and parents' experiences of the flexible working practices of teachers; and
- flexible working arrangements could be explored as part of a study looking more widely at effective leadership practices to support teacher recruitment and retention.

Background and review rationale

Teacher recruitment and retention has remained a persistent challenge in English education, particularly for schools serving disadvantaged children. Such schools typically experience higher teacher attrition, turnover, and vacancy rates (NFER, 2022). Teachers' satisfaction with their work-life balance is also poorer than in other public sector professions such as nursing and the police force (Worth et al., 2018). Evidence from the NFER and others—based on consultation with teachers and analysis of teacher workforce characteristics and leavers' destinations—has indicated that flexible working could be a means to improve teacher satisfaction and wellbeing and, ultimately, recruitment and retention (Lynch et al., 2016; Worth and Bamford, 2023; Worth, Lazzari and Hillary, 2017; Buchanan et al., 2018; CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2019b; Sharp et al., 2019; Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021; Faulkner-Ellis and Worth, 2022; IFF Research, 2023). Teacher flexible working was also an approach highlighted as warranting further research in a recent review of teacher recruitment and retention (Taylor et al., 2023).

Flexible working has been defined in Department for Education (DfE) guidance as 'arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work' and includes part-time working, varied hours, and in-year flexibility (DfE, 2022). Following the introduction of the Flexible Working Regulations in 2014, all employees have the right to request flexible working. The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019a) included a priority to expand flexible working opportunities in teaching. In 2021 the government ran a consultation and published a response (BEIS, 2022) on proposals to make flexible working in employment more accessible.

However, flexible working has not historically been common in schools: just 19% of secondary and 27% of primary teachers worked part-time in 2019 (Sharp et al., 2019). Teachers may not be aware of their school's flexible working policy and may be reluctant to make requests (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2019b; Sharp et al., 2019) or report feeling that part-time working reduces career progression opportunities (Jerrim and Sims, 2019). However, there may also be an increased imperative for schools to offer flexible working opportunities to compete for, and attract, teachers as half of all graduates now work remotely (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023).

Barriers to flexible working in schools, including timetabling issues and unsupportive leadership, may be overcome with logistical organisation and the development of a whole-school culture that recognises the benefits of appropriate flexible working opportunities (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2019b; Sharp et al., 2019). In the last few years, several programmes have pioneered flexible working in schools in England, including Flexible Working Ambassador Schools, the Teaching Pioneers programme, and Flexible Teacher Talent. In addition, the DfE has recently commissioned 12 Flexible Working Ambassador Multi-Academy Trusts and Schools (FWAMS) to support the implementation of flexible working over the next two years through coaching, provision of resources, and a culture change programme. There are also examples of promising practices in other countries such as Australia, Finland, and Singapore (CooperGibson Research, 2019b). When flexible working exists in schools, this has tended to involve part-time working and job shares. However, it is feasible that other forms of flexible working have emerged more recently, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which prompted rapid development of flexible and remote working practices (Timewise, 2022b). This mixed-methods review was commissioned by the EEF in order to explore the issue of flexible working for teachers further, particularly the picture since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Objectives of the review

This mixed-methods review aimed to explore the nature and prevalence of flexible working for teachers (including in schools in areas of high disadvantage) to identify examples and case studies of promising

flexible working practice and indicators of flexible working impact (such as job satisfaction). The review builds on existing evidence to provide an up-to-date picture of flexible working practices in schools in England. It explores how such approaches could be successfully implemented and evaluated in the next stage of the EEF's 'teacher recruitment and retention' research agenda and informs a potential theory of change suggesting how flexible working practices might influence recruitment and retention.

Research questions

The review aimed to address the following research questions:

- RQ1** Do flexible working approaches support teacher recruitment and retention?
- RQ2** What types of flexible working approaches have been implemented in schools and how prevalent are they in different education systems? Are there any indications of changes since Covid-19? How prevalent are these practices in schools in areas of high disadvantage?
- RQ3** What enablers and barriers are identified to implementing flexible working approaches for teachers, especially in areas of high disadvantage?
- RQ4** Do flexible working approaches have a positive impact on teacher outcomes likely to be related to teacher recruitment and retention (for example, job satisfaction, intention to remain in profession, or wellbeing)? What proxy measures indicate impact?
- RQ5** Are there any differential impacts of approaches in areas of high disadvantage? For different phases of education (primary or secondary)? For different groups of teachers (for example, returning teachers and new teachers)?
- RQ6** Are there differences in impact between different types of flexible working approaches (for example, job shares or part-time work)?
- RQ7** How could the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention be evaluated? What methodological challenges would need to be considered?
- RQ8** Are there any other enabling conditions for successful primary research on flexible working approaches?

Structure of the report

The subsequent sections of the report are structured as follows:

- Methodology
- Findings of the review
 - Type and prevalence of flexible working in schools (RQ2)
 - Impact of flexible working in schools (RQ1 and RQ4)
 - Differential impact of flexible working in schools (RQ5 and RQ6)
 - Barriers and enablers to implementation of flexible working in schools (RQ3)
 - Supporting the future implementation and evaluation of flexible working in schools (RQ7 and RQ8)
- Key findings and implications

Overview of methodology

The methodology was informed by the understanding that there is limited robust causal evidence on the impact of flexible working on teacher recruitment and retention, yet a rapid assessment of evidence was required to inform the EEF's future research in this area. To avoid duplication of an existing review of flexible working by the Department for Education (CooperGibson Research, 2019b) and evidence from See et al. (2020) that there is a lack of robust evidence on the impact of most recruitment and retention strategies, this review focused on developments in flexible working since 2019 (since the Covid-19 pandemic) and considered evidence from other countries and the implications of this for teachers in England.

To address the research questions, this mixed methods review involved:

- a rapid evidence assessment (REA)—to update what is already known, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, about the nature, prevalence, and impact of flexible working in the education sector;
- analysis of teacher job vacancies and school flexible working policies—to understand the current prevalence and nature of flexible working;
- analysis of School Workforce Census (SWC) data—to understand the proportion of teachers working part-time in 2022, with a breakdown by school characteristics;¹
- identifying case studies of flexible working approaches and promising practices in education; and
- conducting interviews with leads from organisations and programmes supporting flexible working in schools, including Flexible Working Ambassador Schools (FWAS), to understand innovative approaches to flexible working, how they are implemented and the perceived impacts.

The study was delivered according to a protocol agreed with the EEF and deviations from the protocol are discussed in the subsequent relevant Methods sections of this report.²

Rapid evidence assessment

The REA aimed to provide evidence on each of the eight research questions.

Systematic searches of relevant databases and websites were conducted by the NFER's knowledge and information specialists to identify published and grey literature exploring flexible working in schools. The searches were conducted in accordance with a pre-specified search strategy and inclusion and exclusion criteria informed by the research questions, as well as resources and timescales available for the review and agreed with the EEF. Table 1 provides a summary of the search strategy.

Appendix 1 provides full details of the REA methodology, which is also outlined in the review protocol.²

¹ We acknowledge that part-time working is just one form of flexible working, but that part-time working is a measurable variable in the SWC and hence is the focus of this aspect of the study.

² To view the protocol, see <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/flexible-working-approaches>

Table 1: Summary of search strategy

Summary of search strategy	
Search parameters	Evidence published between 2019 and April 2023.
Sources of evidence	Key education bibliographic databases; peer-review journal publisher websites; search engines; websites of agreed U.K. and international governments, research and teaching profession organisations; recommendations from experts; and reference harvesting (see Appendix 1 for further details).
Search terms	See Appendix 1.
Inclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample/setting: classroom teachers in early years settings, primary and secondary schools, and further education and international equivalents.* • Phenomena of interest: evidence of the impact (or proxy areas of impact) of flexible working approaches in recruitment and retention of teachers; evidence of the nature of approaches to create or enhance flexible working arrangements for teachers. • Geography: U.K. and selected international jurisdictions (see Appendix 2). • Language: English. • Studies/evidence: research (all methods), reviews, surveys, guidance, policy documents, and case studies. • Schools serving pupils in disadvantaged areas.

* We acknowledge the EEF's usual remit is schools in England but for this review the EEF and the NFER were also interested in learning from beyond the school sector (for example, further education) and other countries.

A total of 47 items of literature were fully appraised and form the evidence for this review made up of:

- 27 items of research—including one international source;³ and
- 20 items of guidance and practice examples—including nine sources of guidance and 11 individual or collated examples of flexible working in schools and multi-academy trusts.

Appraisals were conducted by two researchers and involved reading the full text and extracting information to complete a structured Excel template to summarise the main findings and messages in relation to the research questions as well as additional information about the study design, where applicable (this was based on the data extraction tool presented in Appendix 3). The appraisal process also involved evaluating the quality and relevance of the research items using a 'weight of evidence' approach based on the methodological quality, methodological relevance, and topic relevance (Gough, 2007). Appraising methodological quality took into account aspects such as:

- limitations in the research design, data collection, and analysis (such as attrition in the sample and sources of bias);
- validity of measures;

³ The review appraised only one international source as, although several were identified in the searches, these lacked relevance to the priorities of the review and the current educational context in England (e.g., focused on flexible working during the pandemic and associated school closures, or explored forms of flexible working that were out of scope, such as employer-led (casual contracts) and 'shift' patterns).

- generalisability of findings;
- control of confounding variables; and
- clarity of interpretation.

Guidance sources and practice examples were appraised on the basis of relevance to the review questions. Appendix 4 summarises the items of literature processed at each stage of the review.

Evidence from the full-text appraisals was qualitatively analysed to identify the range and extent of consistency of findings and messages in relation to each research question and is presented in a narrative synthesis in this report. This constitutes a slight deviation from the planned approach outlined in the protocol to use MAXQDA qualitative analysis software as, in practice, this was not considered efficient given the different types of literature, larger than anticipated range of sources, and rapid nature of the review.

Analysis of School Workforce Census data

The analysis of School Workforce Census (SWC) data aimed to provide evidence to address RQ2—understanding the prevalence of flexible working in schools in England. Specifically, the analysis of the latest published school-level SWC data aimed to identify the proportion of teachers in England working part-time in 2022, with a breakdown by school characteristics including phase, quintile of proportion of pupils in the school eligible for free school meals (FSM), Ofsted rating, region, school size—based on quintiles of full-time equivalent (FTE) number of teachers employed—and school type (MAT/maintained). The analysis is based on samples of 16,751 primary schools and 3,420 secondary schools. Appendix 5 presents further details of the analysis, sample size, and a breakdown of the results by school characteristics.

Review of teacher job adverts and school flexible working policies

To address further RQ2—to understand the prevalence of flexible working in schools in England—the review included analysis of (1) a sample of schools' teacher job adverts to determine what proportion refer to flexible working and of (2) school websites to determine what proportion of schools publish a flexible working policy. To explore further the nature of flexible working in schools (RQ2) and indicators of the enablers of flexible working practices (RQ3), the review included qualitative analysis of a small sample of school flexible working policies.

The analysis of job adverts is based on a sample of 500 maintained schools in England drawn from the government's database, Get Information About Schools, in May 2023. The sample was stratified by the school level of disadvantage (proportion of pupils in the school eligible for FSM) and school phase (primary or secondary). Half of the sample were schools in the top quintile—those with the highest proportion of pupils eligible for FSM: the remaining half were from the other four quintiles.⁴ The sample includes an even split of primary and secondary schools (that is, over-represents secondary schools to reflect where recruitment is more challenging and better reflect the number of teachers rather than the number of schools). The sample includes a range of school types (LA-maintained, academies, and so forth), regions, and Ofsted ratings. Within this stratification, the sample of schools was selected at

⁴ School-level FSM quintiles were calculated based on the latest data for all schools in England held in the government's Get Information About Schools database. To reflect the study sample frame, the FSM quintiles were calculated for all schools after excluding nurseries, post-16, independent, closed schools, and those with no FSM percentage figure or no Ofsted rating. The top quintile was the highest 20% of school-level FSM eligibility; the lower four quintiles were the lowest, second-lowest, middle, and second-highest.

random from the Get Information About Schools database. Schools with missing data on FSM proportions and Ofsted rating were excluded from the sample. Colleges, 16 to 18 only institutions, nurseries, and independent schools were also excluded from the sample.

The website of each of the 500 sampled schools was searched for teacher job vacancies and flexible working policies and associated documents were downloaded for review. A total of 193 of the 500 schools were advertising teacher vacancies on their websites and 497 documents associated with these vacancies were downloaded (including from schools with multiple teacher vacancies). Only 14 (3%) in the sample had a flexible working policy published on their website.⁵

An automated text search of teacher job vacancy documents was conducted to identify the proportion that referenced the following terms: flexible working, working flexibly, job sharing/job share, part time/part-time, working hours, family friendly, phased retirement, home working, remote working, hybrid working, working from home, annualised hours, compressed hours, staggered hours, and work life balance/work/life balance. Following initial searches, a sample of 39 documents (8%) were checked to identify further keywords that might be associated with flexible working and refinements were made to terms before running the final searches of the terms outlined above.

To supplement the 14 flexible working policies identified from the stratified sample of 500 schools, researchers conducted additional web-based searches and asked Flexible Working Ambassador School interviewees to share their school's or trust's policy. In practice, 25 school or MAT flexible working policies were qualitatively analysed and inform the review findings. This constitutes a slight deviation from the protocol, which set out the intention to conduct text searches of policies in addition to qualitative analysis: this was not possible given the number identified. Basic details about the sample of flexible working policies are provided in the Table 2.

Table 2: School flexible working policies—sample characteristics

Flexible working policies—sample characteristics	
Phase	Primary: 8; secondary: 7; trust: 6; all-through: 2; AP trust: 1; PRU: 1.
Policy level	Trust: 14; school: 9, LA: 2.
Region	North West: 6; London: 5; Yorkshire and the Humber: 5; West Midlands: 2; East of England: 2; South East: 3; East Midlands: 1; South West: 1.
Source	Sampled schools (stratified random sample drawn from Get Information About Schools): 14; Google search: 6; FWAS: 5.

As planned, the qualitative analysis involved coding the content of policies in terms of:

- the types and range of flexible working considered;
- indications of who can apply for flexible working;
- the potential benefits identified;

⁵ It is possible that schools may have had flexible working policies available to staff internally which would not have been accessible to this review.

- the language used (such as openness to flexible working, scope for negotiation); and
- any factors which may enable or inhibit implementation (such as trial periods, staff attitudes).

The analysis identified the extent of commonality in flexible working policies and provides examples of promising practice to enrich the report.

Case study interviews with flexible working support leads

To gather further perceptual insights across all eight research questions, the review included interviews with representatives from schools and other organisations that support flexible working practices. Interviews were conducted with nine personnel involved in supporting schools to implement flexible working, including interviews with six staff who had been involved in leading the Flexible Working Ambassador Schools (FWAS) programme—a network of eight schools in England that had a remit to work with a small number of schools in their regions to champion and support the implementation of flexible working practices between April 2021 and December 2022. Three interviews were also conducted with representatives from organisations that provide support to individuals and schools or trusts to implement flexible working, including Flexible Teacher Talent, the Maternity Teacher Paternity Teacher (MTPT) Project, and Timewise.

Representatives from all eight FWAS and a selection of key organisations supporting flexible working were invited to contribute to the research. Interviewees were provided with a privacy notice outlining the purpose of the study and how their data would be used. For further details, including the legal basis for processing personal data as part of the study, please see the review protocol [here](#).

Interviews were conducted remotely during June and July 2023 and lasted around 45 minutes. Interviews followed a semi-structured schedule; questions focused on:

- the nature of current flexible working approaches;
- how these have been effectively implemented in their own or supported schools (particularly those in areas of high disadvantage);
- perceptions of the impacts, challenges, and enablers; and
- consideration of strategies to monitor and evaluate effectiveness.

Interviews were audio or video recorded where participants gave permission and transcribed by researchers. Interviewees were given an opportunity to check the accuracy of the write-up of their interview. Qualitative analysis of interview responses using both deductive coding (structured around the research question themes) and inductive coding (allowing additional and sub-themes to emerge from the data) was conducted and the resulting range and prevalence of responses are presented in relevant sections throughout the report. The protocol for this study outlined an intention to use MAXQDA qualitative analysis software, however, in practise this was not considered beneficial for such a small dataset.

Findings of the review

Overview and quality of the evidence base

The research-based sources form the main evidence of the REA (27 items) and are supplemented by guidance sources and practice examples that provide more anecdotal evidence (20 items). The 27 items of research have the following methodological characteristics:

- 14 quantitative studies—including one conducted in a non-U.K. country—such as surveys at a single timepoint;
- 7 mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative studies combining survey and interview evidence;
- 3 longitudinal studies drawing on data from more than one timepoint; and
- 3 qualitative studies involving in-depth interviews.

Thirteen of the research sources were appraised as being of high quality and relevance to the review. This was due to the topical relevance to at least one of this study's research questions in addition to methodological quality. The remaining shortlisted studies, once appraised in full, were rated as being of moderate (13 sources) or low relevance (one source) to the review in terms of topic relevance (for example, flexible working was not the focus of the study or its questions or the teaching context was not directly applicable to the U.K.) or methodological limitations (such as bias in the selection of informants and respondents). The information from these shortlisted studies has been extracted, where relevant to this study's research questions, to supplement the findings.⁶ Details of the studies are summarised in Appendix 6.

The 20 sources of guidance and practice examples were also fully appraised using the same data extraction tool structured around the review research questions. The sources included:

- guidance from the government, Flexible Teacher Talent, Timewise, and Education Support;
- individual and compiled practice examples—including from the DfE, FWAS, Timewise, Flexible Teacher Talent, Chartered College of Teaching (CCoT), the Maternity Teacher Paternity Teacher (MTPT) Project, and Education Support as well as other schools; and
- books and book chapters about flexible working in education.

Given that these sources do not involve the collection of empirical evidence or methodological design, it was not appropriate to rate the weight of evidence in the same way as the research sources. However, the guidance sources and practice examples offered an abundance of relevant insights on flexible working in schools that are used throughout the report to supplement the main findings from the research evidence in relation to each of the research questions. Brief details of the guidance sources and practice examples are summarised in Appendix 6.

⁶ A decision was made to retain the source rated as offering 'low' relevance to the review following full appraisal as it offered one relevant finding in relation to teachers' attitudes to flexible working.

Quality of the evidence base

The main limitation of the REA is a lack of robust measurement of the impact of flexible working on non-perceptual aspects, such as teacher attendance and retention, and pupil outcomes. The review did not identify any studies that have measured the impact of flexible working using robust experimental or longitudinal designs. Rather, almost all the research evidence is derived from surveys. This limitation in the evidence base has also been identified by others exploring this topic previously. For instance, Timewise (2022c) cites the conclusions of a systematic review of evidence for a business case for flexible working in 2011 identifying a lack of robust evidence of causal links. See et al. (2020) also identified a lack of robust evidence on the impact of most recruitment and retention strategies. A comprehensive literature review of flexible working practices in schools also found that much of the evidence was based on perceptions and attitudes rather than observable, measured outcomes from independent empirical research (CooperGibson Research, 2019b).

In order of general prevalence, other limitations related to:

- risk of bias in the sample and perspectives explored—for example:
 - lack of representativeness, generalisability, and diversity in samples;
 - schools that are already implementing flexible working;
 - respondents who are part of particular groups, such as unions, or signed up to respond to poll surveys, such as Teacher Tapp);
- limited relevance to the RQs of this study;
- lack of clarity and transparency in the methods or issues of measurement—such as reliance on self-report or hypothetical responses rather than observed data;
- limited analysis—for instance, by subgroups and characteristics of interest;
- limited applicability of context—for instance, data collected only during the Covid-19 pandemic or in a non-U.K. country with a different culture;⁷ and
- interpretations that are poorly substantiated by the evidence and speculative.

Given these numerous limitations in the evidence base, the findings of this review should be interpreted with caution and should be regarded as indicative and illustrative of an up-to-date indication of the nature, prevalence, and perceptions of the impact of flexible working.

Type and prevalence of flexible working approaches

RQ2 What types of flexible working approaches have been implemented in schools and how prevalent are they in different education systems?⁸ Are there any indications of changes since Covid-19? How prevalent are the approaches in schools in areas of high disadvantage?

This section explores the evidence from the REA, analysis of School Workforce Census (SWC) data and teacher job adverts, and interviews with flexible working support leads to understand the types and

⁷ Although evidence collected only during the Covid-19 pandemic may still be relevant to the current educational context in some ways.

⁸ The evidence appraised as part of the REA focused almost entirely on flexible working in schools in the U.K., with only one international source.

prevalence of flexible working approaches implemented in schools, as well as whether this has changed since the Covid-19 pandemic and varies for schools in disadvantaged areas.

RQ2: Summary of key findings

- The main type of flexible working in schools is part-time working; between a fifth and a third of teachers work part time.
- Flexible working is more common among primary teachers than secondary.
- Other forms of flexible working are not common in schools but, occasionally, can include phased retirement, flexible hours, personal days, and remote working.
- Flexible working appears to be less common in schools serving more disadvantaged communities.
- Around a quarter of schools mention flexible working in teacher job adverts, which is at odds with a much higher level of interest in flexible working among teachers.

Nature of flexible working

First, the review finds consistent reference in the appraised literature to a definition of flexible working provided by the DfE (2020): ‘working arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing or location of their work’. In its guidance document, ‘Flexible Working in Schools’ (DfE, 2022), the DfE outlines a range of flexible working options which may be implemented in schools, although it acknowledges that some types of flexible working may be better suited to particular roles. Most of the reviewed sources and interviewees identify some or all of these forms of flexible working, with similar definitions and, again, acknowledge that some types of flexible working will not be suitable for staff with pupil-facing roles. The range of flexible working arrangements that are being implemented in schools identified in the appraised literature and in interviews with flexible working support leads is summarised in Table 3. The table presents the themes identified in the literature and interviews and the following text then explains the prevalence of these practices.

Table 3: Types of flexible working in schools

Types of flexible working in schools identified in the literature and interviews	
Part-time working	Working less than full-time hours.
Job share	Two or more people doing one job and splitting the hours.
Phased retirement	Gradually reducing working hours or responsibilities to transition from full-time work to full-time retirement.
Staggered hours	Different start, finish, and break times.
Compressed hours	Working full-time hours but over fewer days.
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.
Personal or family days	Days of authorised leave during term time to which all employees in a school are entitled.
Lieu time	Paid time off work in lieu of having worked additional hours.
Home or remote working	The employee carries out work off site. For teachers, this tends to take the form of completing planning, preparation, and assessment (PPA) time off-site. *

* Some studies considered PPA time off-site as a form of home or remote working, other studies considered it a separate form of flexible working.

Overall prevalence of flexible working

Across the research sources reviewed, the studies indicated that between a quarter and half of teachers are working flexibly in some way (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; DfE, 2020; Adams et al., 2023; Felstead, Green and Huxley, 2023).⁹ Over three quarters of 1,589 senior leaders surveyed by CooperGibson Research (2019a) reported receiving flexible working requests in the previous five years.¹⁰ However, this prevalence varies depending on phase, gender, and type of flexible working arrangement. Flexible working arrangements appear to be more common in primary schools (between a third and half of teachers are working flexibly)¹¹ compared to secondary schools (between one in ten and two-fifths of teachers are working flexibly)¹² and more common among the female teaching population (around a quarter)¹³ compared to male teachers (just less than a fifth) (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; DfE, 2020; Adams et al., 2023).¹⁴ The prevalence of flexible working among teachers is lower than that in the wider workforce where around two-thirds of full-time employees are working flexibly (Timewise, 2019).

Prevalence of different types of flexible working

Part-time working was the most commonly reported form of flexible working among teachers, likely due to this being a formal arrangement for which data is collected unlike, for example, staggered hours, which are often informally agreed (Timewise, 2019; IFF Research, 2023). Across the research studies which reported figures on part-time working, between a fifth and a third of all teachers are working part-time (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Sharp et al., 2019; Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021; Adams et al., 2023).¹⁵ Again, there are differences in this figure by phase and gender: between a quarter and a third of primary teachers¹⁶ and female teachers¹⁷ are working part-time, compared to between a tenth and a third of secondary teachers¹⁸ and male teachers,¹⁹ respectively (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Sharp et al., 2019; Timewise, 2019; Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021; Adams et al., 2023). The SWC data is also consistent with the reviewed literature in indicating that part-time working is more common

⁹ DfE (2020) reports that 24% of teachers worked flexibly; Felstead, Green and Huxley (2023) report 35%; Adams et al. (2023) report 40%; and CooperGibson Research (2019a) reports 48%.

¹⁰ 26% had received 1–2 requests; 32% received 3–5 requests, 13% received 6–10 requests and 6% received over 10 requests; 14% had not received any requests and 10% did not know.

¹¹ DfE (2020) reports that 33% of primary school teachers work flexibly; CooperGibson Research (2019a) and Adams et al. (2023) report 50%.

¹² DfE (2020) reports that 15% of secondary teachers are working flexibly; CooperGibson Research (2019a) reports 41% and Adams et al. (2023) report 42%.

¹³ 28% (DfE, 2020).

¹⁴ 16% (DfE, 2020).

¹⁵ Adams et al. (2023) report that 21% of all teachers are working part-time; Burge, Lu and Phillips (2021) and Sharp et al. (2019) report 22% (based on the School Workforce Census 2017); CooperGibson Research (2019a) reports 36%.

¹⁶ Timewise (2019) reports that 25% of primary teachers work part-time; Adams et al. (2023) report 26%; Sharp et al. (2019) report 27%; CooperGibson Research (2019a) reports 37%.

¹⁷ Adams et al. (2023) report that 25% of female teachers work part-time and Burge, Lu and Phillips (2021) report nearly 30%.

¹⁸ Timewise (2019) reports that 17% of secondary teachers work part-time; Sharp et al. (2019) report 19% (based on the School Workforce Census 2017); Adams et al. (2023) report 20%; CooperGibson Research (2019a) reports 33%.

¹⁹ Adams et al. (2023) report that 7% of male teachers work part-time and Burge, Lu and Phillips (2021) report 10%.

among primary teachers than secondary: for instance, in 2022, 31% of primary teachers worked part-time compared to 20% of secondary teachers.²⁰

Although figures differ across the studies included in this review, there tends to be less part-time working in teaching compared to the wider workforce. Nationally, 27% of employees are working part-time, with this figure being considerably higher among female employees (42%) and lower among male employees (8%) (Brown, 2019; Timewise, 2019). Part-time working appears to be available in most primary and secondary schools. IFF Research surveyed 622 school leaders on the School and College Panel and asked what forms of flexible working are implemented in their schools: 87% reported that their teachers could work part-time (IFF Research, 2023). Similarly, CooperGibson Research reported that 86% of leaders said that part-time working was a form of flexible working available in their schools (CooperGibson Research, 2019a).

Other types of flexible working in schools are much less often identified in the appraised literature. Only two research sources presented comprehensive data on the proportions of teachers working flexibly through other arrangements (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Adams et al., 2023). Compared to part-time working, fewer teachers (generally less than 10%) reported having other flexible working arrangements and across the two studies there are inconsistencies in the percentage of teachers who report working in these ways.

The Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders survey of 11,177 teachers and leaders in England found that, overall, 6% of teachers are working in a job share (12% of primary teachers and 1% of secondary teachers) (Adams et al., 2023). Whereas, of the 1,305 teachers in England surveyed by CooperGibson (2019a), 20% reported working in a job share, with significant differences across phase: 26% of primary teachers who worked flexibly reported working in a job share, compared to 9% of teachers in special schools and 1% of teachers in secondary schools (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). Two studies which surveyed senior leaders about the implementation of different forms of flexible working indicated that in just over half, job share arrangements were available (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; IFF Research, 2023). Several guidance and practice example sources provided illustrations of job shares working in practice. These included teachers sharing form or tutor groups, classroom teaching posts, and leadership roles to support succession planning (Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; DfE, 2021b; Sheppard, 2022; Timewise, 2022a; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date).

Although the opportunity for home or remote working has increased across the wider workforce post-pandemic, the opportunity for teachers to work remotely remains limited in comparison to other graduate professions (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023).²¹ Around a fifth of senior leaders report implementing home or remote working in their schools (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; IFF Research, 2023). However, very small proportions of teachers (less than 5%) report working in this way (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Adams et al., 2023). The Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders Wave 1 survey asked teachers specifically about the opportunity to complete PPA time off-site. Although around a fifth of primary teachers reported doing this, only 2% of secondary teachers did so (Adams et al., 2023). Similarly, IFF Research reported that 53% of primary senior leaders had implemented off-site PPA in their schools, compared to just 15% of secondary school leaders (IFF Research, 2023). There were several examples from the guidance and practice example sources of this working in practice, including holding team meetings remotely and allowing teachers to complete PPA and CPD remotely (CCoT, 2019; DfE, 2021b, 2021a; Sheppard, 2022; Timewise, 2022a).

²⁰ The slight inconsistency with Gov.uk (2023) figures may be due to differences in analysis, as the analysis of SWC data for this study is based on all relevant schools with data and excludes 16–18 institutions in 'secondary'.

²¹ In 2021/2022, 44% of similar graduates worked mainly from home, an increase from 15% from 2018/2019 (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023).

Evidence from the research sources suggested that very few teachers worked flexible hours (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Adams et al., 2023)²² and that only a minority of schools are implementing these forms of flexible working (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; IFF Research, 2023).²³ The studies suggested this was due to the nature of teaching which requires teaching staff to be in school for set hours of the day when pupils are in attendance (Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021). There were, however, instances from the guidance and practice examples of some teachers who had been granted variations to the hours they worked, such as, a day a week with a late start or early finish, mainly to support teachers who are parents with dropping off and collecting their own children from school (CCoT, 2019; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Sheppard, 2022; Timewise, 2022a).

The evidence indicated that very few teachers (1%) were working flexibly through phased retirement (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Adams et al., 2023). However, a larger proportion of school leaders indicated that this was available in their schools (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; IFF Research, 2023).²⁴ There were examples of teachers who had contributed to the guidance and practice example sources who were working flexibly through a phased retirement arrangement, and this tended to be managed through a job share with a less senior member of staff to support succession planning.

Indications of changes in the prevalence of flexible working

Analysis of SWC data indicates modest increases in the proportions of teachers working part-time between 2010/2011 to 2022/2023. For instance, in 2010, 16.5% of secondary teachers worked part-time compared to 19.4% in 2022. In primary this rose from 25.3% in 2010 to 27.9% in 2022.

There is evidence of modest changes in the prevalence of flexible working since the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of the pandemic, flexible working, in terms of flexible hours and home working, has increased in many professions and teachers are observing these changes in the labour market (Allen, Ford and Hannay, 2022). Yet for teachers, these opportunities remain relatively restricted (Felstead, Green and Huxley, 2023). Of the 6,797 teachers surveyed by Teacher Tapp on 22 May 2022, only 15% reported that they were more likely to seek a reduction in their hours resulting from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic (Allen, Ford and Hannay, 2022). Evidence from the February 2022 wave of the School and College Panel indicates little impact of the pandemic on the prevalence of flexible working: 67% of leaders indicated the pandemic made no difference to whether their school was likely to accept flexible working requests, 12% were more likely to, and 10% less likely to do so (IFF Research, 2022).

Prevalence of flexible working in schools in areas of high disadvantage

None of the sources included in the review reported on differences in the prevalence of flexible working in schools with high compared to low levels of disadvantage. However, Adams et al. (2023) did find that leaders and teachers in schools with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils were significantly more likely

²² Adams et al. (2023) reported that 3% of teachers worked annualised hours and 2% worked staggered hours; CooperGibson Research (2019a) reported that 1% or fewer worked staggered and compressed hours.

²³ CooperGibson Research (2019a) reports that 29% of senior leaders have implemented staggered hours in their schools and 9% compressed hours. IFF Research (2023) reports that 12% of senior leaders have implemented annualised hours. Figures are not provided for staggered and compressed hours but are small and higher in secondary schools.

²⁴ IFF Research (2023) reports that 8% of senior leaders had implemented phased retirement in their school and CooperGibson Research (2019a) reports 22%.

to agree that their school supported flexible working, compared to leaders with the highest proportion of FSM pupils (Adams et al., 2023).²⁵

Analysis of SWC data shows that teachers in schools with the highest proportions of FSM pupils are the least likely to work part-time—suggesting there may be some differences in the prevalence of flexible working in schools serving disadvantaged communities (24% of teachers in disadvantaged primary schools work part-time compared to 37% of teachers in other primary schools; 12% of teachers in disadvantaged secondary schools work part-time compared to 27% in non-disadvantaged secondary schools). Our analysis of the SWC also suggests some regional variation in the proportion of teachers working part-time, that schools with higher Ofsted ratings have more part-time staff, and that schools with leaders working part-time have higher proportions of staff working part-time.

Reasons for requesting flexible working arrangements

The most common reason for teachers requesting to work flexibly is to manage childcare (92%) (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). Around half of teachers with parental responsibilities report requesting flexible working to help them manage parental responsibilities alongside their career (NASUWT, 2021; Adams et al., 2023). The most common forms of flexible working requested by teachers with parental responsibilities are part-time hours and job shares, however, they have also requested staggered hours, compressed hours, and the opportunity to work from home (including off-site PPA) (NASUWT, 2021; Adams et al., 2023). Patience and Rose (2022) describe how women are more likely to take on parental and other caring responsibilities, therefore, more women apply for flexible working compared to male teachers. Similarly, Sharp et al. (2019) found that female teachers returning from maternity leave are the largest group requiring flexible working, with part-time working being most prevalent among female teachers in their late 30s and early 40s. Many teachers who had contributed to the guidance and practice example sources included in the review reported working flexibly to support them with a phased return to teaching post maternity leave, to provide them with more time with their young families, and to support them to manage childcare and parental responsibilities (Cafferty, 2019; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; FWAS, 2022; Sheppard, 2022; Timewise, 2022a; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date).

Seeking a better work-life balance is the second most common reason given by teachers for requesting to work flexibly (57%) (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). While this was linked with teachers who are parents wishing to spend more time with their families, there were also examples of teachers who wanted time to pursue other interests, further study, and parallel careers (Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022). CooperGibson Research (2019a) reported that 13% of senior leaders cited 'other interests/pursuits to follow' as a reason for staff requesting flexible working. Within the practice examples reviewed, there were also instances of career-change teachers who had entered the profession later in life having worked in industry (through routes including Now Teach).²⁶ In their previous roles, they had worked flexibly and wanted to maintain a similar work-life balance while teaching (DfE, 2019b; Patience and Rose, 2022).

CooperGibson Research (2019a) reported that 22% of senior leaders cited phased retirement as a reason for their staff requesting flexible working. The guidance sources and practice examples illustrated teachers approaching retirement wishing to reduce their hours through phased retirement to

²⁵ 84% of leaders and 62% of teachers in schools with the lowest proportions of FSM pupils agreed that their school supported flexible working, compared to 72% of leaders and 47% of teachers in schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils (Adams et al., 2023).

²⁶ Now Teach attract, recruit, and support experienced professionals to change career into teaching: <https://nowteach.org.uk/>

support them to manage the transition from working full-time to not working at all (Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; DfE, 2021a; Patience and Rose, 2022; Timewise, 2022a).

Prevalence of flexible working opportunities in teacher job adverts

Findings from the analysis of teacher job adverts conducted as part of the current study indicate that 27% of schools were advertising teacher vacancies that mentioned flexible working (51 out of 188 schools with teacher vacancies had job adverts making at least one reference to flexible working). The most common references to flexible working in job adverts and job descriptions were (in order of frequency): part-time, flexible working, work-life balance, job share, family friendly, and working hours. In general, this prevalence of flexible working in recruitment compares relatively favourably with other sectors where one in three jobs are advertised with some flexibility (Timewise, 2022e).

Table 4: Examples of flexible working described in teacher job adverts

Example references to flexible working in teacher job adverts and job descriptions
'We endeavour to support flexible working and family friendly policies, including job sharing.'
'Job share, part time and flexible working opportunities will be considered.'
'A commitment to offer flexible working wherever we can, in order to support the work life balance of our employees.'
'Flexible working will be considered, please discuss at interview if you wish this to be considered.'
'We offer flexible working opportunities and policies that are often in excess of statutory minimums.'
'As a Trust, we are happy to discuss flexible working opportunities.'

Demand for flexible working

There is evidence that not all teachers who wish to work part-time are doing so. Sharp et al. (2019) drew on evidence from the NFER's Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey (June 2018) that found 81% of secondary teachers and leaders worked full-time but less than half (45%) would ideally work full-time hours. Excluding teachers who could not afford to work fewer hours, further analysis demonstrated that 36% of secondary teachers and leaders would like to work part-time (and could afford to do so) whereas only 19% of secondary teachers and leaders were currently doing so, indicating an unmet demand for 17% of secondary school respondents.

Fairly low levels of reference to flexible working in teacher job adverts, analysed as part of this review, is somewhat at odds with the high level of interest in, and demand for, flexible working among teachers. For instance, in a report by Timewise (2022b) of a flexible working pilot in eight secondary schools, 78% of full-time staff identified an interest in working flexibly. Similarly, Timewise's eighth Annual Flexible Jobs Index (Timewise, 2022e) finds that nine in ten people across various sectors of employment want flexibility in their working arrangements. In a recent Teacher Tapp poll, 56% of classroom teachers thought they should be allowed a regular day to work from home (Ford, 2022). This level of interest also appears to apply to new entrants to the profession as 90% of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers said in a recent survey run by the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) that increased opportunities for flexible working would attract more applicants (Gould, 2023).

Flexible working approaches and the recruitment and retention of teachers

RQ1 Do flexible working approaches support teacher recruitment and retention?

This section draws together the evidence from the REA and interviews with flexible working support leads on the impacts of flexible working on teacher recruitment and retention.

RQ1: Summary of key findings

- There is some perceptual evidence that flexible working can support recruitment by helping to attract a wider pool of applicants, although flexible working is considerably more likely to be considered a benefit for retention of existing staff.
- There is consistent perceptual evidence that flexible working can support retention and workforce stability and that where this is not possible it can be a key reason why teachers leave.
- There is a paucity of evidence measuring the causal impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention.

Flexible working support for recruitment

Several appraised sources suggest that flexible working opportunities can benefit recruitment by attracting a wider range of candidates to jobs and helping to compete with other employers to be regarded as an employer of choice (CooperGibson Research, 2020; Malmesbury School, 2021; DfE, 2022; Timewise, 2022b, 2022c; IFF Research, 2023; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date). For example, 53% of school leaders responding to the School and College Panel survey in 2021 agreed to some extent that offering flexible working had helped to attract a greater number of candidates (IFF Research, 2023). This may be particularly important in light of increases in flexible working (particularly remote working) post-pandemic in other areas of the labour market and, given that teachers' pay has been falling in real terms in recent years, greater access to flexible working may help in areas where recruitment is particularly challenging (Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023). Indeed, Flexible Teacher Talent (2020) cites evidence that offering flexibility can increase the chances of successful recruitment by 13%. Wider evidence from an experimental study beyond teaching of employers advertising on the recruitment website 'Indeed' indicates that the benefits of including reference to flexible working in job adverts could result in up to a 30% increase in applicants (Londakova et al., 2019).

Interviewed flexible working support leads also advocated the benefits of being open to flexible working in recruitment in order to widen the talent pool, attract more candidates, and compete with other professions.

'The school leaders that really supported this [developing flexible working policies and culture] saw a real shift in terms of their school reputation and not just for colleagues within the school, who are benefiting from an inclusive, flexible working offer, but in terms of recruitment, making sure that you're really widening that talent pool' (flexible working support lead interviewee).

However, there is further evidence that flexible working is considerably more likely to be perceived as beneficial for retaining existing teachers, more so than recruiting teachers. According to IFF Research (2023), most school leaders would not openly advertise flexible working opportunities. Similarly, Sharp et al. (2019) found that interviewed school leaders were more ambivalent about the benefit of flexible working for recruitment compared to retention. Furthermore, Timewise (2019) cites data from TES (formerly known as the Times Educational Supplement) that only 7% of secondary teaching jobs are advertised as part-time.

Finally, a further perspective is evident in the appraised literature in that flexible working in the form of part-time working or compressed hours may exacerbate teacher recruitment and retention challenges as more teachers are required in order for schools to provide a full five-day week timetable (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019).

Flexible working support for retention

The impact of flexible working most commonly identified in the reviewed literature and in interviews is on retention and workforce stability.

A survey of teachers by Burge, Lu and Phillips (2021) found part-time and flexible working was one of the most prominent factors influencing teachers' intention to stay or leave. Teachers with little possibility of accessing flexible working were more likely to say they planned to leave in two years or earlier (46%), compared to teachers who could possibly or very likely access flexible working (35% and 26% respectively). This led the authors to estimate that access to flexible working arrangements would have the equivalent impact on retention as a 4.34% increase in annual pay (Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021).

In another study, school leaders indicated through surveys and interviews that flexible working helped to retain good quality staff as it made staff feel valued and encouraged loyalty (IFF Research, 2023). It was also regarded as a benefit that schools could offer staff despite limited scope to increase pay and was becoming increasingly important in the context of a recruitment and retention challenge in teaching. The majority of leaders surveyed in the study (82%) agreed to some extent that flexible working had a positive impact on retention.

Similarly, a mixed-methods study by CooperGibson Research (2019a, 2020) found that over half of senior leaders (57%) felt that flexible working practices had helped retain staff who would otherwise have left. Teachers were even more positive about the impact of flexible working on their retention: 76% agreed to some extent that they would be more likely to remain in the profession long term, if able to work flexibly. According to school leaders interviewed in a study by Sharp et al. (2019), the greatest benefit of flexible working is the retention of high-quality teaching staff as a result of accommodating their need for flexibility in their working pattern.

Flexible working arrangements were found to be one of the top-five reasons why surveyed 30- to 39-year-old teachers stayed in the profession and the lack of them one of the top ten reasons why they leave the profession (Brown, 2019; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Malmesbury School, 2021; MTPT Project, 2021; Patience and Rose, 2022). The adverse impact of a lack of flexibility on retention was exemplified by a case in Brown's (2019) qualitative study of a teacher who left teaching after being refused part-time working following maternity leave. In a small-scale study, 34% of teachers indicated they would welcome flexibility in their working hours to encourage them to stay in teaching (Newton, 2020). Finally, there are indications from a study comparing the retention rates of teachers in Wales and England that suggests significantly higher retention rates of part-time teachers in Wales compared to England as well as higher prevalence of part-time working in Wales, which may be linked to higher rates of retention (Faulkner-Ellis and Worth, 2022).

In wider evidence beyond teaching, high proportions (75%) of employers believe that flexible working positively impacts on retention of the workforce (Timewise, 2019). Other studies have drawn on existing evidence indicating the impact of flexible working on retention or the lack of it as a reason teachers leave or do not return after a career break (Brown, 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2019b; Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021; Faulkner-Ellis and Worth, 2022; Timewise, 2022b).

Almost all of the reviewed guidance and practice examples also cited retention as a key benefit, including examples of schools with substantially reduced rates of turnover since they had implemented flexible working approaches and accounts from individuals who had stayed in teaching as a result of

being able to work flexibly. This was further supported in interviews with flexible working support leads who provided examples of staff retention in their own schools and schools they had supported to develop flexible working. Interviewees explained this retention was a result of staff feeling valued and supported, and being able to achieve balance between work and life commitments. Indeed, one interviewee explained that offering a modest degree of flexible working to full-time staff (such as one late start a week) to enable them to manage their personal lives during term time, could prevent staff from going part-time.

'In a school where that culture isn't there, and they know that is not going to be agreed, what most likely happens is that colleagues will request to go down to four days, for example, so that they meet ... their work-life balance. But actually, if you're able, through timetabling, to support that colleague to come in one day a week at 9.30am, you then haven't got a situation where you're having to look for a solution for a colleague wanting to work part time. You are more likely to retain that member of staff because they know that there's that kind of "we care" culture' (flexible working support lead interviewee).

The impact of flexible working on teacher and school outcomes

RQ4 Do flexible working approaches have a positive impact on teacher outcomes likely to be related to teacher recruitment and retention (for example, job satisfaction, intention to remain in profession, wellbeing)? What proxy measures indicate impact?

This section draws together the evidence from the REA and interviews with flexible working support leads on the range of additional impacts that are associated with flexible working.

RQ4: Summary of key findings

- There is perceptual evidence that flexible working contributes positively to teacher outcomes:
 - increased support for, and access to, flexible working;
 - enhanced wellbeing and job satisfaction;
 - enhanced attendance, productivity, and motivation;
 - enhanced teaching capacity, expertise, and diversity; and
 - improved career progression and succession planning and reduction in the gender pay gap.
- However, there is also perceptual evidence that flexible working can restrict teachers' career progression, increase the gender pay gap, and contribute negatively to school outcomes (for example, increased costs).
- There is perceptual evidence of flexible working contributing positively to pupils' experiences and outcomes but also perceptions of negative impacts on pupils as a result of reduced consistency of teaching.

Increased access to flexible working

The most proximal impacts of flexible working identified in the appraised literature appeared to be attitudinal changes in school leadership and culture providing increased support for, and access to, flexible working (Timewise, 2022a, 2022d). This was also conveyed in interviews with flexible working support leads who described development of a common understanding around flexible working, increased understanding of the process of requesting flexible working, and increased flexible working practices and opportunities. These immediate impacts arose from the effective implementation of flexible working approaches and were measurable through surveys with staff before and after the development work focusing on flexible working.

Enhanced wellbeing and job satisfaction

It was often identified in the literature and in interviews that increased opportunities for flexible working leads to positive impacts on staff wellbeing and job satisfaction. In the recent Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders Survey (Adams et al., 2023) there were indications that teachers and leaders who were working flexibly in some way were more satisfied in their jobs and were more likely to feel that their work-life balance was considered by their manager than those who did not work flexibly (60% and 56%, and, 66% and 58% respectively).²⁷ Similarly, teachers and leaders who were working flexibly in some way were more likely to feel valued by their school and trusted to work independently than those without flexible working (69% and 63%, and 89% and 86% respectively). However, other differences between teachers who work flexibly and those who do not could also contribute to explaining this apparent variation, for instance, age and length of time in teaching.

Similarly, IFF Research (2023) found that 85% of surveyed leaders who offer flexible working in their schools agreed to some extent that flexible working had a positive impact on staff wellbeing. Comments from interviewed leaders as part of the study further substantiated this perception.

'The wellbeing one is a bit of a no-brainer as people who are working in a way that suits them tend to be more productive and lots of schools were reporting that people were less stressed or less wrung out because they were able to work in ways that matched their lives' (flexible working support lead interviewee).

CooperGibson Research (2019a) identified similar positive perceptions from leaders and teachers surveyed. Most senior leaders (74%) and teachers (89%) felt that flexible working arrangements in their school helped with the management of workload and work-life balance. High proportions of senior leaders (67%) and most teachers (85%) also indicated that it improved well-being. Again, evidence from a literature review and interviews with teachers and leaders corroborated these impacts and suggested flexible working helped teachers feel more supported, more able to balance their work and home commitments, and contributed to a happier work environment (CooperGibson Research, 2019b, 2020). A recent NEU survey of teachers provided further, albeit prospective, evidence that increased availability of flexible working could benefit wellbeing as 18% of surveyed teachers ranked this in the top three most important actions their school could take to improve their wellbeing (NEU, 2022). Similarly, Education Support (2021b) reported on the Teacher Wellbeing Index 2021 and found that just over a quarter (27%) of surveyed teachers thought that 'offering flexible working hours to fit with other commitments' could help improve the mental health of the teaching workforce.

A small-scale international study found a positive correlation between teachers who had a flexible work system and their perceived work-life balance and job satisfaction (Gudep, 2019). Evidence from beyond the teaching sector drawing on data from the longitudinal household survey Understanding Society is perhaps more robust in identifying a relationship between employees' degree of control over their working hours (the times they start and finish their working day) and job satisfaction and suggests a strong correlation between low job satisfaction and high leaving intention (cited in Timewise, 2022c).

Qualitative evidence and examples from the guidance sources and practice examples mirror the quantitative indicators in identifying positive impacts of flexible working on teacher wellbeing. In turn, this leads to staff having more energy and creativity, being less stressed, managing their work commitments, and experiencing more enjoyment of their role (DfE, 2019b; Sharp et al., 2019; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Timewise, 2020; FWAS, 2022). This was further supported by interviews conducted with leaders of flexible working support who outlined the wellbeing benefits in terms of

²⁷ Although the survey asked about different types of flexible working, this analysis in relation to job satisfaction grouped flexible working into a dichotomous variable of 'yes' or 'no'.

reducing teachers' stress and helping them to feel cared for, valued, and trusted. Interestingly, interviewees explained that this was not just a benefit for those individuals with flexible working arrangements but tended to extend to all staff who had access to flexible working.

Enhanced attendance, productivity, and motivation

Flexible working is also identified in the literature as benefiting teacher attendance, productivity, and motivation, and this is particularly highlighted in the guidance and practice example sources. First, survey evidence from the December 2021 School and College Panel suggests that substantial proportions of leaders find that flexible working has a positive impact on staff productivity (74% agreed to some extent) and reducing staff absence (58% agreed to some extent) (IFF Research, 2023). In a literature review conducted as part of an analysis of the costs and benefits of flexible working in schools, Timewise (2022c) identified benefits on reduced sickness and absence rates. Evidence from a literature review exploring flexible working in education also identified reduced staff absenteeism as a positive impact (CooperGibson Research, 2019b). In a small-scale international survey, Gudep (2019) found flexible work systems in teaching were directly and positively correlated with organisational commitment.

Reviewed qualitative evidence indicates that these impacts may arise from a more positive school culture as staff feel more valued, listened to, and trusted and hence there is more 'goodwill' in the organisation (Timewise, 2022b). Guidance offered by Patience and Rose (2022) also suggests teachers that work with some degree of flexibility are better able to manage their work and private commitments and are therefore less likely to experience 'burnout'. This was substantiated further in interviews with leaders of flexible working support programmes who cited a noticeable connection between staff wellbeing and motivation.

Positive impacts of flexible working on staff attendance, productivity, and motivation were also highlighted in numerous sources of guidance and practice examples (Timewise, 2022a, 2022c, 2022d; Malmesbury School, 2021; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022; CCoT, 2019; Wilson, 2020; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019). For example, teachers use PPA time to work productively from home focusing on tasks without other interruptions (Patience and Rose, 2022).

Enhanced capacity, expertise, and diversity

The appraised literature also identifies perceptions of positive impacts of flexible working on teaching capacity, expertise, and diversity. It can broaden diversity and expertise beyond just those teachers who can work full-time, five days a week, which helps employers to achieve their diversity and inclusion aims by employing staff from different backgrounds and in different circumstances (Turner, 2020; Timewise, 2022b; DfE, 2021a; Malmesbury School, 2021; Patience and Rose, 2022; Education Support, 2021a). In the December 2021 wave of the School and College Panel, 50% of school leaders who offer flexible working in their schools reported it creates a more diverse teacher and leader workforce (IFF Research, 2023).

There is also a perception conveyed in the literature that flexible working can be used to increase the number of staff in school with different specialisms and expertise to provide a broader curriculum, extra-curricular activities, interventions and small-group teaching, leadership, and pastoral roles as well as internal cover supply (CCoT, 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2019b, 2020; Sharp et al., 2019; FWAS, 2022; Timewise, 2022c). Flexible working can be used to staff specialist subjects that perhaps do not require a full-time specialist (Patience and Rose, 2022). Schools also benefit from the skills and expertise that teachers who work flexibly are able to develop outside of work, such as through additional postgraduate study, parallel careers, and hobbies (DfE, 2019b; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Turner, 2020; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date). Teachers who job share

can also share expertise and bring different experiences to complement each other (CooperGibson Research, 2020b; Turner, 2020).

Further evidence in the literature highlights the adverse impact of a lack of flexible working opportunities on the diversity of the teacher workforce: in particular, this is reported to exclude women in their 30s (Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021; MTPT Project, 2021; NASUWT, 2021). All of these points are further substantiated by flexible working support lead interviewees.

Improved career progression, succession planning, and reduction in the gender pay gap

It is also identified in the literature and in interviews with flexible working support leads that flexible working might impact career progression, succession planning, and the gender pay gap (CooperGibson Research, 2019b; DfE, 2019b; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Turner, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022; Timewise, 2022c). For example, a literature review of flexible working in education by CooperGibson Research (2019b) highlights that flexible working arrangements such as job share and phased retirement can facilitate succession planning whereby more senior and experienced colleagues can support the development of colleagues into leadership positions by sharing responsibilities, mentoring, and collaborative working. Examples of flexible working supporting career progression were also identified in schools taking part in the Flexible Working Ambassador Schools (FWAS) programme (Malmesbury School, 2021), working with Flexible Teacher Talent (Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020), and case studies collated by the Chartered College of Teaching (CCoT, 2019) and Education Support (Education Support, 2021a). Several interviewees highlighted the positive impacts of flexible working practices such as job sharing and more generally from retaining experienced teachers and leaders who could support and mentor less experienced colleagues.

'People in leadership positions who potentially wanted to have phased retirement or people who were in a leadership position who want to reduce their hours were able to bring somebody in as a co-leadership model, which was great for succession planning because you've got all this wisdom and expertise in the person who's already doing the job, mentoring the other one on the job for when they go. So, succession planning was a really great one' (flexible working support lead interviewee).

There were also examples in the literature of flexible working helping to enhance the career progression—of women in particular—into leadership roles and, therefore, helping to reduce the gender pay gap (Education Support, 2021a; DfE, 2021a).

Restricted career progression and increased gender pay gap

The literature suggests that teachers who work flexibly can also experience negative impacts on their career progression and pay as a result of working part-time (Brown, 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2019b; Sharp et al., 2019; Timewise, 2019; Teacher Tapp, 2020; Wilson, 2020; Allen, 2022; Patience and Rose, 2022). The literature and insights from interviewees indicate this affects women in particular who may be asked to relinquish Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs), middle and senior leadership roles, or their progression to such roles is prohibited due to their need for part-time work (Brown, 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2019b, 2020b; Turner, 2020; Wilson, 2020; Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021; MTPT Project, 2021). Interviewees explained that some school leaders held the perspective that it is not possible to fulfil a leadership position with less than full time hours and that staff with specific responsibilities need to be in school at all times. Brown (2019) reports on several in-depth case studies of female teachers returning from maternity leave and wishing to work part-time who were required to give up their leadership roles or felt discouraged from applying for promotion. Survey evidence has shown that between two-thirds and three-quarters of teachers think that working flexibly would damage their career prospects (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). Research by Teacher Tapp found that 70% of teachers agreed, to varying extents, that working part-time would damage their future

career prospects (Teacher Tapp, 2020). More recent research by Teacher Tapp found that among primary teachers, 66% of females and 78% of male teachers agreed that working part-time would damage their career prospects. Among secondary teachers, 69% of females and 74% of male teachers agreed (Allen, 2022).

A lack of flexible working was identified in several sources as inhibiting the career progression of women and exacerbating the gender pay gap (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; NASUWT, 2021; Timewise, 2022b). The lack of flexible working opportunities in middle and senior leadership positions contributes to the under-representation of women in these roles (Wilson, 2020; Timewise, 2022b). For instance, analysis of School Workforce Census (SWC) data by Brown (2019) revealed disparity in the proportions of teachers that held TLRs depending on their full-time or part-time status: 79% of part-time teachers did not receive any type of TLR, compared to 57% of full-time teachers. Brown (2019) suggests that only 5% of leadership positions were occupied by part-time workers in 2017. In turn, this affects the gender pay gap in education (Brown, 2019; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Wilson, 2020; NASUWT, 2021; Patience and Rose, 2022; Timewise, 2022b). According to evidence cited by Timewise (2022b), the gender pay gap is higher in education compared to other employment sectors in the U.K. (26% pay gap compared to the U.K. average of 10%). Other evidence on the gender pay gap in education (guidance on flexible working from Patience and Rose, 2022) identifies a similar trend, although a slightly lower figure of 20%. Despite teaching being a female dominated profession, males dominate headteacher and MAT CEO roles.²⁸ The pay of teachers with TLRs who work part-time is also adversely affected if they are paid on a pro-rata basis in line with their contracted hours while still taking full and sole accountability for the TLR (Wilson, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022).

Increased costs for schools

Two of the appraised studies provided evidence focusing on the cost impacts of flexible working. First, IFF Research (2023) examined the costs and benefits of flexible working in schools that were offering some form of flexibility, including drawing on a survey and qualitative interviews with school leaders. It found that, overall, school leaders' perception was that the benefits of flexible working tended to outweigh the costs but that the costs and benefits varied depending on the type of flexible working. Overall, a higher proportion of surveyed school leaders (39%) reported that the benefits of flexible working outweighed the costs, as opposed to the reverse (23%). The benefits identified in the study are discussed in the previous impact sections. The financial costs of flexible working were generally considered difficult to measure and quantify. However, the main costs relate to increased wages where schools have more staff to enable flexible working arrangements, particularly part-time working and job shares, and were also accompanied by increased costs associated with additional recruitment, line management, training, and PPA time. Costs of flexible working also varied depending on staff placement on the pay scale. There were few financial costs associated with time off in lieu and remote working.

Second, a study by Timewise (2022c) explored the financial return from investment in flexible working across several sectors, including education. The authors reported that the reduction in staff absence and turnover would offset the costs associated with flexible working within three years. For example, in a multi-academy trust with 100 teaching staff, if flexible working helped to reduce staff absence by an average of one fewer sick day per member of staff per year, over three years, costs would break even. Alternatively, if one fewer member of staff left per year over three years as a result of flexible working this would also see the cost investment in flexible working arrangements offset. This is considered to

²⁸ Around three-quarters of the teaching workforce is female (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Patience and Rose, 2022). Although around 60% of primary headteachers are female, only around 30% of secondary headteachers are female (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Wilson, 2020).

be a fairly cautious estimate given that the analysis does not take account of the potential impacts of flexible working that are difficult to quantify, such as increased productivity and improved progression.

Several other sources of appraised literature and one interviewee identified cost benefits of flexible working, including reduced supply and recruitment costs due to improved retention and capacity (CCoT, 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2020; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp et al., 2019; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; DfE, 2021b, 2021a; Malmesbury School, 2021; Patience and Rose, 2022; Sheppard, 2022). Wilson (2020) reports that there is no evidence from other sectors that flexible working is more expensive in the long term, particularly when balanced against the costs of recruitment and training of new staff, which will be incurred less frequently if staff can be retained (Wilson, 2020).

However, a couple of sources of literature and interviewed flexible working support leads identified perceived costs of flexible working. Again, these tended to be associated particularly with part-time flexible working models and included increased national insurance costs, additional PPA time for job-share staff to handover, additional recruitment of more staff to fulfil the uncovered hours created by staff working flexibly, and additional training (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019). One interviewee explained that additional costs from having to over-staff to allow flexible working was becoming increasingly challenging in light of budget pressures.

Enriched pupil experiences and outcomes

Several sources of literature identified the ultimate distal impacts of flexible working on pupils' experiences and outcomes, although this was based purely on perceptions rather than measured outcomes. Predominantly these were perceived to be positive and a result of increased teacher wellbeing and productivity leading to better teaching as well as the increased diversity of expertise, stability, and capacity of the workforce (CCoT, 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2019b; Education Support, 2021a; Patience and Rose, 2022; Timewise, 2022b; IFF Research, 2023). Sources also identified the particularly positive impacts of more stability, diversity, expertise, and capacity in the workforce on vulnerable pupils, pupils from different backgrounds, and with specific needs (Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Education Support, 2021a). For example, allowing consistent supportive relationships to be established, providing additional capacity for interventions and extra-curricular activities, and access to diverse role models. Several interviewed flexible working support leads also identified these ultimate impacts on pupils as a result of increased staff stability and retention of experienced teachers.

Reduced consistency of teaching for pupils

The appraised sources of literature also suggested some perceptions of negative impacts of flexible working on pupil outcomes. This included a perception from leaders and teachers of a lack of consistency and continuity where teachers job share or are part-time and only available at certain times during the school week, which can be a particular issue for younger pupils, vulnerable pupils, and pupils with special educational needs (SEN) (CooperGibson Research, 2019b, 2020; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Newton, 2020; Education Support, 2021a; Malmesbury School, 2021; NASUWT, 2021; DfE, 2022; Timewise, 2022b; IFF Research, 2023). These sources also mentioned that this concern may be shared by parents, although none of the appraised sources explored parents' and pupils' perspectives directly. CooperGibson Research (2019a) reported that almost two-thirds (61%) of senior leaders declined flexible working requests because of a concern of a detrimental impact on pupils and just over a quarter (28%) reported this to be a reason for not implementing flexible working at all (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). Similarly, where teachers had requests for flexible working declined, they understood this was due to perceptions that it would be disruptive to pupils or negatively impact upon them, such

as in terms of wellbeing or their outcomes (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; NASUWT, 2021).²⁹ Interviewees had also encountered this perception in schools that they were supporting to develop flexible working practices, including concerns around consistent communication with parents, accountability, and maintaining adequate staff-student ratios. Several sources of literature and interviewees argue that, despite leaders' concerns, there is no evidence that being taught by teachers working flexibly has a negative impact on pupils (Wilson, 2020; Education Support, 2021a; DfE, 2022).

The differential impacts of flexible working in different contexts

RQ5 and RQ6 Are there any differential impacts of approaches in areas of high disadvantage, for different phases of education, different groups of teachers, or types of flexible working?

This section draws together the evidence from the REA and interviews with flexible working support leads on the indications of differential impacts of flexible working.

RQ5 and RQ6: Summary of key findings

- There is very limited evidence on the differential impacts of flexible working on teacher outcomes, schools, and pupils. However, it is important to note that this reflects the lack of investigation of this, which means there is insufficient evidence to draw conclusions.
- There are some indications that disadvantaged schools may have less positive perceptions of flexible working and be less likely to adopt flexible working practices.
- There is also evidence that some forms of flexible working will be more appealing and beneficial to different groups of teachers and at different stages of their lives.

Differential flexible working in disadvantaged schools

There is little evidence from the reviewed literature and interviews with flexible working support leads that specifically addresses whether or not flexible working has differential impacts in schools in areas of high disadvantage. However, there is some tentative evidence that disadvantaged schools may have less positive perceptions of the benefits: survey evidence reported by IFF Research (2023) indicated that school leaders from the least disadvantaged schools (based on the proportion of FSM pupils) were more likely to agree that flexible working improved productivity and reduced staff absence (81% and 65% respectively) compared to leaders from the most disadvantaged schools (63% and 47% respectively). Interviewees also offered insights on this issue, observing that the challenges to flexible working are often exacerbated in schools serving disadvantaged communities—especially in disadvantaged coastal and rural areas—due to challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, which limits the scope to offer flexible working approaches. Furthermore, such schools may generally be under greater pressures given the more complex needs of their pupils.

This is reflected in the (limited) evidence that flexible working practices may be less common in disadvantaged schools. For instance, it was discussed earlier in relation to the SWC analysis—in the section exploring the nature and prevalence of flexible working—that teachers are less likely to work part time in schools with the highest proportions of FSM pupils. However, this distinction could reflect

²⁹ CooperGibson Research (2019a) reported that of the 96 teachers who had their flexible working request declined, the most common reason, reported by 39%, was that it would be detrimental to pupils. NASUWT (2021) surveyed 3,298 teachers: of the 30% who had their flexible working request declined, 43% said this was due to the employer saying it would be disruptive to other staff and pupils.

different workforce demographics, such as the age of teachers. In the February 2022 wave of the School and College Panel, leaders in schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils were most likely to say that their school was less likely to accept flexible working requests after the pandemic than before (IFF Research, 2022).

Differential flexible working in primary and secondary schools

There is evidence of a differential in the prevalence of flexible working in different phases of education (as discussed in the section on the nature and prevalence of flexible working): it is more common in primary than secondary but there is no evidence of differential impacts.

Differential flexible working for different groups of teachers

There is some indication that some forms of flexible working will be more appealing and beneficial to different groups of teachers and at different stages of their lives. For instance, teachers may have different needs depending on factors such as caring responsibilities, age, health, and their professional roles. Female teachers are considerably more likely to work flexibly than male teachers (Adams et al., 2023; Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021).

Differential types of flexible working

Finally, there may be some slight differential impacts depending on the nature of flexible working, although most forms are perceived to be associated with the same core impacts. Part-time working and job share are particularly mentioned in terms of cost and capacity impacts.

Enablers and barriers when implementing flexible working

RQ3 What enablers and barriers are identified to implementing flexible working approaches for teachers, especially in areas of high disadvantage?

This section explores the evidence from the REA, interviews with flexible working support leads, and analysis of flexible working policies to understand the challenges and enablers to implementation of flexible working in schools. Enablers and barriers are often linked in that some sources identify a challenge or barrier whereas other sources provide a strategy to overcome this—that is, identify an enabler. With this in mind, the key challenges are discussed first followed by consideration of how these can be overcome by key enabling factors, which includes detailed insights of key features of school flexible working policies (presented in Box 1).

RQ3: Summary of key findings

- Challenges to effective implementation of flexible working include:
 - resistant leadership attitudes and school culture;
 - timetabling;
 - financial costs;
 - staff availability; and
 - workload.
- Enablers to effective implementation of flexible working include:
 - supportive leadership and school culture;
 - proactive rather than reactive approach to flexible working practices;
 - fair and transparent processes for requesting flexible working;
 - willingness to negotiate and compromise, from both leaders and teachers;
 - clear and accessible flexible working policy;

- flexible working arrangements in recruitment;
- piloting flexible working arrangements;
- creative timetabling;
- managing and defining the responsibilities and workload associated with flexible roles;
- training and resources for senior leaders and HR teams.
- The challenges and enablers tend to apply to flexible working in general rather than specific approaches: in particular, there is less evidence relating to approaches that are less common in teaching (for example, phased retirement, compressed hours, remote working) and more relating to part-time teaching.

Challenges to flexible working—resistant leadership attitudes and school culture

Negative attitudes of school leaders and a culture that does not value and trust staff were consistently identified in the literature and in interviews as major barriers to implementing flexible working effectively in schools (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2019b; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp et al., 2019; DfE, 2020; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Timewise, 2020; Wilson, 2020; Malmesbury School, 2021; DfE, 2021b, 2021a; Timewise, 2022b, 2022c; Patience and Rose, 2022; Adams et al., 2023; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date; MTPT Project, no date). Several sources reported on teachers' experiences of facing a lack of respect from colleagues when they began working flexibly, for example, due to colleagues' perception that they would have to 'pick up work' for their flexible colleague, and teachers not feeling that their inputs were valued compared to when they worked full time (Brown, 2019; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Malmesbury School, 2021; Patience and Rose, 2022).

Linked to this, sources of literature and interviewees identified a challenge associated with a school culture of presenteeism: that staff are only capable of working when they are in the school building and that staff who are present the most are the most effective (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Timewise, 2019; Wilson, 2020). This was also identified by Patience and Rose (2022) who argue that pre-pandemic, teachers working remotely was largely inconceivable and—although the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent growth in the use of technology demonstrated that elements of remote working were possible—it is still often resisted by leaders. Interviewees also described encountering similar resistant attitudes from leaders who perceived staff who wanted flexibility as lacking dedication and ambition.

A number of reviewed sources as well as interviewees identified concerns raised by school and trust leaders that offering flexible working would 'open the floodgates' and result in an unmanageable position of leaders being unable to offer flexible working to all staff who required it while still being able to effectively staff the school (Timewise, 2019; Wilson, 2020; Malmesbury School, 2021; Patience and Rose, 2022).

Multiple research sources identified that staff are often reluctant to request flexible working (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Sharp et al., 2019; Teacher Tapp, 2020; Wespieser, 2020; Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021; Allen, 2022; Adams et al., 2023). Evidence from two surveys indicated that between half and two-thirds of teachers would not be comfortable requesting a flexible working arrangement,³⁰ or thought that their request would be rejected,³¹ with more male than female teachers suspecting this would be the outcome of their request.³² Qualitative evidence from CooperGibson Research (2019a) highlighted the following factors driving these perceptions: the culture of the school, a lack of flexible

³⁰ 62% (Adams et al., 2023).

³¹ 28% of teachers strongly agreed and 23% somewhat agreed with the statement: 'My manager/headteacher would be unlikely to allow me to work part-time if I put in a flexible working request' (Teacher Tapp, 2020).

³² Among primary teachers, 58% of female and 66% of male teachers thought a part-time working request would be rejected; among secondary teachers, the corresponding figures were 49% (female) and 55% (male) (Allen, 2022).

working policies or options being available, an attitude from leadership that all teachers should work full-time, experience of other colleagues' requests being refused, and an awareness of constraints on school resources, including budgets, staffing, and timetabling options (CooperGibson Research, 2019a).

Challenge to flexible working—timetabling

Challenges around timetabling logistics—including the perception that it is not possible to accommodate flexible working patterns and a skills gap in designing creative timetables to accommodate flexible arrangements—were identified as key barriers (CooperGibson Research, 2019b, 2020; Sharp et al., 2019; Timewise, 2019, 2022d; NASUWT, 2021; Wilson, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022; IFF Research, 2023). In one study, the most common reason that senior leaders gave for declining flexible working requests was being unable to organise work among existing staff facing timetabling issues (69%) (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). In the same study, half of senior leaders who had implemented flexible working reported challenges in managing overlapping requests (54%) and designing a suitable timetable (50%) (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). Almost all flexible working support lead interviewees had encountered this challenge in either implementing flexible working in their own school or supporting it in other schools. They explained that this was a particular challenge in secondary schools and that allocating staffing, resources, and subjects was a complex and time-consuming task that was compounded by flexible working requests.

'Secondary: often it's timetabling because the timetable is set at the beginning of the year and it's quite difficult to match or map flexible working across there, especially to be responsive to flexible working mid-year in a secondary. There is more potential for flex in a primary timetable than in a secondary timetable' (flexible working support lead interviewee).

Challenge to flexible working—financial cost to school

As outlined earlier in relation to Research Question 4, there are financial costs associated with flexible working which can pose a barrier to implementation (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2019b; Sharp et al., 2019; NASUWT, 2021; Wilson, 2020). In a study by CooperGibson Research (2019a), around a third (31%) of senior leaders who had declined flexible working requests cited the burden of additional costs as a reason and a quarter (25%) reported that this is why flexible working was not implemented at all. In the same study, just over half of senior leaders who had implemented flexible working cited additional costs or resources as a practical challenge they had faced (CooperGibson Research, 2019a).

Challenge to flexible working—staff availability and capacity

Challenges with staff availability were often identified in the literature—such as reduced availability to attend meetings and training when staff worked flexibly, leading to issues of communication. In a survey by CooperGibson Research (2019a), around three-quarters of senior leaders had experienced practical challenges implementing flexible working in terms of managing or arranging staff meetings (75%) or with managing communications and keeping staff up to date (73%). In the same study, around half of senior leaders reported challenges with 'setting agreements around expectations of workload and attendance at meetings/training' (53%). In addition, two-thirds (66%) of teachers who worked flexibly reported experiencing difficulties with keeping up to date and managing communication with colleagues (CooperGibson Research, 2019a).

A further challenge to the effective implementation of flexible working is workload, particularly where flexible working is used as a strategy to manage workload (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; DfE, 2022; Patience and Rose, 2022). Numerous sources, as well as interviewees, refer to examples of teachers reducing their hours but being required to work on non-working days to fulfil their responsibilities and

their workload not being reduced in proportion to their hours, thus exacerbating workload challenges (Brown, 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2019a; Sharp et al., 2019).

Enabler to flexible working—supportive leadership and school culture

One of the most prominent enablers of flexible working is supportive leadership and school culture. It was highlighted by many research, guidance, and practice example sources, as well as by interviewees, that senior leaders and governors actively demonstrating a positive attitude towards and supporting flexible working arrangements facilitates effective implementation of flexible working practices (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2019b; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp et al., 2019; DfE, 2020; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Timewise, 2020; Wilson, 2020; Malmesbury School, 2021; DfE, 2021b, 2021a; Timewise, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d; Patience and Rose, 2022; Adams et al., 2023; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date; MTPT Project, no date).

Several research studies included in the review surveyed senior leaders and teachers and asked the extent to which they felt their school was supportive of flexible working. Findings differed across senior leaders and teachers, with more senior leaders than teachers perceiving their schools to be accepting and supportive of flexible working (CooperGibson Research, 2019a; DfE, 2020).³³ Primary teachers were more likely to agree that their school supported flexible working compared to secondary teachers (DfE, 2020; Adams et al., 2023).³⁴ Consensus in attitudes towards flexible working between senior leaders and teachers was higher in outstanding schools and schools with the lowest proportions of FSM pupils (DfE, 2020).

The guidance and practice examples provided insights on senior leader support for flexible working. Leading by example, demonstrating commitment to making flexible working a success, and supporting staff were seen as pivotal in creating a school culture that supports and successfully embeds flexible working (Timewise, 2020; DfE, 2021b, 2021a). This included championing flexible working and its benefits, which can give teachers the confidence to be honest about their need to work flexibly (DfE, 2021b). Such SLT support can help to engender a positive culture and dispel feelings of resentment and unfairness (DfE, 2021a). Overcoming negative attitudes to flexible working was reported by many sources to be key to successful implementation of flexible working (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Timewise, 2019, 2020; Wilson, 2020).

In a guidance seminar on effective flexible working, Wilson (2020) argues against the perception of staff presenteeism suggesting that just because teachers may work flexibly during the school day and week, it does not mean they are less effective or that the quality of work is lower than their colleagues who do not work flexibly, and that these teachers are likely to catch up on work at other times. Patience and Rose (2022) also advocate the need to challenge perceptions that teachers cannot do any of their work remotely. They suggest that while it would not be advisable for teaching to happen remotely, activities including PPA and CPD can be very effectively done remotely where there may be fewer distractions and interruptions.

³³ The School Snapshot Survey: Winter 2019 surveyed 802 senior leaders and 1,013 teachers. Over three-quarters (78%) of senior leaders agreed that their school was supportive of flexible working compared to just over half (53%) of teachers (DfE, 2020). Findings from CooperGibson Research's survey of 1,582 senior leaders and 1,305 teachers found that two-thirds (66%) of senior leaders and just over half (55%) of teachers felt their school was committed to 'flexible working and tries to accommodate requests' (CooperGibson Research, 2019a).

³⁴ 62% of primary teachers compared to 44% of secondary teachers agreed their schools supported flexible working (DfE, 2020). The Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders—Wave 1 report found that 29% of primary teachers and 36% of secondary teachers did *not* believe their SLT supported flexible working (Adams et al., 2023).

All interviewees also identified leadership and culture as essential for supporting the effective implementation of flexible working. This included helping leaders understand how flexible working can benefit schools and be effectively managed. Central to this conducive culture is caring for people and treating them as human beings rather than resources. Leaders can also act as role models by working flexibly themselves and being open minded to try and support staff needs to work flexibility while ensuring the needs of the organisation are met.

Enabler to flexible working—proactive approach

Taking a proactive approach to flexible working practices was recognised as another key enabler to effective implementation (CCoT, 2019; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp et al., 2019; Timewise, 2019, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d; CooperGibson Research, 2020; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Wilson, 2020; Malmesbury School, 2021; DfE, 2021b, 2021a; Patience and Rose, 2022). This was regarded as preferable to a more reactionary approach of assessing individual applications for flexible working as they arise. Several research, guidance, and practice example sources, as well as interviewees, highlighted the value in asking staff on an annual basis for their flexible working requirements for the following academic year. This included asking staff currently on parental leave (CCoT, 2019; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Wilson, 2020; DfE, 2021b; Patience and Rose, 2022; Timewise, 2022b). This allows time for the timetable to be planned and for recruitment to vacancies that may be created. Several sources reported that this should be part of a whole-school approach in which staff, both existing and incoming, are offered flexible working rather than individual teachers requesting arrangements on an ad-hoc basis (Malmesbury School, 2021; DfE, 2022; Timewise, 2022c). Interviewees suggested that, contrary to some leaders' concerns that such an invitation would 'open the floodgates' and lead to an unmanageable volume of requests, most staff will not seek flexible working (particularly not reduced hours and pay as many staff cannot afford this) but would still appreciate that the support is there should they need it in future.

Enabler to flexible working—fair and transparent processes

Evidence from the REA and interviews with flexible working support leads also highlighted the importance of fair and transparent processes for requesting flexible working. This includes leaders giving equal consideration to all flexible working requests and exploring how needs can be met in the interests of the school and individual members of staff (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp, 2019; Timewise, 2019, 2020, 2022b, 2022d; CooperGibson Research, 2020; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date). Several sources stressed that this is about equity in the process, rather than necessarily equity in the outcome of a decision, as members of staff in different roles may be able to access more or less, or different types of, flexibility. The commitment of senior leaders to equitable access to request flexible working demonstrates to teachers that they are valued by the leadership team and that they have the opportunity to develop their career while also achieving a sustainable work-life balance (Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date). To avoid stifling career progression and perpetuating the gender pay gap, it was suggested in the literature and interviews that leaders should consider the extent and nature of flexible working that is possible in different roles, including middle and senior leadership positions, as well as for classroom teachers and other members of staff, and opportunities for flexibility around full-time posts (Brown, 2019; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; NASUWT, 2021; Wilson, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022; Timewise, 2022a; Sharp et al., 2019; CooperGibson Research, 2020). Several interviewees and guidance from Timewise (2022a) suggest that flexible working should not be dependent on the reason it is requested as this implies the judgement that some reasons are more valid than others.

Enabler to flexible working—leaders' and teachers' willingness to negotiate and compromise

A willingness to negotiate and compromise, from both leaders and teachers, was key to finding a successful flexible working arrangement according to reviewed literature and several interviewees

(Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp et al., 2019; Timewise, 2019, 2020; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Wilson, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022). On the part of senior leaders, this requires a willingness to fairly consider requests and, from teachers, the understanding that their request must align with the needs of the school and that negotiations may be required around what type of flexibility is possible in their role. Turner (2020) highlights that involving teachers in the conversations around how a flexible working arrangement may be accommodated is key. Teachers can provide suggestions about how the timetable may work to suit their arrangement or may have discussed in advance with a colleague how, together, they can fulfil a full-time role through a job share (Turner, 2020).

Enabler to flexible working—clear and accessible flexible working policies

According to the reviewed literature and interviewees, schools and trusts need clear and accessible flexible working policies which all staff are aware of in order to facilitate a fair and transparent whole-school approach (CooperGibson Research, 2019b, 2020; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Timewise, 2022c). Most senior leaders (83%) surveyed by CooperGibson Research (2019a) reported having a procedure in place for managing flexible working requests. However, the most common reason (38%) for not having such a policy was uncertainty around how to develop this. This current review suggests that very few schools (3%) publish flexible working policies on their external facing websites. In DfE guidance, schools and MATs are encouraged to develop a flexible working policy with the support of education trade unions (DfE, 2022).³⁵ Although most schools may have a flexible working policy, research has found that levels of awareness of this among staff can be limited and it can be perceived as only being relevant to teachers returning after family leave (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2020). Research from Timewise also highlights the importance of all staff being aware of their school or trust's flexible working policy. They advise that within these policies, schools need to be clear what is meant by 'flexible working' because often it is seen as synonymous with 'part-time working' so staff are not always aware of other flexible opportunities they may explore (Timewise, 2022b). One source of guidance indicated that a clear flexible working policy makes it easier to manage and consider flexible requests, ensuring that all are dealt with consistently and fairly (Malmesbury School, 2021). Sheppard (2022) reports that having accessible policies and procedures in place is conducive to developing an open and trusting school culture around flexible working. Patience and Rose (2022) and Sheppard (2022) encourage senior leaders to amend their policies to state how TLRs will be paid to staff who do not work full-time, for example, continuing to pay 100% of the TLR if this can still be fulfilled, or considering sharing the TLR between two staff who wish to work flexibly but have the skills and experience to take on the responsibility (Patience and Rose, 2022; Sheppard, 2022).

Box 1 presents the findings from analysis of the content of a sample of 25 flexible working policies.

Box 1: Analysis of flexible working policies

Analysis of flexible working policies

What types and range of flexible working are considered in policies?

All flexible working policies reviewed stated that employees' requests for flexible working must relate to a change to their working hours, their place of work, or the times they work. Most policies provided examples or further

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2>

In accordance with the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) code of practice on flexible working, employers have a duty to consider requests for flexible working. ACAS provides a template for flexible working policies, which can be found here: <https://www.acas.org.uk/example-flexible-working-policy-template>

information on the specific types of flexible working that would be considered, including some or all of the following: part-time hours, job share, term-time working, home or hybrid working, annualised hours, compressed hours, staggered hours (also described as flexitime), time off in lieu (TOIL), personal or family days, phased retirement, and career breaks or sabbaticals.

Who can apply?

Policies stated that they were applicable to all permanent employees (that is, not agency staff). All policies acknowledged that under the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Children and Families Act 2014, all employees with 26 weeks continuous service have the statutory right to request flexible working. A small number of policies went further and stated that all current and prospective employees, regardless of length of service, were welcome to apply for flexible working. Policies also commonly stipulated that staff applying should not have made another request for flexible working in the previous 12 months. Although policies indicated that all employees could make a request for flexible working, several provided caveats that not all forms of flexible working would be appropriate for all members of staff. For example, homeworking would only be possible for teachers when doing their PPA and compressed hours were likely to be unsuitable for teaching staff but may work for non-pupil facing roles.

What potential benefits of flexible working are identified?

Policies tended to begin with a statement of intent, which set out a school's or trust's reasons for introducing such a policy which touched on potential benefits of flexible working. The impacts that schools and trusts hoped to see resulting from offering flexible working opportunities included improved work-life balance and employee wellbeing, improved staff morale, motivation, performance, and productivity, and reduced absenteeism and stress. Policies also conveyed the intention that flexible working would support the retention of highly skilled and committed staff and support their recruitment through making the school or trust an attractive place to work. Policies frequently referenced schools' and trusts' commitment to being equal opportunities employers and acknowledged the importance of flexible working in this regard.

What is the process for agreeing flexible working arrangements?

The process for agreeing flexible working arrangements was largely the same across all reviewed flexible working policies. Policies stated that, under legislation, the entire process, from a request being submitted to the outcome being settled, should take no longer than three months. Requests for flexible working should be made in writing to the headteacher or, in some cases, members of the trust senior leadership team (SLT). Several policies provided an application form for this in an appendix. In the request, employees were asked to state aspects such as the date of request, the desired flexible working pattern, when they would like this to commence, the effect this may have on the school and how this may be dealt with, the statutory nature of the request, and whether or not a previous request for flexible working had been made (and if so, when this was). Employees were also asked to state whether the request was a reasonable adjustment in relation to the Equality Act 2010. Following the request, a meeting may be required to discuss and negotiate the details. Policies set out that where requests were accepted, confirmation was provided in writing. Policies set out the right of employees to appeal rejected requests, which would be followed by an appeal panel. Policies stated that any granted request would be considered a permanent change to the employees working conditions and another request for flexible working could not be made for a further 12 months.

Several policies stated that acceptance of the flexible working request may be subject to a trial period. Trial periods tended to be between three and six months. Where a trial has been seen to be successful, a request will be granted and the employee's new working conditions will be made permanent. Trial periods may also end in a request being rejected if unsuccessful and an appeal process can follow.

All policies set out the law on the business grounds for refusing a flexible working request, with some small variations to wording across the policies. Such grounds were:

- burden of additional costs to the school, academy, or trust;
- inability to meet service demands, needs, organisation, and delivery;
- inability to organise work among the staff available;

- inability to recruit additional staff;
- detrimental impact on performance;
- detrimental impact on quality;
- insufficient work during the periods the employee proposes they work; and
- planned structural changes.

Enabler to flexible working—consider flexible working requests at recruitment

Several literature sources and interviewees highlighted value in indicating a willingness to consider flexible working arrangements in recruitment. For example, CooperGibson Research (2020) reported that this is an important enabling element of implementing flexible working in a school. Other sources recommend this as an important way to open up recruitment to a wider range of candidates and Timewise advocates this as one of five key elements of implementing flexible working (Timewise, 2022a).

Enabler to flexible working—pilot flexible working approaches

Piloting flexible working approaches at small scale to find out what works, and how to make implementation successful, can be a valuable activity ahead of rolling it out more widely across the school (CooperGibson Research, 2019b). Many flexible working policies indicated that the flexible working arrangements may be subject to a trial period before being agreed to enable monitoring of whether or not the arrangement is beneficial to the teacher, the pupils, and the school more widely.

Enabler to flexible working—creative timetabling

The literature searches revealed a range of guidance advocating the need for effective scheduling and creative timetabling so flexible working patterns can be effectively implemented, and this was equally advocated by interviewees who support its implementation (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp et al., 2019; Patience and Rose, 2022). Timewise reports the need to reframe the mindset around timetabling—including when, where, and how much people work—and findings from other studies aligned with this, highlighting the need for creative and intelligent timetabling (Timewise, 2019, 2022b; Turner, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022). This included, for example:

- moving form time or assemblies to allow staff working staggered or compressed hours to start later in the day;
- allocating PPA time in blocks to allow teachers to complete this at home; and
- splitting responsibility for aspects of subjects between teachers—for example, science teachers only teaching biology or English teachers only teaching English literature—to allow teachers to teach to their expertise.

Effective timetabling involves prioritising activities that need to happen in school and considering where staff can be most effectively deployed (Malmesbury School, 2021). Several other sources suggested redesigning roles and contracts to ensure the scope of their role fits with employees' strengths, abilities, and the hours they work (DfE, 2021b, 2022; Patience and Rose, 2022). While there may be an initial short term cost for timetabling software and for training timetablers to provide them with the skills that support this, there was a perception that this is recouped through the benefits of flexible working (Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019).

Enabler to flexible working—redefining responsibilities and workload

Another enabling factor commonly identified in the appraised literature and by interviewees was the importance of managing and defining the responsibilities and workload associated with flexible roles (Cafferty, 2019; Marsh and Derbyshire, 2019; Sharp et al., 2019; Timewise, 2019, 2022b; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; Turner, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022; IFF Research, 2023; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date). This includes setting clear expectations around attendance at out-of-hours events, such as staff meetings and CPD, and communicating to staff which events are compulsory and which will be recorded or can be disseminated to them in another format. For example, most school leaders who have implemented flexible working value clarifying flexible workers' attendance at meetings and non-teaching events (78%) and arrangements for keeping in touch and informing staff of key updates and news (71%) (CooperGibson Research, 2019a). Practice examples of flexible working in schools highlighted a range of methods for ensuring all staff kept up-to-date with meetings and CPD, including providing dates for such events a year in advance, scheduling meetings on the days when most staff will be in school, allowing teachers to swap their non-working day, holding meetings during the school day, and delivering meetings/CPD remotely so staff can access from home (Cafferty, 2019; CCoT, 2019; Flexible Teacher Talent, 2020; DfE, 2022; Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, no date).

Patience and Rose (2022, p.14) report that 'being unable to do your job within the hours you are paid for is a workload management issue and the responsibility of school leaders to address'. Marsh and Derbyshire (2019) comment that paying teachers 'part-time for full-time commitment [...] is neither ethical nor sustainable'. They report that workload is a separate priority which needs to be tackled, for example, through reducing the number of unnecessary tasks teachers must complete. Interviewees also frequently raised this issue and argued that flexible working that involves reduced contracted hours should never be used as a strategy to reduce workload as workload should be proportionately reduced.

In cases where staff are working flexibly through a part-time or job share arrangement, communication between departmental colleagues or job share partners is key for consistency in provision. Several sources reported that for job-sharers, the best way to achieve this is through providing shared PPA time or funded handover time (Cafferty, 2019; Turner, 2020; Patience and Rose, 2022). In a survey by CooperGibson Research (2019a), the majority of senior leaders who had implemented job share arrangements in their schools said that providing joint PPA was valuable (78%). Patience and Rose (2022) also advocate ensuring that job share partners are compatible, for example, have similar ways of working and a shared vision, are clear on the expectations of each other (such as their individual and shared responsibilities), and that a shared email address and calendar is set up for them (Patience and Rose, 2022).

Enabler to flexible working—training and resources for senior leaders and HR teams

Training for senior leaders and HR teams is required to support them to implement flexible working effectively and fairly, and there are indications from the reviewed literature that increased availability of this training and support would be appreciated. Sources reported that senior leaders would benefit from information, advice, and guidance on a range of practicalities related to implementing flexible working on a large scale. This could include effective timetabling and associated tools, key features of effective policies and the legalities of flexible working to ensure requests are dealt with fairly, and guidance on the technology that is recommended to support remote working (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2020; Sharp et al., 2019; Sheppard, 2022; Timewise, 2022b). Sharp et al. (2019) also recommended that leadership qualifications include content on adopting a proactive approach to part-time and flexible working.

Evidence also suggests that senior leaders would welcome best practice case studies and testimonies and advice from teachers and leaders in schools who have high proportions of staff working flexibly,

including practices that have made implementation successful, examples of challenges, and how these have been overcome (CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2020; Sharp et al., 2019). Testimonies which reflect a range of specific school contexts and where staff in a range of roles and at different levels are working flexibly would be welcomed so they are relatable to schools in a range of contexts.

Evaluating the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention

RQ7 and RQ8 How could the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention be evaluated? What are the methodological challenges and enabling conditions?

This section draws together the evidence from the REA and interviews with flexible working support leads to explore how the impact of flexible working could be evaluated and the methodological considerations.

RQ7 and RQ8: Summary of key findings

- There is a paucity of evidence measuring the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention.
- Recruitment and retention outcomes, as well as proximal outcomes such as teacher wellbeing, could be measured before and after schools implement effective flexible working practices.
- The major challenges of evaluating the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention outcomes are isolating the effect of flexible working and defining and measuring flexible working practices.

Gaps in the evidence base on the impact of flexible working

Few research studies from the REA measured the full range of short and long term impacts of flexible working beyond perceptual data. In particular, there is a gap in the evidence to enable understanding of the causal relationship between flexible working and teacher retention and pupil outcomes. This evidence is essential to informing future developments in the implementation of flexible working. There also appears to be a gap in the evidence in terms of pupils' and parents' experiences of teachers working flexibly and this is something that could be explored in future research.

Challenges in evaluating flexible working practices and outcomes

Several interviewees alluded to challenges in measuring the impact of flexible working as, in schools where it works well, flexible working is not a discrete initiative but an embedded element of the ethos and culture of the school. Furthermore, to measure long term impacts on recruitment and retention that can be attributed to flexible working will be challenging given the many other school, education system-level, and societal influences.

A further challenge of future evaluation was also raised in interviews in terms of a lack of available administrative data on flexible working. Currently, the School Workforce Census records the proportions of teachers working part-time but other forms of flexibility, particularly around full-time roles, is harder to measure at scale and via existing datasets.

A further challenge could be recruiting a range of schools to participate: school leaders are the gatekeepers to school participation in research and there is evidence that school leaders may have mixed views on the value of flexible working for teachers. Leaders may be encouraged to participate by promoting understanding of the range of types of flexible working (including modest adjustments such as an allowance of a small number of 'personal' term-time days off or completing PPA tasks remotely) and how these can be effectively implemented, and the potential benefits.

Considerations of evaluation design and measurement of outcomes in relation to flexible working

Several interviewees advocated the need to monitor the impacts of flexible working through methods such as teacher surveys before and after implementation. There are several more proximal areas of impact outlined in this review—such as improved staff awareness of, and access to, flexible working, improved staff wellbeing, attendance, and motivation—that can be measured and which perceptual and anecdotal evidence suggests will lead to more distal impacts on recruitment and retention. There are also indicators that schools that are pioneering flexible working and flexible working support programmes are attempting to collect more ‘hard’ data on its impacts, such as by monitoring staff turnover (Timewise, 2022b).

Flexible working support leads identified the need to evaluate the impact of flexible working on:

- flexible working practices—such as the number of staff working flexibly and the diversity and demographics of such staff—including more leaders and men;
- staff wellbeing and job satisfaction;
- staff absence;
- recruitment—for example, exploring the number and diversity of applicants;
- retention—for example, assessing whether it leads to reduced attrition, focusing on particular groups such as women aged 30 to 39;
- diversity—for example, whether it leads to more women in leadership positions; and
- pupil outcomes—for example, in classes with job sharing teachers.

Outcomes in national datasets such as the SWC and NPD could be analysed in relation to measures of the extent of schools’ flexible working, which could be derived from a large-scale survey, in a correlational study. This could measure outcomes in terms of teacher recruitment and retention and pupil achievement.

IFF Research (2023) found that leaders do not tend to explicitly measure or track the financial costs or benefits of their flexible working provision (IFF Research, 2023). Hence, future evaluation design would need to consider how to support schools to record and, where possible, quantify these implications. In the Teaching Pioneers Programme, pilot schools completed a human resources proforma on aspects such as workforce demographics, number and role of staff with flexible arrangements, flexible recruitment and progression, and staff turnover (Timewise, 2022b), which gives insights on the type of data that could be collected.

A quasi-experimental design comparing schools with high and low levels of flexible working and tracking the outcomes outlined above in the short term and longitudinally is conceivable and likely to be beneficial in supporting the future development of flexible working to support teacher recruitment and retention. However, there are significant limitations with this approach in isolating the contribution of flexible working from other impacts resulting from leadership practices that support teacher recruitment and retention more generally. Demographic factors and school contextual factors may also be influential, although these could be accounted for with sample matching. Studies could also focus on particular types of flexible working such as a late start or early finish one day per week, having PPA time at home, or one or two days per year during term time. Alternatively, models of flexible working could be codified and analysis conducted at scale to explore the association with proxy outcomes such as job satisfaction. The reviewed evidence indicates that benefits are likely to be associated with school staff having access to a range of flexible working practices to suit their needs and circumstances.

An evaluation of the impact of flexible working would need to take account of varying school contexts (such as those outlined in the potential ToC) and flexible working practices as these may have a moderating effect on successful implementation. This should include a robust evaluation of the implementation and processes associated with effective flexible working to further inform understanding of how impacts of flexible working can be realised.

As indicated by the promising practice case studies in this report (see below), there are numerous programmes and organisations that are supporting the implementation of flexible working in schools. A pilot evaluation of such a programme would enable exploration of the proof of promise, implementation factors, and feasibility of measures and could seek a range of perspectives including from school and MAT leaders, governors, teachers, pupils, and parents to understand perceptions of the issues and implications. Such a pilot could also consider how schools that are perhaps more sceptical could be encouraged to participate and implement flexible working practices and how such programmes could best be scaled up to support widespread flexible working practices across all schools.

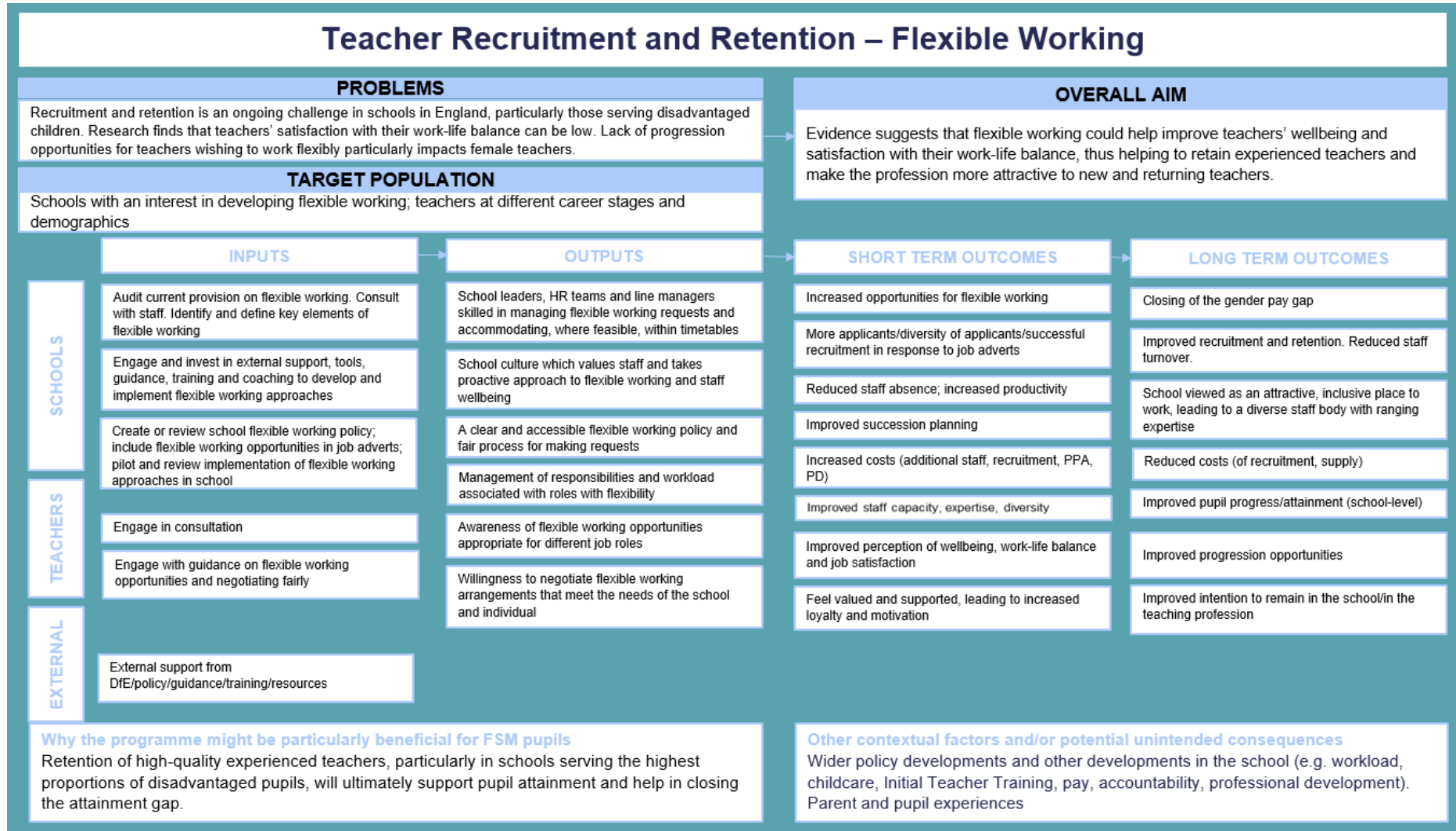
Finally, flexible working arrangements could be explored as part of a study looking more widely at effective leadership practices to support teacher recruitment and retention. This would enable a full range of flexible working practices to be explored in the context of other effective leadership practices.

Theory of change for the implementation of flexible working in schools

A summary of a potential theory of change (ToC) for the implementation of flexible working in schools that is informed by all the evidence in this review is set out in Figure 1 and could form the basis of a future evaluation. The outcomes could be measured via a combination of staff surveys, school monitoring information, and administrative datasets (such as the SWC). The ToC highlights the complexity of the ecosystem within which flexible working in schools operates, particularly as indicated by the influence of wider contextual factors, the potential for unintended consequences, and the un evidenced nature of the causal assumptions between the inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. The key causal assumption is that flexible working can improve teacher wellbeing, which in turn improves recruitment and retention of high quality teachers, which ultimately leads to improve pupil outcomes. As outlined in this review, there is some perceptual evidence to support these assumptions but they would benefit from more robust testing.

The ToC is followed by three promising practice case-study summaries of support for the effective implementation of flexible working in schools.

Figure 1: A potential theory of change relating to the impact of flexible working in schools on teacher recruitment and retention



Box 2: Promising practice case study 1

Promising practice case study 1: Flexible Working Ambassador Schools

How has the implementation of flexible working been supported?

In 2021, eight schools were appointed as Flexible Working Ambassador Schools (FWAS) by the DfE to support schools within their region to implement and embed flexible working approaches. FWAS each supported between five and 20 schools. This case study presents a summary of how FWAS supported implementation of flexible working in schools. It is based on interviews with leads from five FWAS as well as published practice examples from FWAS.

FWAS often carried out audits and staff surveys to gain an understanding of schools' current practices and needs in terms of flexible working and to identify areas for development. FWAS provided support to schools through coaching, training, webinars, sharing best practice case studies, and developing flexible working policies. These activities tended to engage with MAT leaders, headteachers, senior leaders, HR staff, other staff involved in timetabling, and, sometimes, governors. The support tended to focus on exploring the benefits of flexible working, providing bespoke support to address challenges such as with timetabling and using technology, and also sometimes involved one to one advice on flexible working requests.

Working with central MAT teams and school leaders was an essential element of the support and facilitated implementation of a consistent and strategic approach to flexible working within and across the organisations. Promoting the benefits and providing examples of how challenges have been overcome, or where it has been successful in a range of relevant contexts, was an important activity to demonstrate that implementing flexible working approaches is achievable within schools. Webinars were also delivered to wider staff teams to help raise awareness about who can apply for flexible working and the options available to staff.

FWAS provided support to develop or review flexible working policies to ensure that these were inclusive and accessible. FWAS leads reported that having a policy was key for creating a fair process for requesting flexible working and ensuring that staff felt requests were dealt with in a consistent manner, even though the types of flexible working possible may vary depending on staff roles. Building a culture of flexible working and embedding policies was also seen as a key activity to ensure that it would be sustained even through leadership changes. FWAS also encouraged headteachers to move from a reactive to a proactive approach to managing flexible working requests, whereby teachers are asked on an annual basis if they need to adapt their working pattern, thus allowing time to respond and supporting the fair process.

Impacts

There were numerous examples from across the FWAS of positive impacts as a result of effective implementation of flexible working. These included:

- improving staff perceptions of their work-life balance and wellbeing;
- developing a school culture where staff feel more valued and cared for;
- anticipated improved retention of staff—and, in the short term, teachers who have remained because they have been able to access flexible working;
- additional staff expertise and capacity—for example, to focus on strategic development, deliver initiatives or interventions to pupils with specific needs, and help run school trips or other events;
- a more motivated and productive workforce;
- enhanced recruitment—including reputation as being an inclusive employer of choice and widening and diversifying the talent pool from which to recruit;
- career progression and succession planning—through job shares between experienced and less experienced staff, enabling mentoring and professional development; and
- additional costs—particularly part-time and job share—but generally offset by cost savings from enhanced retention and some approaches can be implemented with minimal or no financial costs, such as remote working for PPA time.

Evaluation and monitoring

Leads from FWAS reported on strategies that have supported the monitoring and evaluation of flexible working arrangements. This included conducting pre-and post-implementation surveys to explore changes in access to and perceptions of flexible working, tracking the number of requests and who is accessing flexible working, and tracking staff well-being and satisfaction, recruitment, retention, and turnover rates as well as staff demographics. However, FWAS leads acknowledged the many other school and wider factors that influence such outcomes.

Box 3: Promising practice case study 2

Promising practice case study 2: Timewise

How has the implementation of flexible working been supported?

Through the Teaching Pioneers Programme, Timewise partnered with eight secondary schools across three MATs over a 16-month period to explore the best ways to champion and implement flexible working within education.

The Teaching Pioneers Programme supported schools to explore what flexible working can look like in a school environment, such as the types of arrangements that may be feasible for teachers and school leaders and the changes required within schools to ensure it can be successfully implemented. The programme followed a four-phase model and was delivered with MAT human resources (HR) teams and headteachers within individual schools.

Phase 1: Set-up and engagement

Timewise highlighted the importance of gaining buy-in and commitment from HR teams and headteachers for the implementation of flexible working to be a success. Phase 1 involved establishing a steering group with HR directors to discuss opportunities, challenges, and risks, readiness workshops with HR business partner teams to discuss current flexible working practices, staff roles, and responsibilities, and an engagement session for headteachers exploring current and future flexible working practice.

Phase 2: Diagnostic in pilot schools

The diagnostic phase involved in-school surveys that collected data on staff understanding, attitudes, and perceptions of flexible working. Responses were used to identify issues and agree priorities for the programme. In addition to the survey, one MAT also ran staff focus groups to collect qualitative data. Timewise also worked with HR teams to design a data template to support the long term evaluation of flexible working.

Phase 3: Intervention and support

Timewise highlights that a proactive, whole-school approach is central to the effective implementation of flexible working rather than a reactive approach to individual requests in isolation. A range of interventions were delivered to support schools to move towards this model. Timewise ran insight workshops with HR teams to identify schools' individual priorities and consider what good flexible working practice looks like. One to one discussions were held with headteachers of the eight schools to discuss the school's current flexible working practice, review diagnostic findings from the survey, and consider where development was required. In cases where there was a disconnect between what headteachers reported and teachers understood, communication was highlighted as a priority for future development. To support headteachers and those responsible for timetabling within the schools, a webinar was run supported by a school that has experience of managing a workforce of teachers working flexibly, to provide guidance for accommodating flexible working patterns within the timetable. Discussion forums were facilitated for headteachers from the eight schools to share learning and guidance documents were created for teachers and team leaders covering topics including what flexible working means within school, the reasons for wanting flexibility, and how to have open discussions about flexible opportunities.

Phase 4: Measuring impact and sharing learning

The fourth phase of the programme involved evaluation of medium and longer term progress. The medium term evaluation measured changes in understanding, perceptions, and attitudes towards flexible working via a short survey and interviews. This happened during the 16-month programme. The longer-term evaluation, using the HR data template created, will track longer term changes in data relating to recruitment, retention, progression and availability, and prevalence of flexible working.

Impacts

Across the eight pilot schools, the following impacts were identified:

- increased awareness of flexible working, different models, and the benefits;
- more supportive school culture;
- teachers felt they were listened to, understood, and trusted;
- improved staff wellbeing;
- improved intentions to remain in the school and/or in the profession;
- reduced staff absenteeism;
- enhanced recruitment; and
- strategic development in improving delivery of the curriculum, including plans for outstanding teachers to deliver remote masterclasses, remote lessons for pupils unable to attend school, and broadening the A-level offer through outstanding specialist teachers who are not local to the school partially delivering courses remotely.

Evaluation and monitoring

Timewise developed a flexible working framework for HR teams to support monitoring of the changes in flexible working within their school over time. The framework collects data on workforce demographics, flexible working, flexible recruitment, flexible discussions, flexible progressions, flexible policy and communication, staff wellbeing, engagement, and turnover.

Timewise has also made available the survey it delivered within the eight pilot schools that was used to measure changes in attitudes and perceptions of flexible working and the engagement of staff members. Survey questions gather staff perceptions on school support for flexible working, the opportunity to discuss arrangements, understanding of the options available, and reasons why staff are currently working flexibly or would like to do so in the future.

Box 4: Promising practice case study 3

Promising practice case study 3: Flexible Teacher Talent

How has the implementation of flexible working been supported?

Flexible Teacher Talent (FTT) provides bespoke support for individuals, schools, and trusts to develop flexible working practices. This has included supporting FWAS and, going forward, will involve working with 12 FWAMS appointed by the DfE to deliver support to schools wishing to implement and embed flexible working.

FTT provides a broad range of support tailored to the needs of individuals, schools, and MATs depending on where they are in their journey of implementing flexible working. The support has spanned:

- helping individual teachers with flexible working requests or with the appeal process;
- delivering webinars for different groups of teachers at different stages of their lives and careers—for example, Early Career Teachers or working with the MTPT Project to provide support to parent teachers;
- running webinars and workshops for school leaders to support with the practicalities of implementing flexible working such as timetabling, job shares, and managing the curriculum across flexible teachers;
- providing advice to leaders and governors on overcoming barriers to gain buy-in, changing mindsets, and achieving diversity; and
- auditing flexible working policies.

Impacts

Perceived impacts of supporting the effective implementation of flexible working in schools and for individuals are identified in terms of:

- retention, particularly of women teachers aged 30 to 39, and returning from maternity leave;
- career progression and reduction of the gender pay gap where flexible working is facilitated in leadership positions;
- improved diversity in recruitment and the number of applications; and

- improved staff wellbeing—where flexible working is implemented along with effective workload management.

Evaluation and monitoring

FTT suggested a range of indicators that can be used to determine the impact that flexible working is having within a school and on individuals. This includes monitoring:

- staff absence, retention, and attrition rates;
- diversity—such as the gender pay gap, the gender balance within leadership roles, and the diversity in job applicants for different roles;
- whether staff who work flexibly can progress and if these opportunities come to fruition; and
- pupil outcomes—for example in classes with job sharing teachers.

Key findings and implications

The evidence for this review comprises research-based sources supplemented by guidance sources and practice examples as well as new analysis of teacher job adverts, flexible working policies and SWC data, and insights from interviews with leaders of flexible working implementation in schools. It therefore offers many topically relevant insights, particularly on the recent prevalence and nature of flexible working, the challenges and enablers to implementing flexible working in schools, and perceptions of proximal impacts. Yet, there are clear limitations to this review. In particular, the evidence is largely based on practitioners' perceptions of flexible working through surveys and from insights from what appears to be a relative minority of schools pioneering flexible working approaches in education. The evidence base is limited by a lack of robust measurement of causal impact and the lack of research designs that enable measurement of outcomes for a comparative counterfactual condition not exposed to flexible working opportunities. Despite its limitations, this review builds on previous evidence in indicating the potential for flexible working to be an important ingredient in efforts to improve teacher recruitment and retention and suggests this is a promising area for further investigation and investment. Key findings from the review are summarised below.

What types of flexible working approaches have been implemented in schools and how prevalent are they in different education systems?

Flexible working predominantly involves part-time and job share arrangements, though there is evidence of a wider variety of practices in a minority of schools, including flexibility around full-time roles. Around a fifth to almost a third of teachers work part-time, yet there is evidence that more would like to do so. There has been only modest change in the prevalence of part-time working since 2011 yet the demand for flexible working is high and has increased to some extent following the Covid-19 pandemic. Data on forms of flexibility other than part-time working is limited.

Do flexible working approaches support teacher recruitment and retention? Do such approaches have other impacts and is there any differential impact?

There is consistent perceptual evidence that flexible working supports retention of existing staff in particular, and that it can also help in recruitment. There is a paucity of evidence that measures these impacts more robustly, particularly on retention. There is evidence that effective flexible working practices have a positive impact on teachers' wellbeing, sense of work-life balance, and job satisfaction, which, in turn, reduces staff absence and improves motivation. There is tentative evidence that these are the precursors to retention. There is very little evidence of differential impacts, however, there is very tentative evidence that schools in areas of high disadvantage are likely to experience more challenges to flexible working and are less likely to implement flexible working practices. Flexible working is more common in primary schools and among female teachers. Teachers seek flexible working for a range of reasons, yet the perceived benefits are noticeably similar.

What enablers and barriers are identified to implementing flexible working approaches for teachers, especially in areas of high disadvantage?

There are numerous challenges to flexible working but consistent evidence suggests that these can be overcome with attitudinal and cultural changes, a whole-school proactive approach, effective communication, fairness, and transparency, creative timetabling, clear and accessible policies, and access to training and tools. Leadership and creating a school culture that values staff and prioritises staff wellbeing emerged as being crucial to successful flexible working practices and underpinned the other factors.

How could the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention be evaluated? What methodological challenges and enabling conditions would need to be considered?

Evaluating the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention is challenging given the distal nature of these outcomes, the complexity of factors underpinning effective flexible working, and the multitude of other factors that could moderate any relationship. The recommendations for evaluating the impact of flexible working are set out below in Implications for Research.

Implications for policy and practice

Flexible working practices are not a panacea for resolving the current teacher recruitment and retention challenges. However, the perceptual evidence included in this review indicates that government support for flexible working in schools is a valuable part of the solution and that policies should continue to encourage school leaders to increase flexible working and support them to overcome the challenges. Research evidence on the impacts and examples of effective practice in a range of contexts will help to achieve this.

Addressing teacher workload is likely essential to realising the benefits of effective flexible working practices, and policies that support teacher workload reduction are clearly important. Flexible working may not be effective for teachers with an unmanageable workload and, if poorly implemented, it may even exacerbate workload. Management of workload should be considered in effective flexible working practices.

Flexible working opportunities need to be available to teachers at all levels so that teachers who wish to work flexibly are not denied the opportunity to progress in their careers. This review has highlighted the potential negative impact that the lack of availability of flexible working opportunities in middle and senior leadership positions may be having on the gender pay gap in education, diversity in leadership roles, and career progression opportunities. Policy support to improve career progression opportunities for teachers (particularly women) would be welcomed.

Support could also continue to be developed to facilitate schools' implementation of flexible working in terms of training and guidance, including on logistical and organisational considerations, such as timetabling, HR processes, and effective flexible working practices.

Finally, the peer-to-peer networks to support flexible working in schools—such as through the FWAS and now FWAMS programmes—appear to be helpful in encouraging the sharing of good practice; these support structures are likely to be a valuable ingredient in developing this practice further and reducing the burden on individual schools.

Implications for research

The evidence from this review leads to the following implications for future research.

- Evaluate the outcomes of schools that are involved in programmes supporting their implementation of flexible working in comparison to similar schools that are not involved (for example, through a QED).
- Measure teacher recruitment and retention and pupil achievement outcomes in national datasets (such as the SWC and NPD, respectively) in relation to measures of the extent of schools' flexible working, which could be derived from a large-scale survey. However, there are significant limitations with this approach in isolating the contribution of flexible

working to any impacts identified over and above the influence of leadership practices that support teacher recruitment and retention generally.

- Conduct a pilot evaluation of a programme that supports the implementation of flexible working in schools that could explore the evidence of promise, implementation factors, and feasibility of measures. This could also usefully address a gap in the current evidence base by exploring pupils' and parents' experiences of flexible working practices for teachers.
- Flexible working arrangements could be explored as part of a study looking more widely at effective leadership practices to support teacher recruitment and retention.

Limitations of the review

The main limitation of this review is the lack of evidence to support causal pathways linking flexible working and teacher, school, and pupil outcomes. The evidence is also limited by time constraints and narrow inclusion criteria focusing on evidence from 2019 onwards. The review evidence is based on the best available evidence within the criteria and, as such, extracts insights from sources with limitations in terms of topical relevance and methodological relevance and quality. It was also challenging to impose a systematic approach on the appraisal of the literature given the breadth of types of evidence. There are also limitations relating to the primary data collection and analysis conducted as part of this review, particularly in terms of sample sizes and bias.

Team

The review was conducted by a team from the National Foundation for Educational Research:

Jack Worth, principal investigator, directed the research and provided expertise and quality assurance of methods and outputs.

Jennie Harland, project leader, led the review and report and carried out data extraction and interviews.

Eleanor Bradley, researcher, conducted data extraction, analysis of flexible working policies, and co-authored the report.

Amanda Taylor, Head of Knowledge Team, led the rapid evidence review searches.

Wendy Durham, knowledge and library officer, conducted the searches on the rapid evidence review.

Jose Liht, statistician, conducted analysis of teacher job adverts.

Vrinder Athwal, administrator, provided administrative support.

Conflicts of interest

The authors are not aware of any conflicts of interest.

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Appendix 1: Rapid evidence assessment methodology

This appendix provides details of how the REA was conducted for this review. The table below provides a summary of the search strategy.

Summary of search strategy	
Search parameters	Evidence published between 2019 and April 2023
Sources of evidence	Key education bibliographic databases; peer-review journal publisher websites; search engines; websites of agreed UK and international government, research and teaching profession organisations; recommendations from experts; and reference harvesting (see below)
Search terms	(see below)
Inclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sample/setting: classroom teachers in early years settings, primary and secondary schools and further education & international equivalents³⁶ • phenomena of interest: evidence of the impact (or proxy areas of impact) of flexible working approaches in recruitment and retention of teachers; evidence of the nature of approaches to create or enhance flexible working arrangements for teachers • geography: UK and selected international jurisdictions (see Appendix 2) • language: English • studies/evidence: research (all methods), reviews, surveys, guidance, policy documents and case studies • schools serving pupils in disadvantaged areas.

Search results were collated using the Zotero bibliographic referencing tool (<https://zotero.org>). The searches yielded 393 items which were then sifted to remove duplicate items and manually apply the selection criteria, resulting in an initial selection of 147 items.

A team of researchers coded the 147 items on the basis of the abstract/summary, rating the relevance (high, medium, low) of each item to the research questions, and coding the type of literature, methodology, and key information such as the type of flexible working, sector, school phase, whether in an area of disadvantage, and any particular teacher groups referenced. Twenty items (14%) were blindly double coded by two researchers based on the abstract/summary, which indicated a high level of consistency in approach and any discrepancies were resolved to assign a final rating. Items rated as

³⁶ We acknowledge EEF's usual remit is schools in England, but for this review EEF and NFER were interested in learning from beyond the school sector (e.g., FE) and other countries.

of 'high' relevance were shortlisted for full appraisal. This screening process resulted in a shortlist of 42 items which was checked with EEF.

Subsequently, a small number of further items of literature were added as a result of recommendations from experts and reference harvesting. Several items were also removed, following inspection of the full source, due to lower relevance to the review.

Search sources

The table below sets out the breadth of sources that were searched as part of the REA.

Source	Details
Key education bibliographic databases	British Education Index (BEI) and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) via EBSCO. Australian Education Index (AEI) via Proquest
Peer-review journal publisher websites	Taylor & Francis, Wiley Online Library, SAGE Journals, Elsevier Science Direct: to identify new research or research not indexed in databases
Search engines	Google & Google Scholar
Websites of agreed UK and international government, research and teaching profession organisations	Important as much of the evidence base 'grey literature' such as case studies or policy documents. Example UK websites include: Timewise, Flexible Working Ambassador Schools (FWASs), Chartered College of Teaching (CCoT). Example international websites include: education ministry and teacher unions/organisations in selected jurisdictions.
Recommendations (evidence & promising practice)	Identified from a request to organisations such as Teach First, FWASs, CCoT, Shared Headship Network, Flexible Teacher Talent, and Timewise, as well as EEF, NFER and other evaluator teams' recommendations. The recently published DfE Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTAL) survey report (Adams et al., 2023) which includes further evidence on flexible working. Monitored submissions to the Education Committee inquiry.
Reference harvesting	Sometimes referred to as 'snowballing', i.e., identifying additional references from shortlisted literature

Search terms: bibliographic databases

Searches combined thesaurus keywords from the respective databases with free-text keywords as set out in the table below. These were combined with a set of thesaurus keywords which cover teachers in schools and FE colleges to focus search results within inclusion criteria (e.g., excluding flexible working in higher education and other sectors).

Keywords for databases: thesaurus/controlled vocabulary		
ERIC	BEI	AEI
Family work relationship Job sharing Part time employment Teleworking Working hours (used for flexible working)	Flexible work arrangements Flexitime Job sharing Part-time teachers Telecommuting	Family work relationship Flexible working hours Job sharing Part time employment
OR free-text keywords for all databases: *indicates truncation of terms, i.e., agile work* will cover agile working, agile work arrangements etc		
Agile work* Annuali*ed hours Compressed hours/work Family friendly Flexible hours Flexible work* Flexitime	Phased retirement Home working Hybrid work Job shar* Lieu time/time off in lieu Part time Remote work*	Smart work Split shift* Staggered hours/work/start Working from/at home Work life balance
AND thesaurus terms to narrow down to teachers (early years, schools, FE). **explode is a function within database thesauri which means all narrower terms are covered e.g., preschool teachers, secondary school teachers, vocational education teachers etc.		
Teachers (explode**)	Teachers (explode**)	Teachers (explode**)

Search approach: peer review publishers and Google Scholar

For the peer review publisher websites ([Taylor & Francis](#), [Wiley Online Library](#), [SAGE Journals](#) and [Elsevier Science Direct](#)) and Google Scholar (first 30 records) searches focused on combining the following selected key words (judged most likely to be used in recent literature) searching within article abstracts:

- Flexible work/working AND teachers/schools
- Part time AND teachers/schools
- Job share/job sharing AND teachers/schools

Search approach: UK (England) websites

The searches were further supplemented by general Google searches (limited to first 3 pages of results) on the search combinations above to identify any other organisations active in this area.

The websites of the organisations listed in the table below were screened for research/news/policy relating to flexible working.

Search websites		
CCoT	Flexible Teacher Talent	Teacher Tapp
DfE	Timewise	Maternity Teacher Paternity Teacher (MTPT) project
Find your Flex (FWAS)	Now Teach	Teach First

Appendix 2: Selected international jurisdictions

Search approach: International jurisdictions

Ten international jurisdictions were identified as broadly comparable and relevant to the teaching workforce and context in England. These are outlined in the table below along with the rationale for including. The websites of education ministry and teacher unions of these 10 countries were searched to identify policy documents or practice exemplars. This was supplemented by targeted Google searches on: “flexible working” AND “teachers” OR “schools” limited to the country/jurisdiction in question, screening the first 3 pages of results.

Jurisdiction	Rationale
UK (Wales)	High proportion of part-time teachers (Faulkner-Ellis and Worth, 2022) UK devolved administration
UK (Scotland)	UK devolved administration
Netherlands	High proportion of part-time teachers (TALIS, 2019)
Denmark	Scandinavian countries known for family friendly/flexible working practices
Finland	Teacher recruitment and retention issues not reported (European Education and Culture Executive Agency (European Commission) et al., 2021) and flexibility is inherent within the working life of teachers (CooperGibson Research, 2019b). Scandinavian countries known for family friendly working practices
Sweden	Reports suggest significant teacher recruitment and retention issues relating to high levels of retirees and others leaving the profession (Albert et al., 2022). Scandinavian countries known for family friendly working practices
USA (Federal) and example state (North Carolina)	Reports suggest unprecedented recruitment and retention issues since the pandemic with particular impact on disadvantaged pupils (Darling-Hammond, 2023; Natanson, 2022)
Australia (Federal) and example state (New South Wales)	In response to unprecedented teacher shortages, the Australian government has recently published a national workforce plan (Australian Government and Department of Education, 2022). High proportion of part-time teachers (CooperGibson Research, 2019b). New South Wales has recently launched a teacher supply plan (NSW Department of Education, 2021)
Canada (Federal) and example state (Ontario)	Reports suggest significant teacher shortages reversing earlier oversupply issues (Ontario College of Teachers, 2022) and initiatives to encourage retired teachers back into the workforce (Darling-Hammond, 2023)

Appendix 3: Data extraction tool

Appraisal themes and information to extract	
Source information	
Type of publication (Research, review, survey, guidance, policy document, practice example) Date Authors Title Jurisdiction	
Study population	
Sample size Sample characteristics/demographics Sample selection criteria	
Research design or document type	
Meta-analysis; systematic review; other review; longitudinal study/analysis; single quantitative study; mixed methods study (quantitative and qualitative); qualitative study (including interviews and case studies); other research; policy document; guidance document; practice example	
Data collection	
Data collection instruments/methods Outcome measures Analysis methods Date when data collected	
Prevalence and nature of flexible working	
RQ2. What types of flexible working approaches have been implemented in schools and how prevalent are they in different education systems? Any indications of changes since Covid-19? Prevalence in schools in areas of high disadvantage?	<p>Summarise any evidence on the nature of flexible working:</p> <p>What types of flexible working are discussed? (e.g., part-time, flexible/compressed/staggered hours, home/remote-working, phased retirement)</p> <p>What (materials and procedures) are used? Who is involved (groups of teachers, senior leadership, HR)? How are flexible working approaches implemented in schools? Where does it take place?</p> <p>Summarise any evidence on the prevalence of flexible working: When and how much? Which schools are using more/less?</p>
RQ3. What enablers and barriers are identified to implementing flexible working approaches, especially in areas of high disadvantage?	<p>Summarise any evidence on the enablers and barriers:</p> <p>What are the enablers? What are the barriers? How are barriers overcome? In what contexts and circumstances is flexible working more/less</p>

	effective? (e.g., staff training, policy documents, HR processes, technological infrastructure)
Impact	
<p>RQ1. Do flexible working approaches support teacher recruitment and retention?</p> <p>RQ4. Do flexible working approaches have a positive impact on teacher outcomes likely to be related to teacher recruitment and retention (e.g., job satisfaction, intention to remain in profession, wellbeing)? What proxy measures indicate impact?</p> <p>RQ5. Are there any differential impacts of approaches in areas of high disadvantage? For different phases of education (e.g., primary/secondary)? For different groups of teachers (e.g., returning teachers, new teachers)?</p> <p>RQ6. Are there differences in impact between different types of flexible working approaches (e.g., job shares, part-time work)?</p>	<p>Summarise any evidence on the impact of flexible working:</p> <p>What impacts are identified (including proximal – wellbeing, job satisfaction, intention to remain in teaching, and distal – teacher recruitment and retention)? Who is impacted? Is it positive/negative? To what extent?</p> <p>Do impacts differ by level of disadvantage, phases of education, types of teachers, types of flexible working?</p> <p>Is there any underpinning theory/rationale associated with the benefits/risks of flexible working? Why are schools using/not using flexible working approaches?</p>
Scoping future implementation and evaluation	
<p>RQ7. How could the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention be evaluated? What methodological challenges would need to be considered?</p> <p>RQ8. Are there any other enabling conditions for successful primary research on flexible working approaches?</p>	<p>Summarise any evidence with implications for how flexible working approaches could be implemented and evaluated in future:</p> <p>Which approaches are most promising and likely to be of interest to schools?</p> <p>How could impacts be measured? What evaluation challenges are discussed?</p> <p>What are the suggested implications of the finding/s for policy, practice and further research?</p>
Weight of evidence	
<p>Limitations in the research design/data/analysis (e.g., attrition in sample, publication bias) (identified by authors or reviewer themselves)</p> <p>Limitations in the generalisability of findings</p> <p>Rate the general quality of evidence on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) (e.g., extent the interpretation substantiated by evidence, validity of measures, consideration of alternative explanations for findings, measures to limit bias)</p> <p>Rate the relevance of the methodology to the review on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) (e.g., robustness, detail, range of perspectives)</p>	

Rate the relevance of the topic/content focus to the review on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) (e.g., provides some evidence on one, two, three, four or five or more of the review research questions)

Overall assessment of the weight of evidence to address the review question (based on 3 x 1 to 5 ratings)

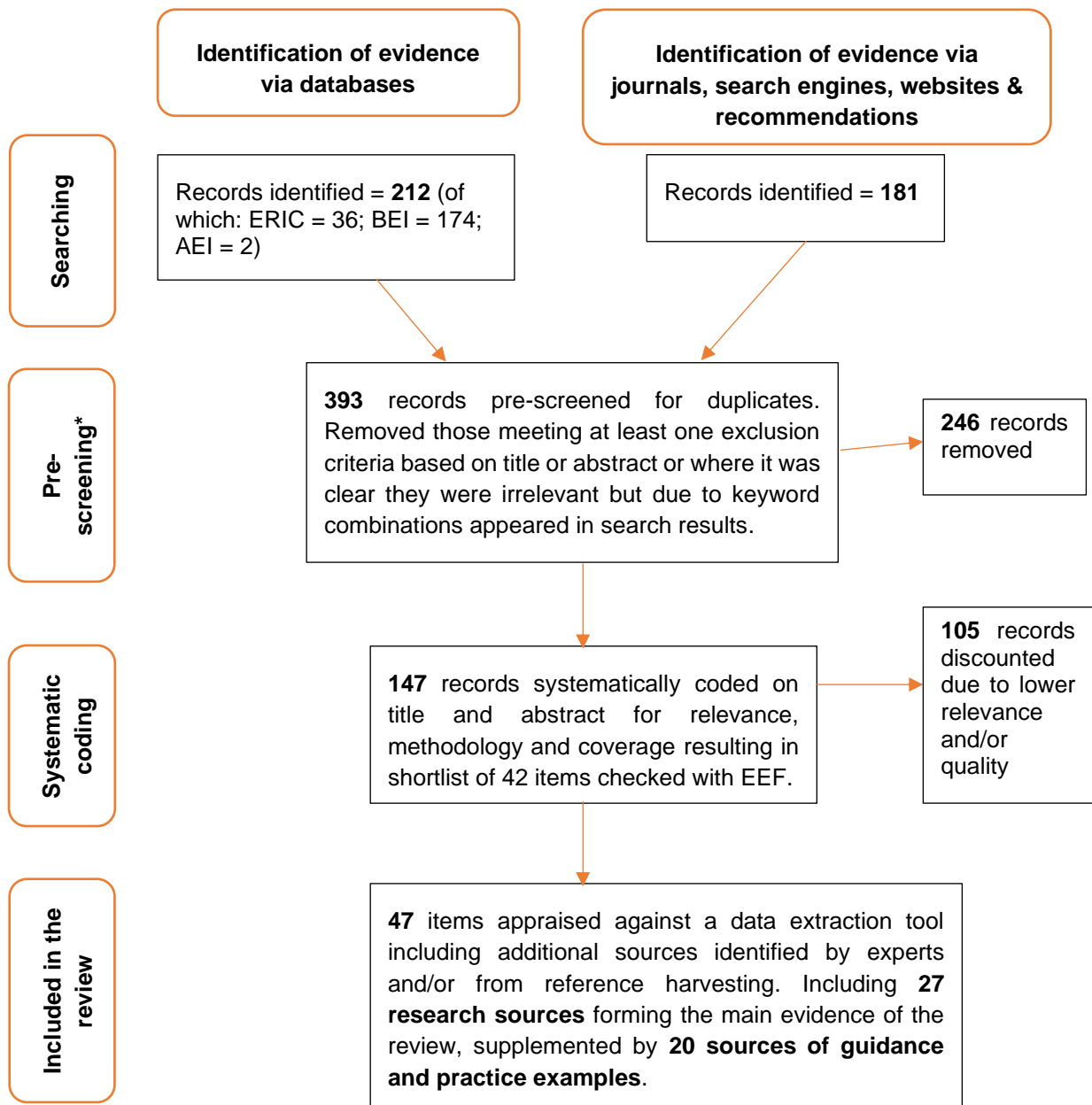
Contextual evidence

Select if the source does not address any of the research questions but provides useful broader context for the review

Example of promising practice

Recommendation to explore the flexible working approach/source of evidence further to develop a flexible working case study (including flexible working initiatives in other jurisdictions) (Y/N and brief rationale)

Appendix 4: Identifying optimal evidence for the rapid review³⁷



³⁷Diagram adapted to reflect the rapid review methodology from: Page et al. (2021) 'The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews', *BMJ*, 372, p. n71. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>.

Appendix 5: Analysis of proportion of teachers working part-time by school characteristics using School Workforce Census data

The analysis is based on the ‘teacher characteristics by school’ dataset, published by DfE on the School Workforce in England page of the Explore Education Statistics website. The school-level data on the proportion of teachers is augmented with school characteristics data from Get Information About Schools (school type, region), school census (proportion of pupils eligible for FSM), Ofsted management information (latest inspection rating) and same school workforce data file (size of teaching staff and whether any senior leaders work part time). The measure of part time working is the proportion of teachers (headcount rather than full time equivalent) who work part time. Each school in the analysis is weighted by the headcount number of teachers, so accounts for schools of different sizes when aggregating to a higher level. The main analysis is based on data from the November 2021 and November 2022 censuses, with overall aggregates estimated on data from the November 2010 census to show overall change over time.

The contracts module of the SWC data collection (from which teacher working patterns data comes) has excellent coverage, so the analysis includes virtually all state-funded schools. The analysis is based on samples of 16,751 primary schools and 3,420 secondary schools. The aggregate data differs very slightly from the aggregate figures published by the DfE since it is based on a simple aggregation of all schools with data provided, whereas the DfE’s aggregation accounts for the small number of schools with missing data.

The table below shows a full breakdown of the proportion of teachers who work part time, split by phase and the full range of school characteristics.

	2010/11		2021/22		2022/23	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
All Schools	27	18	30	20	31	20
Lowest FSM	-	-	38	28	37	27
Second-lowest FSM	-	-	36	24	35	24
Middle FSM	-	-	31	20	31	19
Second-highest FSM	-	-	26	16	27	16
Highest FSM	-	-	23	12	24	12
Outstanding	-	-	30	23	30	22
Good	-	-	30	20	31	20
Requires improvement	-	-	28	19	30	18
Inadequate	-	-	31	18	33	18
LA maintained	-	-	31	21	32	20

Understanding the factors that support the recruitment and retention of teachers: review of flexible working approaches

Mixed-methods review

Single academy	-	-	30	24	30	24
Multi-academy trust	-	-	28	19	29	19
South West	-	-	39	28	39	27
East of England	-	-	35	24	35	24
South East	-	-	34	23	34	23
East Midlands	-	-	33	22	34	22
Yorkshire and The Humber	-	-	29	20	29	20
West Midlands	-	-	28	19	28	19
North East	-	-	25	18	25	18
North West	-	-	27	17	26	17
Outer London	-	-	25	16	25	16
Inner London	-	-	20	13	21	13
Smallest staff	-	-	44	21	44	20
Second-smallest staff	-	-	35	19	35	19
Middle staff size	-	-	32	20	32	19
Second-largest staff	-	-	29	20	29	20
Largest staff	-	-	25	21	26	21
Not an Education Investment Area	-	-	30	21	31	20
Education Investment Area	-	-	30	20	30	19
SLT all full time	-	-	26	19	27	18
Some SLT part time	-	-	37	24	37	24

Appendix 6: Overview of evidence sources used in the REA

This appendix provides a summary of the sources that were fully appraised as part of the REA and provide evidence on flexible working in schools. The information is presented in three tables: the first summarising research evidence identified as highly relevant to the review; the second summarising research evidence identified as moderate or low relevance; and the third summarising guidance and practice examples.

Author	Methods	Brief description and sample	Jurisdiction	RQ themes addressed ³⁸
Sharp et al. (2019)	Mixed methods	A study focusing specifically on flexible working including a survey with 475 teachers and 125 school leaders from NFER's Teacher Voice panels and interviews with 19 senior leaders.	England	All themes
IFF Research (2023)	Mixed methods	A study exploring the costs and benefits of flexible working drawing on the December 2021 wave of the School and College Panel (SCP) completed by 622 school leaders and 40 in-depth interviews with school leaders.	England	All themes
CooperGibs on Research (2019a, 2019b, 2020)	Mixed methods	A literature review, online survey with 2896 leaders and teachers, and interviews with 50 leaders and teachers, exploring flexible working practices in schools.	England (plus several international examples in review)	All themes
Timewise (2022b)	Mixed methods	A survey with 301 staff and focus groups in 8 secondary schools across 3 MATs that were implementing flexible working as part of the Teaching Pioneers Programme.	England	All themes
Adams et al. (2023)	Quantitative	The inaugural wave 1 Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders Survey, completed by 11,177 teachers and school leaders.	England	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers /barriers
McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis (2023)	Quantitative	Analysis of national data from the Labour Force Survey, UK Household Longitudinal Survey and Annual Population Survey.	England	All themes
DfE (2020)	Quantitative	The DfE school snapshot survey of Winter 2019 which included specific questions on flexible working and	England	Nature/prevalence,

³⁸ For analysis, research questions were grouped into the following four themes: nature and prevalence of flexible working (RQ2); impacts and differential impacts of flexible working (RQ1, 4, 5, 6); enablers and barriers to flexible working (RQ3); implications for future implementation and evaluation of flexible working approaches (RQ7+8).

		obtained responses from 802 leaders and 1013 teachers.		enablers/barriers
Burge, Lu and Phillips (2021)	Quantitative	A survey with 2210 teachers responding to questions to explore the impact of pay, rewards, and other employment characteristics – including flexible working practices.	England	All themes
NASUWT (2021)	Quantitative	Being a teacher and a parent survey with 3298 teachers and leaders who were parents.	UK	All themes
Timewise (2022c)	Quantitative	Analysis of the financial return on investment associated with flexible working, drawing on secondary data sources.	UK	All themes
Timewise (2019)	Qualitative	Interviews and consultations with leaders and staff in 2 academies, a MAT, and a range of organisations focusing on flexible working, review of existing evidence.	UK	All themes

Author	Methods	Brief description and sample	Jurisdiction	RQ themes addressed
Gudep (2019)	Quantitative	A survey of 224 teachers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) exploring the relationship between flexible working, organisational commitment, work life balance and job satisfaction.	International - UAE	Nature/prevalence, impact, future implementation
IFF Research (2022)	Quantitative	Findings from the School and College Panel 2022, explores the prevalence of flexible working. Responded to by 1218 school leaders, 1590 classroom teachers, and 22 college leaders.	England	Nature/prevalence
Brown (2019)	Qualitative	Literature review, analysis of SWC and interviews with female secondary teachers exploring how and why working part-time limits career progression.	England	All themes
Faulkner-Ellis and Worth (2022)	Quantitative	Analysis of the SWC and Labour Force Survey in England and Wales 2019-2021 to identify differences in teacher attrition rates and the reasons for these.	UK	Nature/prevalence, impact
Allen (2022)	Quantitative	Questions asked via Teacher Tapp exploring perceptions of part-time working.	England	Enablers/barriers
MTPT Project (2021)	Mixed methods	Surveys of female teachers aged 30 – 39, for which over 500 responses were received, and interviews with 56 teachers, exploring reasons for remaining in/leaving the profession.	UK	Nature/prevalence, impact
NEU (2022)	Quantitative	National Education Union (NEU) State of Education survey responded to by 1788 teachers, included questions related to flexible working.	England	Nature/prevalence, impact
Felstead, Green and Huxley (2023)	Quantitative	Job quality survey of 100,000 working people, including 3211 teachers and NEU survey of 15,584 leaders, teachers, and support staff pre- and post-pandemic exploring teachers' job quality in comparison to other sectors.	UK	Nature/prevalence
Wespieser (2020)	Quantitative	Questions asked via Teacher Tapp exploring teachers' hypothetically preferred flexible working pattern.	England	Enablers/barriers, future implementation
Teacher Tapp (2020)	Quantitative	Questions asked via Teacher Tapp exploring perceptions of part-time working.	England	Nature/prevalence,

				enablers/barriers
Allen, Ford and Hannay (2022)	Quantitative	Questions asked via Teacher Tapp exploring the impact of Covid-19 on teachers' career plans, recruitment challenges and shortages in the teaching workforce.	England	Nature/prevalence, future implementation
Ford (2022)	Quantitative	Questions asked via Teacher Tapp to teachers and leaders exploring views on whether headteachers and classroom teachers should be allowed a regular day to work from home.	England	Enablers/barriers
Newton (2020)	Mixed methods	A literature review, survey of 236 teachers, and interviews (N not specified) exploring which teachers are at greatest risk of leaving the profession and why.	England	Nature/prevalence, enablers/barriers, impact
Education Support (2021b)	Quantitative	Findings from the Teacher Wellbeing Index 2021, responded to by 3354 senior leaders, teachers, and support staff.	UK	Future implementation

Author	Brief description	Jurisdiction	Type of evidence	RQ themes addressed
Patience and Rose (2022)	A guide for flexible working in schools produced by Flexible Teacher Talent.	UK	Guidance	All themes
Sheppard (2022)	A book chapter providing guidance on how to create family-friendly schools.	England	Guidance	All themes
Marsh and Derbyshire (2019)	A book chapter providing guidance on how flexible working cultures can redress inequities.	UK	Guidance	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
Turner (2020)	A book that explores successful flexible working approaches.	UK	Guidance	Impact, enablers/barriers, future implementation and evaluation
Wilson (2020)	Video guidance on how to create school cultures and ethos to enable flexible working.	England	Guidance	All themes
Timewise (2022a)	Guidance on developing a proactive whole-school approach to flexible working, based on the Teaching Pioneers Programme with 8 secondary schools.	England	Guidance	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
DfE (2022)	Non-statutory guidance to support the implementation of flexible working policies.	England	Guidance	All themes
Timewise (2022d)	Guidance on how best to champion and deliver flexible working within schools based on the Teaching Pioneers Programme.	England	Guidance	Impact, enablers/barriers, future implementation and evaluation
Education Support (2021a)	Guidance on what flexible working is, the different forms it can take, and the impacts it can have for schools, teachers, and pupils.	UK	Guidance	Nature/prevalence, impact enablers/barriers
DfE (2021a)	A case-study of a Trust's approach to flexible working solutions.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
DfE (2021b)	A case-study of how a primary school has implemented flexible working to support staff recruitment and retention.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers

Timewise (2020)	A case-study of part-time working and the people-first culture in a secondary school.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
DfE (2019b)	A case-study of a teacher working flexibly in a secondary school.	England	Practice example	Impact, enablers/barriers
Carmel College and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust (no date)	A collection of case studies from a Flexible Working Ambassador School (FWAS) of individual members of staff working flexibly across the Trust.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
Malmesbury School (2021)	A collection of case studies from a Flexible Working Ambassador School (FWAS) of individual members of staff working flexibly across the Trust.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
Flexible Teacher Talent (2020)	A collection of case studies from schools, including FWAS, who have implemented flexible working, and individual members of staff working flexibly.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
CCoT (2019)	A collection of case studies from the Chartered College of Teaching and WomenEd of schools, including FWAS, who have implemented flexible working.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
MTPT Project (no date)	A collection of case studies of teachers who are parents who work flexibly.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact, enablers/barriers
Cafferty (2019)	A case-study of how job-shares have been implemented in a primary school to improve recruitment, retention, and school culture.	England	Practice example	Prevalence/nature, impact, enablers/barriers
FWAS (2022)	A case-study of a teacher working flexibly in a primary school.	England	Practice example	Nature/prevalence, impact enablers/barriers

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