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Exploring flexible working practice in schools

Literature review

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Executive Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) has committed to promoting flexible working among the teaching workforce within schools. This literature review forms part of a broader research project that aims to explore existing use of flexible practices in schools, and how flexible roles can be effectively designed and implemented in the sector. It summarises existing evidence on flexible working practices and how they have been implemented in schools, highlights relevant examples of practice within broader sectors and internationally, and identifies gaps in evidence for future consideration.

Methodology

A review was undertaken of literature published from 2008 onwards, England-wide (although some data are presented at UK level) and focusing on core teaching and learning roles in schools. Six case studies were also developed. These explore flexible working in Higher Education (HE), health and social care, the wider private sector, and three international studies – Australia, Finland and Singapore.

The findings within the literature reviewed need to be treated with some caution due to gaps within published reports regarding the methodological approaches taken, the localised nature of many studies, and a lack of clear definition of what ‘flexible working’ has comprised in the context of the research studies reported. In addition, case studies and examples of flexible working are generally published with a promotional remit, making it difficult to identify detail relating to the risks and challenges associated with flexible working in schools.

Flexible working in schools

The existing literature on perceptions of flexible working in schools in England focuses predominantly on part-time arrangements (or job share as part of part-time arrangements). This is because they are likely the most widespread form of flexible working utilised in schools. However, it is difficult to ascertain how prevalent wider flexible working arrangements are within schools in England since evidence on other practices (such as staggered hours, compressed hours or working from home) is minimal.

There are distinct gaps in the existing literature relating to the direct experiences of schools that implement flexible working, or the teachers accessing them, despite a large body of research recommending increased opportunities for part-time and flexible working as a means to improving recruitment and retention across the profession. In an evaluation of DfE’s Return to Teaching initiative, half of career breakers (46%) reported that a lack of flexible or part-time opportunities was a barrier to returning to the profession.

Across the teaching workforce, awareness of flexible working policies appears to be mixed and there are reports of requests for flexible working being denied particularly among those in leadership positions or with Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR).

Reasons for teachers requesting flexible working opportunities reflect the perceived benefits, namely improved work/life balance and being able to meet family/care responsibilities. Benefits to schools have been found to include the employment of a more diverse range of skills and experience, reduction in absenteeism, potential reduction in staff turnover, and valuable support for succession and/or retirement planning.

It would appear that the attitude of senior leadership teams (SLTs) can be an important influencer on teachers' experiences of working flexibly – a lack of support can be a key barrier to teachers requesting flexible working arrangements. Other perceived barriers to flexible working tend to relate to perceived timetabling complexities, cost to the school, perceived potential negative impacts on school/pupil outcomes or it not being possible or convenient for the school.

Several research studies have identified concerns among teachers regarding the potential negative impact on career progression or pay among part-time workers. Those teachers that have reported accepting informal arrangements have been found likely to do so due to concerns regarding a lack of opportunities for progression or potential negative impact on pay if flexible working arrangements were formalised. Some school leaders have reported giving up leadership/management roles in order to have flexible working arrangements agreed.

Learning points for schools: comparative UK sectors

Common learning points from across HE, health and social care, and the private sector which may be applicable to schools were:

- Senior leaders/line managers can be important role models in creating a work culture that accepts and supports flexible working practices. Therefore, training for line managers may be important in the success of implementing flexible working practices, and likewise clarity and consistency in communications and guidance.
- Where workplace cultures or management processes do not frame flexible working positively, these may pose a significant barrier to their implementation and effectiveness. If not managed effectively, resentments between colleagues on different working arrangements can occur due to the challenges of trying to provide flexible working whilst ensuring that services for users are adequately staffed at the point of need.

- In order for flexible working arrangements to be successful, they may need to be considered from the perspective of all stakeholders, particularly in large schools/academy trusts. It could be beneficial to have all operational teams on board as several different personnel and/or departments will be integral to their implementation (e.g. HR, finance and IT).
- Benefits to flexible working (for example, reduced absenteeism and increased productivity) appear to be particularly notable where small team-based approaches have been adopted. These include co-designing timetables and rotas, and regular collaborative reviews of flexible working schedules.
- The adoption, circulation and promotion of formal flexible working policies may positively impact the take-up of flexible working across a school. It may also be a key recruitment strategy for attracting and retaining a range of skilled and experienced individuals from across different generations.

International case study findings

Research focused on flexible working in schools internationally¹ has identified that:

- Flexible working in schools can refer to a range of practices beyond part-time working, and they can accommodate teachers' needs through various timetabling practices (e.g. blocks of teaching time through the week, and flexible additional hours to complete other tasks such as preparation and administration).
- Enabling teachers to be off-site when they are not required to be in the classroom can provide a sense of autonomy that may potentially lead to increased retention and levels of teacher wellbeing.
- There are risks for part-time workers to feel disadvantaged if they perceive pressure to work substantially beyond their contracted hours (e.g. to demonstrate commitment to colleagues), or where face-to-face contact and communication with colleagues is reduced, potentially affecting working relationships.
- In order for flexible working practices to work in schools, a key factor appears to be organisational and management cultures. Where senior leaders are seen to be receptive towards requests for flexible working, or even take advantage of such arrangements themselves, employees are more likely to feel able to make such requests should they need.

¹ Specifically Australia, Finland and Singapore.

1. Introduction

The DfE is committed to promoting flexible working among the teaching workforce within schools, with an aim to support equality and diversity, and high quality recruitment and retention. To help support this commitment, the DfE has commissioned an independent research project to fill the evidence gaps in this area and to build on what is already known. The project will use a mixed methods approach to assess the extent of existing flexible working practices in schools, as well as the attitudes and perceptions on these practices from individual teachers and senior leaders.

This literature review forms part of this broader piece of research. It looks at current policy and practice, including perceptions and experiences of flexible working of teachers and senior leaders. The overall aims of the review are to:

1. Establish existing evidence on flexible working practices and how they have been implemented in schools.
2. Highlight relevant examples of practice within broader sectors and internationally, and their potential transferability to schools.
3. Identify gaps in evidence to inform future research.

1.1 Methodology

Desk research involved systematic searches of academic and online libraries, “grey” literature² and websites of key organisations to identify relevant literature. This included, for example, reports published by government departments, industry/sector bodies and research organisations. Academic databases included JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, Taylor and Francis Journals, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Web of Science and Google Scholar.

An initial scoping exercise took place to identify the types of information available, to help build a picture of: flexible working practices in schools, the range of terminology used to refer to various methods of ‘flexible working’, challenges and impacts of such practice, and any examples of flexible working already taking place in schools.

Following this scoping exercise, a search matrix was formulated. This was based on the core research questions and parameters for including or excluding literature from the search.

² This includes non-commercial documentation such as government reports, policy statements and research papers.

1.1.1 Search parameters and matrix

The search matrix included key words, concepts and themes including abbreviations and synonyms (Table 1). Generally, each search comprised a combination of one term from each of the columns A – D in the matrix (e.g., ‘flexible working teacher school challenge’).

Literature saved during the searches was predominantly England-wide, although data are presented at UK-wide level where English data are unavailable. Three international case studies were also included (Australia, Finland and Singapore). The searches focused on literature from 2008 onwards that related to core teaching and learning roles. Where it provides useful context, pre-2008 literature has been referenced.

Table 1: Search matrix: Flexible working in schools literature review

Search terms						
A		B		C		D
agile/smart/ flexible working flexitime/flexi- time family friendly part-time job-share split shifts shift-working self-rostering staggered hours sabbatical extended leave compressed hours home working working from home	+	teacher headteacher middle leader senior leader head teacher deputy head teaching assistant/TA/ HLTA school leader principal head of department head of key stage curriculum lead school staff TLR holder	+	school college/FE primary secondary education school-based universities academy multi academy trust independent school private school civil service government public sector public service public administration	+	support intervention help promote barrier challenge impact effective good practice guidance research systematic review meta-analysis policy practice workload staff wellbeing

term time working annualised hours teleworking lieu time phased retirement return from maternity rights of working parents study leave personal days family days		pastoral leader form tutor		police NHS health service medicine healthcare social care employees Singapore Australia (and key cities) Finland (and key cities)		staff morale work-life balance mental health attainment cost accountability recruitment retention
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1.1.2 Scope (definitions of flexible working)

Flexible working can comprise a range of different practices and approaches to work. DfE guidance, *Flexible working in schools*,³ sets out the following four main formal ways of flexible working that are perceived to commonly work in schools:

1. **Part-time working:** working less than full-time hours/days.
2. **Job share:** more than one person carries out one job, splitting the hours between them.
3. **Compressed hours:** working full-time hours but over fewer days.
4. **Staggered hours:** having different start, finish and break times to colleagues.

However, this review also explored other forms of flexible working that are not currently common in the schools sector. These are:⁴

5. **Working from home/remotely:** carrying out work tasks from a home/other base away from the usual place of work.

³ DfE (2017), *Flexible working in schools: Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*.

⁴ UK Government, 'Flexible working'; <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working>.

6. **Annualised hours:** working a set number of hours over the course of a year. This may include core hours of the week but flexibility in terms of when additional hours are undertaken, for example to reflect busy periods/workload demands.
7. **Flexitime:** working specific core hours each day, but being able to choose when to start and finish work.
8. **Phased retirement:** older workers choosing to reduce their hours and working part-time before moving to full retirement.

In addition, other terminology can be used in reference to approaches to work that include flexible working arrangements:

- **Smart working** refers to an approach where new technology is used widely across an organisation to support effective flexible working arrangements.⁵
- **Agile working** refers to working practices that enable employees to work where and when they choose on a permanent basis – it is based on complete flexibility rather than traditional, structured patterns of flexible working.⁶

All practices above were included in the literature searches to gather a comprehensive picture of relevant working practices.

1.1.3 Case studies

The development of six case studies was a key element of this literature review. Three UK sectors (Higher Education [HE], health and social care and the wider private sector) were selected following initial scoping and in discussion with project stakeholders. These were chosen to capture transferable practice or contextual considerations that could provide valuable learning points for schools in England.

In addition, three international case studies were developed – Australia, Finland and Singapore. The selection of these was based on OECD data on the proportion of teachers *choosing* to work part-time.⁷ This suggested flexible working arrangements were made available to meet individual needs. In addition, a brief scoping exercise was used to confirm that literature was available from proposed case study countries relating to flexible working practices and contexts applicable to schools in England.

⁵ UK Cabinet Office (2016), *New Smart Working Code of Practice announced*; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-smart-working-code-of-practice-announced>.

⁶ Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, *Agile Working: A Guide for Employers*; <https://www.enei.org.uk/diversity-inclusion/excellence-in-diversity-inclusion/agile-working/>.

⁷ Defined as less than 90% FTE. See: OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*.

2. Flexible working in schools

This chapter examines perceptions and experiences of flexible working practices within schools in England.

Summary of available literature

The existing literature on perceptions of flexible working in schools in England focuses predominantly on part-time arrangements. It is therefore difficult to ascertain how prevalent wider flexible working arrangements are within schools in England. Evidence on practices such as job-share, staggered hours, compressed hours or working from home is minimal; there is limited evidence relating to informal/ad hoc arrangements, or personal/term-time leave. There are also distinct gaps in the existing literature relating to the direct experiences of schools that implement flexible working, or the teachers accessing them.⁸

Some caution should be noted when considering the literature cited. There is little empirical, independent research related to schools enabling and experiencing flexible working practices, the benefits and challenges of doing so, and its impact on schools, staff and students, which also draws from a representative sample of participants.

Furthermore, detailed examples of flexible working are found within case studies that have a promotional remit. This means that existing evidence is inevitably skewed towards the beneficial aspects of flexible working. Detail related to the risks and challenges that have been directly experienced by schools are less commonly identified.

2.1 Flexible Working Regulations

The introduction of the Flexible Working Regulations 2014 means that all employees have a right to request flexible working subject to having continuous service of at least 26 weeks prior to the application being made (and if they have not already submitted a statutory request within the preceding 12 months).⁹ These requests must be dealt with by employers reasonably, i.e. by assessing the advantages and disadvantages of the application, discussing the request with the applicant, and offering an appeals process

⁸ This gap in evidence was also highlighted by the Teachers Working Longer Review Steering Group (2017), *Teachers Working Longer Review: Interim Report*, p.12.

⁹ See: 'The Flexible Working Regulations 2014'; <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2014/1398/made>. The regulations came into force following the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011), *Modern Workplaces* consultation and the government's response to the consultation findings – HM Government (2012), *Modern Workplaces Consultation – Government Response on Flexible Working: Impact Assessment*.

should the request be turned down (the request can only be turned down based on reasonable business grounds).¹⁰

2.2 Context: flexible working in schools

In March 2017, the then Secretary of State for Education announced a commitment ‘to see flexible working become the norm’ in schools.¹¹ This announcement followed the development of DfE guidance on flexible working,¹² which had identified ‘the very practical challenges’ of encouraging and enabling flexible working in schools.¹³

That work was bolstered in October 2017 through a Flexible Working Summit hosted by DfE and attended by education stakeholders to discuss the barriers and benefits to flexible working in schools, and how to raise awareness of the options available to teachers. A range of pledges were made by DfE, schools, education sector organisations, professional associations, teaching unions and industry/educational technology organisations to promote and support flexible working across the teaching workforce.¹⁴ These pledges were outlined in a policy paper, setting out a definition of flexible working for schools,¹⁵ the perceived benefits of flexible working, and the potential barriers for schools in introducing and implementing them.¹⁶

Following the Flexible Working Summit, the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts recommended that the DfE ‘work with the schools sector to share good practice in implementing flexible working’, to help retain and develop the teaching workforce, and attract qualified teachers to return to the profession.¹⁷

¹⁰ UK Government, ‘Flexible working’; <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working>.

¹¹ DfE (2017), ‘Justine Greening: teacher development key to school improvement’; <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/justine-greening-teacher-development-key-to-school-improvement>.

¹² DfE (2017), *Flexible working in schools: Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*.

¹³ DfE (2017), ‘Justine Greening: teacher development key to school improvement’; <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/justine-greening-teacher-development-key-to-school-improvement>.

¹⁴ For a full list of the pledges made at the Flexible Working Summit, see: DfE (2017), *Increasing flexible working opportunities in schools*; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/increasing-flexible-working-in-schools/increasing-flexible-working-opportunities-in-schools>.

¹⁵ This definition included part-time working, job share arrangements, and compressed or staggered hours. DfE (2017), *Flexible working in schools: Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*, p.6. As outlined in section 1.1.2, this review considers a broader range of flexible working opportunities that are being, or could be, adopted in the schools sector.

¹⁶ DfE (2017), *Flexible working in schools: Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*.

¹⁷ House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2018), *Retaining and developing the teaching workforce: Seventeenth Report of Session 2017 – 19*, p.6.

2.3 Experiences and perceptions of flexible working in schools

The following section explores research related to the experience of flexible working in schools.

2.3.1 Requesting flexible working

The *Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey* (NFER, 2018) gathered survey responses from 1,962 teachers, split fairly equally by phase of education and role.¹⁸ Most respondents (60%) felt that it was 'easy for teachers in their school or returning to teaching to arrange part-time or flexible working'.¹⁹ Nonetheless, senior leaders were found to be more likely to think it easy to agree flexible working arrangements compared to classroom teachers (68% and 51% respectively).²⁰ In a live electronic poll taken at a NASUWT women's conference in October 2016 three-quarters of respondents reported that their school did not have a flexible working policy in place. Sample data does not make it possible to establish the representativeness of this finding, but when read in conjunction with NFER's findings, suggests that awareness of flexible working policies is an issue in some schools.²¹

Many schools do develop and publish formal flexible working policies, although this is not a statutory requirement.²² To support requests, teaching unions produce guidance for members, encouraging them to follow informal processes when first discussing the options in their school.²³ In the 12 months between September 2014 and September 2015, NASUWT received 3,000 requests from teachers for support with requesting flexible working arrangements, with three-quarters of these individuals citing age, health and work/life balance as reasons for wishing to access flexible working (although no detail is provided regarding these reasons).²⁴

To understand the issue further, between August 2015 and February 2016 NASUWT conducted research with teachers and school leaders focusing on their experiences of flexible working.²⁵ In total, the study gathered responses from over 1,000 teachers through a mixed-method approach of surveys, interviews and focus groups, although no

¹⁸ 48% were classroom teachers and 52% were senior leaders: NFER (2018), *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey*, p.6

¹⁹ Note that 'flexible working' was left to the interpretation of the respondents. Ibid., p.17.

²⁰ Ibid., p.17-18.

²¹ NASUWT (2016), 'Women teachers denied access to flexible working'; <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/women-teachers-denied-access-to-flexible-working.html>. Note that it is not made clear how many teachers responded to the poll, but the article states that hundreds attended the conference and associated workshops.

²² DfE (2014), *Statutory policies for schools*.

²³ For example: NUT (2016), *Flexible Working Guidance for Members in England and Wales*.

²⁴ NASUWT (2016), *Flexible Working: The Experiences of Teachers*, p.6.

²⁵ NASUWT (2016), *Flexible Working: The Experiences of Teachers*.

detailed breakdown is given for how many teachers participated in each stage.²⁶ The report states that the sample represented all phases of education, however it is not possible to confirm whether the study was representative of the profession as a whole.²⁷ Thus, the following findings should be treated as indicative.²⁸

- Over half of the respondents were unaware of Flexible Working Regulations and did not know whether their school had a flexible working policy in place; some believed that flexible working was not an option for a teacher and others did not know how to make a request.
- Flexible working requests had been turned down by schools across all phases. Nearly one-third of teachers said that they had a flexible working request denied – this was particularly common among those with leadership or with Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR). This has been supported by research undertaken by Flexible Teacher Talent, which found that nearly all requests at leadership level had been denied (although no sample details were provided).²⁹
- Common reasons for schools denying requests cited in the NASUWT report were: cost to the school, potential negative effect on pupil attainment/wellbeing and school performance.³⁰ Other reasons included that parents prefer one point of contact/do not like split teaching (particularly in primary schools), it is not possible or convenient for the school, timetabling complexities, job share positions being allocated already, or not being able to recruit suitable job share partners.
- Approximately one-third of teachers felt that they would be granted flexible working on an informal basis, rather than having it agreed and written into contracts; some reported ‘complications’ due to these informal agreements (such as a vulnerability to sudden change in expectations from senior leaders).
- Teachers who had accepted informal flexible working arrangements were ‘likely to [have accepted those arrangements] due to concerns about potential job loss or fear of an adverse pay progression decision or capability concern’.³¹

²⁶ It is not clear from the methodology whether primary research was undertaken solely with NASUWT members, although data from its casework and advice service were included.

²⁷ Ibid., p.5.

²⁸ The following findings are summarised from: NASUWT (2016), *Flexible Working: The Experiences of Teachers*.

²⁹ Flexible Teacher Talent: <https://flexibleteachertalent.co.uk/about-us>.

³⁰ Examples included perceptions that having more than one teacher may confuse learners, parents would not be happy with job share/more than one teacher, there may be a detrimental impact on outcomes so a school does not split teaching in exam classes. NASUWT (2016), *Flexible Working: The Experiences of Teachers*, p.10-11.

³¹ NASUWT (2016), *Flexible Working: The Experiences of Teachers*, p.8.

- School leaders, including those with middle leadership responsibility, had reported giving up leadership/management roles ‘as a precondition for flexible working’; no data are provided as to how common this was, but only around a fifth felt it was possible to combine senior leadership roles with flexible working.
- Where schools were implementing flexible working opportunities for teaching staff, positive and encouraging attitudes of senior leaders were perceived to be the most important factors for teachers in getting the arrangements right.

2.3.2 Part-time working

According to the School Workforce Census, the number of headteachers, senior leaders and teaching staff working part-time in schools in England has increased since 2010; according to the latest published workforce statistics, 23% of teachers working in England were doing so on a part-time basis (November 2017).³² In OECD’s *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS, 2013), 14% of Key Stage 3 secondary teachers reported working part-time (90% of these did so by choice, while the remaining 10% reported that ‘there was no possibility to work full-time’).³³ Where references in existing literature are made to teachers working flexibly, these generally relate to part-time hours (or, part-time as part of a job share arrangement), because these are likely to be the most common form currently in practice.³⁴

DfE research (2017-2018) has identified that teachers can find part-time working helpful for their work/life balance, but only if it does not disadvantage them in their roles more broadly. When participating in interviews exploring teacher workload, twelve part-time teachers reported taking up part-time opportunities as a way to manage their work/life balance.³⁵ Qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with 101 former teachers found that increased access to part-time roles was perceived by participants as supporting a better work/life balance.³⁶ Nonetheless, some that had moved part-time went on to leave the profession, reporting that they were ‘still working beyond their

³² The UK Labour Force Survey shows that 26% of the overall workforce works part-time (ONS Labour Force Survey data, 11 September 2018, ‘Full-time, part-time and temporary workers (not seasonally adjusted)’).

³³ Note that TALIS figures relate only to KS3 teachers and therefore do not apply to all phases/type of school but are a useful comparison, for example when considering the case studies later in this review. In addition, no further details are available for the cohort of teachers reporting during TALIS 2013 that they had no option to work full-time (e.g. reasons given, role). OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, Table 2.7 ‘Employment status of teachers, full time or part time’.

³⁴ Kell, E. (2016), *Shifting identities: A mixed-methods study of the experiences of teachers who are also parents*; TES (2016), *A Question of Quality: TES Teacher Recruitment Index: Easter 2016 Data*; NFER (2017), *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Research Update 3 – Is the Grass Greener Beyond Teaching?*; DfE (2018), *Factors affecting teacher retention: qualitative investigation*.

³⁵ The twelve teachers represented all of the part-time teachers interviewed as part of a sample of 75 teachers who had participated in DfE’s Teacher Workload Survey 2016 and agreed to take part in follow-up interviews. DfE (2018), *Exploring teacher workload: qualitative research*, p.5.

³⁶ DfE (2018), *Factors affecting teacher retention: qualitative investigation*, p.36.

contracted hours'.³⁷ This reflected the findings of the Teacher Workload Survey 2016, with nearly one-third of part-time teachers reporting that '40% of their total hours were worked outside of school hours' which was a higher proportion than for those working full-time.³⁸

A large body of research undertaken into teacher retention has included recommendations for implementing or increasing part-time opportunities in schools.³⁹ NFER's longitudinal teacher retention study found that teachers in secondary schools often leave the profession in order to take-up part-time working opportunities, suggesting that they may have left to seek more flexibility.⁴⁰ This supported findings of a Rapid Evidence Assessment to inform the Working Longer Review (2017), which identified evidence in earlier literature that some teachers nearing retirement age were taking up, or intending to take-up, supply teacher roles in order to access part-time opportunities.⁴¹

The Working Longer Review also suggested that the implementation of more opportunities for flexible working 'would...help to motivate teachers to work for longer' – although it found little evidence of how this worked in practice beyond reducing hours.⁴²

In 2007, changes in the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) included the option to take phased retirement, thereby enabling schools to retain older members of the workforce for longer.⁴³ Early research into the impact of this change on teacher behaviour (Peters, 2008) involved 4,837 teachers and headteachers.⁴⁴ The findings suggested that half of all headteachers interviewed felt that meeting teachers' needs in terms of supporting flexible working and phased retirement was a key aspect of ensuring quality provision. When examined by school phase however, the majority of headteachers in secondary schools were not happy at the prospect of employing more part-time teachers as a result

³⁷ Ibid. The number of former teachers interviewed who had moved to part-time contracts prior to leaving the profession is not provided in the report.

³⁸ DfE (2017), *Teacher Workload Survey 2016: Research report*, p.7.

³⁹ As examples: Simons, J. (2016), 'Let's Talk About Flex' in *The Important of Teachers: A collection of essays on teacher recruitment and retention*, ed. J. Simons. Policy Exchange, pp. 15 – 22; NFER (2016), *Engaging Teachers: NFER Analysis of Teacher Retention*; National Audit Office (2017), *Retaining and developing the teaching workforce*; NFER (2017), *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Interim Report*; NFER (2018), *Teacher Supply, Retention and Mobility in London*; Broad, S. (2016), 'Could part time working fix teacher recruitment problems', *Academy Today*, 6 July 2016; <https://academytoday.co.uk/Article/could-part-time-working-fix-teacher-recruitment-problems>.

⁴⁰ NFER (2017), *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Research Update 3 – Is the Grass Greener Beyond Teaching?*, p.7.

⁴¹ Teachers Working Longer Review (2017), *Teachers Working Longer Review: Interim Report. Annex B: Employment Practice – Rapid Evidence Assessment*, p.45-46.

⁴² Teachers Working Longer Review (2017), *Teachers Working Longer Review: Interim Report*, p.11.

⁴³ Further changes to the TPS were made in 2015, although these related to the scheme itself (career average versus final salary payments) rather than flexible working options pre-retirement. See: Teachers' Pensions (2015), *Understanding the changes to the Teachers' Pensions Scheme*.

⁴⁴ The total interviewed was 672 headteachers across primary and secondary schools. Peters, M. et al (2008), *The Behavioural Impact of Change in the Teachers' Pension Scheme: DCSF Research Brief*.

of the TPS changes.⁴⁵ The study found that once some headteachers became used to enabling and managing flexible working practices, a small proportion were prepared to do so more often.⁴⁶

‘These different attitudes seemed to be rooted in the headteachers’ ideas about what makes an effective school...Heads of schools that employed a high proportion of part-time teachers were more likely than those with a low proportion to agree that they would be happy to employ more (28 versus 18 per cent)’.⁴⁷

In terms of the impact of TPS changes on the decisions of older teachers, nearly one quarter of teachers participating in the Peters study were considering remaining longer in teaching and reducing their hours. The study also found that although older teachers would appreciate being able to reduce their hours (for example to four days per week), they encountered a range of barriers to doing so.

‘Some teachers pointed out that headteachers are often reluctant for part-timers to fit their work into a small number of whole days because of timetabling difficulties; others echoed the headteachers’ concerns about lack of continuity for pupils. A few talked of the difficulties of reducing responsibilities and staying in the same school’.⁴⁸

2.3.4 Other forms of flexible working

Evidence on other forms of flexible working in schools, such as staggered or compressed hours, working from home or ad hoc arrangements for personal/term-time leave, is minimal. Literature tends to comprise guidance or suggestions to schools rather than how these work in practice. For example there are anecdotal reports of where schools have enabled time ‘off-site’ for job share partners to meet and handover/plan remotely, or allowed some forms of remote working.⁴⁹ Guidance from the NUT includes possible suggestions to enable working at home including the introduction of ‘home admin days’ for planning time, or for staff working ‘on significant curriculum projects...provided that such days are agreed in advance, recorded in the office calendar, and that staff are

⁴⁵ Peters, M. et al (2008), *The Behavioural Impact of Change in the Teachers’ Pension Scheme: DCSF Research Brief*, p.3.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Peters, M. et al (2008), *The Behavioural Impact of Change in the Teachers’ Pension Scheme: DCSF Research Brief*, p.7.

⁴⁹ eteach, ‘Job Sharing – Why Aren’t Schools Doing It...Really?’, *eteach*, 18 October, 2017; <http://www.eteachblog.com/job-sharing-why-arent-schools-doing-it-really/>; McDowall, A., ‘Flexible working doesn’t have to mean part-time hours – sometimes it just means a little extra support’, *TES*, 12 September 2016; <https://www.tes.com/news/flexible-working-doesnt-have-mean-part-time-hours-sometimes-it-just-means-little-extra-support>.

contactable at home during school hours'.⁵⁰ The guidance argues that time set aside for home working 'can help teachers to focus on tasks and can be a highly efficient and cost effective way of working', although no empirical evidence is included.

According to DfE and NUT guidance, schools have anecdotally reported the following benefits to job sharing:⁵¹

- The ability to employ a diverse set of skills and experience whilst offering equality of opportunity.
- Classes benefiting from the input and motivation of two teachers.
- A larger teaching staff, particularly in smaller schools, can be helpful for covering various aspects of the curriculum.
- In secondary settings, job share partners can teach different classes simultaneously (rather than the same class on separate days), providing greater flexibility in timetabling.
- Phased retirement through job sharing can retain skilled and experienced teachers for longer.
- Succession planning can be supported through job share arrangements, with the opportunity to shadow roles and create a smooth transition process.

2.3.5 Engagement initiatives for career returners

Flexible working may be a factor in encouraging teachers to return to the profession. Many trained and qualified teachers of working age are not currently working in the sector. In March 2016, this amounted to 251,300 qualified teachers below the age of 60, not working in the sector.⁵² There have been two subsequent pilot programmes that have tested different approaches to attracting returners back to the sector:

1. Supporting Returning Teachers Pilot (15/16), specifically for maths and physics returners.
2. Returners Engagement Pilot (REP) (16/17), for school-led delivery for returners in all EBacc subjects.⁵³

⁵⁰ NUT, *Work-Life Balance: Guidance on Developing Policies for Schools*.

⁵¹ DfE (2017), *Flexible working in schools: Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*, p.7; NUT (2016), *Flexible Working: Guidance for Members in England and Wales*, p.3; NUT (2012), *Job Sharing – Guidance for Members*.

⁵² Who were previously in service. DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>; National Audit Office (2017), *Retaining and developing the teaching workforce*, p.30.

⁵³ EBacc subjects are English, maths, history/geography, chemistry, physics, biology, computer science and modern foreign languages.

An evaluation of the Supporting Returning Teachers pilot (evaluated as the 'Return to Teaching Pilot programme') aimed to explore the pilot's effectiveness in terms of the impact it had on securing returners into employment. It included online survey responses from 818 potential returners (a response rate of over 50%).⁵⁴ Reflecting the feedback of those leaving the profession, one of the main barriers that potential returners reported was a lack of opportunities for flexible working, including part-time teaching roles (reported by 11% of 818 survey respondents).⁵⁵

Nearly half of career breakers (46%) reported that a lack of flexible or part-time opportunities was a barrier to returning to the profession; likewise, a lack of flexible working opportunities was a key barrier for those returning to teaching for reasons such as dissatisfaction with their current job or teaching fitting with family life (48%).⁵⁶ Where 21 of 30 returners supported through the Supporting Returning Teachers pilot had not managed to secure employment as a teacher, one of the reasons given by schools providing support was 'limited availability of flexible or part-time employment'.⁵⁷ This was echoed by half of thirty returners who were seeking part-time posts but reported not seeing many opportunities advertised.⁵⁸

The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) subsequently launched the Returners Engagement Programme Pilot in 2016, for trial in two regions (the North West and the South East).⁵⁹ This pilot was made available only to those schools 'willing to support and employ returners including those who wish to return on a part-time or flexible basis'.⁶⁰ The pilot aimed to provide a tailored support package to help overcome the barriers to returning to teaching, including opportunities for flexible working.⁶¹

2.4 Perceived challenges to flexible working in schools

The most common challenge to implementing flexible working practices in schools cited within research studies, and anecdotally, is a perceived lack of support for flexible working among school leadership teams. NFER's *Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey* (2018)

⁵⁴ This included 577 who registered on the Return to Teaching website but did not apply for a place by March 2016 (a 44% response rate), 241 responses from returners receiving support through a Returning to Teaching Pilot (a 64% response rate), plus smaller numbers of telephone interviews with supported returners and school staff providing support. Just over one-third of respondents participating in the evaluation were those who had taken a career break to raise a family.

⁵⁵ NCTL (2018), *Evaluation of the Return to Teaching pilot programme: Final report*, p.30. Other key barriers were concerns about their lack of recent experience (28%) and potential workload of teaching (12%).

⁵⁶ NCTL (2018), *Evaluation of the Return to Teaching pilot programme: Final report*, p.35-36.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ NCTL (2018), *Evaluation of the Return to Teaching pilot programme: Final report*, p.63.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.64

⁶⁰ NCTL (2017), *Returners Engagement Programme Pilot: Funding for the design and delivery of school-led programmes – Programme and Application Guidance*.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.5.

⁶¹ No published impact/evaluation data are available for this pilot.

reported that nearly one third of respondents (31% of 1,962) felt that a lack of support among senior leaders and governors was the 'most significant barrier to part-time and flexible working', and was more commonly cited among classroom teachers compared to senior leaders (46% compared to 13%).⁶² An academic study (Kell, 2016) found that 117 of 1,604 teachers (7%) felt that 'a more flexible attitude to family commitments from the headteacher and senior leadership team' was important to their wellbeing and performance.⁶³

Respondents to NFER's *Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey* (2018) also highlighted perceived complexities in timetabling as a barrier to flexible working.⁶⁴ During that survey, nearly 47% of 1,962 practising teachers cited timetabling issues as a particular barrier, and this was cited by proportionally more senior leaders compared to classroom teachers (63% and 33% respectively). Timetabling issues were also cited as a barrier by respondents in secondary schools more than primary (62% and 32% respectively).⁶⁵

Furthermore, the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2018) received evidence that school leaders perceive the knowledge/skills of career returners to be out of date (for example where this cohort of individuals are looking for part-time opportunities).⁶⁶

The Work Foundation (2014) noted a perception among school leaders and parents that pupils (particularly primary age) struggle if they are taught by different teachers, or that this will have a detrimental impact on school performance/learner outcomes.⁶⁷

DfE's *Teachers in England's Secondary Schools* (2014) reported a potential negative impact on pay or career progression among part-time workers.⁶⁸ This was also highlighted during qualitative interviews with 101 former teachers, some of whom

⁶² NFER (2018), *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey*, p.18.

⁶³ Kell, E. (2016), *Shifting identities: A mixed-methods study of the experiences of teachers who are also parents.*, p.144.

⁶⁴ NFER (2018), *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey*; Peters, M. et al (2008), *The Behavioural Impact of Change in the Teachers' Pension Scheme: DCSF Research Brief*; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2018), *Retaining and developing the teaching workforce: Seventeenth Report of Session 2017 – 19*.

⁶⁵ NFER (2018), *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey*, p.18. Note, the School Workforce Census shows a lower proportion of teachers working part-time in secondary schools than in primary, see: DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>.

⁶⁶ House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2018), *Retaining and developing the teaching workforce: Seventeenth Report of Session 2017 – 19*, p.6. One headteacher also suggested to the Committee that when recruiting and managing two individuals for a job share, this had implications in terms of pension and national insurance contributions: 'I have 92 teachers, I believe, and the full-time equivalent is 71...It is a very expensive model'. (p.26)

⁶⁷ See: NUT (2016), *Flexible Working: Guidance for Members in England and Wales*; The Work Foundation (2014), *Healthy teachers, higher marks? Establishing a link between teacher health and wellbeing and student outcomes*.

⁶⁸ DfE (2014), *Teachers in England's Secondary Schools: Evidence from TALIS 2013*.

highlighted that it was ‘important to teachers that they were not penalised for [working part-time] in terms of salary or the opportunity to [take up positions of] responsibility’.⁶⁹

Suggestions for overcoming some of these barriers are made within DfE and teaching union guidance and on blogs/social media from individual teachers.⁷⁰ However, no data were identified during this review that explored how and when these guidance materials were accessed, by whom, and to what effect.

It is also not always clear in the existing literature what types of flexible working are being considered during surveys and interviews with the school workforce. The range of ways in which ‘flexible working’ and ‘work life balance’ can be interpreted (coupled with a lack of awareness of flexible working policies among the teaching workforce – see section 2.3.1) may therefore create challenges in ensuring that all individuals understand what is available to them. It has been noted by Bruton (2012) that clarity is essential in ensuring that different stakeholders within a school community share a common vision of what ‘work life balance’ or ‘flexibility’ mean.

‘The need for transparency and clarity is essential if staff are to appreciate that policies relating to [work/life balance] have been applied in an even-handed way, taking account of the needs of students, staff and the school as a whole’.⁷¹

2.5 Examples of existing practice

The following examples are additional to those found in DfE’s guidance, and on the government’s teaching blog.⁷²

- The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services⁷³ produced joint guidance in partnership with the National Governors’ Association (NGA) and Co-ordinators of Governors Services (COGS) focusing on the retention

⁶⁹ Exact numbers of teachers reporting this are unavailable; the research interviewed 101 former teachers. DfE (2018), *Factors affecting teacher retention: qualitative investigation*, p.36.

⁷⁰ DfE (2017), *Flexible working in schools: Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*; NUT (2016), *Flexible Working: Guidance for Members in England and Wales*; eteach, ‘Job Sharing – Why Aren’t Schools Doing It...Really?’, *eteach*, 18 October, 2017; <http://www.eteachblog.com/job-sharing-why-arent-schools-doing-it-really/>.

⁷¹ Bruton, A. (2012), *Work-Life Balance and the Workforce Reforms*, unpublished thesis; School of Education: University of Birmingham.

⁷² GOV.UK. (2017) Teaching blog. Flexible working: Putting our pupils at the heart of our flexible working policy. <https://teaching.blog.gov.uk/2017/11/02/flexible-working-putting-our-pupils-at-the-heart-of-our-flexible-working-policy/>.

⁷³ As it was known between 2009-2011.

of headteachers. This included practical examples of flexible working practices implemented in schools wishing to retain experienced headteachers, such as:⁷⁴

- Phased retirement including a two-year part-time consultancy contract to support succession planning and transition to new leadership.⁷⁵
- Agreeing for the headteacher to work from home for one day per week to enable them to attend to childcare needs.⁷⁶
- An example was identified where a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) provides information about its approach to flexible working through a report on its website.⁷⁷ It states it has placed flexible working at the core of its human resources (HR) strategy. The MAT felt that it was ‘important to create [a] consistent culture across the trust’ whilst ensuring that the local context of each school is taken into account when agreeing flexible working arrangements.⁷⁸ This means that the trust has a central bank of practical examples for its schools to use, with support available through its HR team. As examples, a primary school in the trust operates with a headteacher job share arrangement; a programme of support is provided to returning teachers, including those returning from maternity leave; and there is a willingness to ‘remove the barriers to job share at all levels, particularly TLR in primary and class teaching’.⁷⁹ Job share and other flexible arrangements are referred to as ‘talent partnerships’ and CPD is available through flexible pathways to accommodate the needs of those working flexibly.⁸⁰
- Social media and online forums are being used by practising teachers to discuss issues relating to flexible working and to share ideas of how this can work in schools. Examples of current practice from a #WomenEd and Maternity Teacher/Paternity Teacher (MTPT) Project discussion thread on social media included schools that:
 - Adapt school timetables mid-year to reflect changing circumstances of teachers.
 - Maintain responsibility and leadership roles (and pay) for leaders taking part-time hours.
 - Offer later starts or early finishes to support teachers with care commitments.

⁷⁴ National College of Leadership for Schools and Children’s Services (2010), *Retaining headteachers: Succession planning – A planning guide for governors*.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.2

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ GLF Schools, *Innovative Practice at GLF Schools – Flexible Working: Case studies*.

⁷⁸ GLF Schools, *Innovative Practice at GLF Schools – Flexible Working: Case studies*, p.3

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.4-6.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.8.

- Enable working from home or remotely when not teaching, or for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time (with Higher Level Teaching Assistant [HLTA] staff providing cover).
 - Create roles for part-time teachers to teach one subject across a school rather than a specific class (enabling more flexibility in their hours).⁸¹
- Social media and blogs aimed at senior leaders provide examples and descriptions of how to go about effectively offering flexible working opportunities.⁸² These include practical tips and suggestions of how to manage requests for, or the day-to-day arrangement of, flexible working within a school. One blog has focused on how technology can be adopted to support flexible working arrangements, for example through video conferencing, corporate networking platforms, email scheduling, and specialist software.⁸³
 - Ambition School Leadership (a school leadership training organisation) reported in a blog in 2018 that a Deputy Headteacher works four days per week (0.75), but is 'flexible if needed': 'I'll return to school to attend governors meetings, for example...this arrangement also had an additional benefit to the school - one of the Assistant Heads was appointed as an Associate Deputy Head to cover the 0.25 when I am not in school, which has also given her the career progression she was looking for'.⁸⁴ The experiences of this individual led to the establishment of The Shared Headship Network, which supports school leaders to meet potential partners for shared SLT roles.⁸⁵
 - Co-headship has been in place in Surrey Square School since 2014, both headteachers working four days a week. A report by the school on the

⁸¹ @WomenEd 'slow chat', Twitter 13 – 15 October 2017:

<https://twitter.com/hashtag/WomenEdSlowChat?src=hash>; Sheppard, E. 'Flexible Working Options: Part 1', #WomenEd Blog, 29 October 2017; <https://womenedblog.wordpress.com/2017/10/29/flexible-working-options-part-1/>; also see TES (2017), 'Can we talk about why there are no P/T members of SLT', 27 September 2017, <https://community.tes.com/threads/can-we-talk-about-why-there-are-no-p-t-members-of-slt.764686/>; and @maternityCPD, <https://twitter.com/maternityCPD/status/898976382658764800>; Mumsnet, 'Primary school deputy head – part time?', 7 March 2015; https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/the_staffroom/2325390-Primary-school-deputy-head-part-time.

⁸² Sheppard, E., 'Flexible Working Options: Part 1', #WomenEd Blog, 29 October 2017; <https://womenedblog.wordpress.com/2017/10/29/flexible-working-options-part-1/>; Sheppard, E., 'Flexible Working – Part 2', #WomenEd Blog, 4 November 2017; <https://womenedblog.wordpress.com/2017/11/04/flexible-working-part-2/>;

Headteacher Update, 'Handling requests for flexible working', 13 September 2012; <http://www.headteacher-update.com/best-practice-article/handling-requests-for-flexible-working/66638>.

⁸³ Norrish, D., 'The role of technology in supporting flexible working in schools', *Domnorrish.com*, 12 November 2017; <http://domnorrish.com/?p=381>; Small, I., 'Tools that make flexible working easy at LKMco', *LKMco*, 15 May 2018; <https://www.lkmco.org/tools-that-make-remote-and-flexible-working-easy-at-lkmco/>.

⁸⁴ Turbet, H. 'How flexible working and job-shares could change school leadership', *Ambition School Leadership*, 27 February 2018; <https://www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/blog/how-flexible-working-and-job-shares-could-change-school-leadership/>.

⁸⁵ The Shared Headship Network: <https://www.sharedheadshipnetwork.com/>.

arrangement suggests that the individuals felt they share the same values and beliefs, enabling decisions to be made effectively.⁸⁶ The partners in the co-headship perceived that the arrangement had made the role feel less isolating and more enjoyable.⁸⁷ Similarly, the London Leadership Strategy has published a case study of co-headship in place at Barham Primary School; both headteachers work three days a week, with an overlap for handover meetings. The case study suggests that they feel their leadership skills and expertise complement each other. They report the arrangement as successful due to continuous communication between the heads and flexibility in sharing workload.⁸⁸

- FE News reported a case study of a Federation that has implemented a range of measures (including flexible working) to help reduce teacher workload.⁸⁹ PPA can be taken off site and each teacher has a mentor from the leadership team with whom they can discuss their needs and how they are managing with flexible hours.⁹⁰ This is similar to a practice reported by Ed Schools Week where Brooklands Primary School staff are given the choice to take their PPA time at home or stay in school. They are also able to spend time away from school during the school day to run personal errands when not teaching. This increased level of autonomy has been reported by staff at the school as helping them to feel more valued.⁹¹

2.6 Key learning points

Existing literature needs to be treated with caution due to the gaps in detail regarding methodological approaches, a lack of clear definition of what 'flexible working' has comprised in previous research studies, the promotional or subjective nature of some of the materials, and potential bias in findings where samples were selected, for example, from membership databases.

There are gaps in up-to-date research regarding the implementation of flexible working in practice in schools. Where flexible working is considered, this tends to focus on part-time and job share arrangements, suggesting there is room for more research on alternative approaches that may not all include contractual processes.

⁸⁶ Woolcock, N. (2017), 'Head teachers take job shares to ease pressure', *The Times*, 9 January 2017; <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/head-teachers-take-job-shares-to-ease-pressure-zlnt5p8zc>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The London Leadership Strategy (July 2016) Co-Headship: the future solution to school leadership. <http://londonleadershipstrategy.com/content/co-headship-future-solution-school-leadership>.

⁸⁹ feNEWS.co.uk (July 2018) Department for Education. Case Study: Supporting NQTs and teachers with work life balance. <https://www.fenews.co.uk/press-releases/18133-case-study-supporting-nqts-and-teachers-with-work-life-balance>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Whitaker, F. (2018) 'How are schools implementing flexible working?', *Ed Schools Week*, 24 February 2018; <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/how-are-schools-implementing-flexible-working/>.

Reasons for teachers requesting flexible working opportunities often reflect the perceived benefits for individuals, such as achieving an improved work/life balance and being able to meet family/care responsibilities. Benefits to schools have been found to include the employment of a more diverse range of skills and experience, reduction in absenteeism, potential reduction in staff turnover, and support for succession and/or retirement planning.

Perceived barriers to flexible working in schools that were identified in the literature included: costs to the school, logistical challenges (i.e. timetabling complexities), the idea that parents prefer one point of contact/do not like split teaching (particularly in primary schools), and that it is perceived as not possible or convenient for the school.

The attitudes of senior leaders towards flexible working appear to be a key factor influencing teachers' experiences. Nonetheless, they are noted to be part of an approach to improving perceptions of teacher workload and work/life balance in some schools. Recent research has highlighted that they may be most beneficial when part of a package of approaches to tackling recruitment and retention in schools.

3. Case study: Higher Education

This case study focuses on the implementation of different forms of flexible working for teaching staff in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

3.1 Context

Academic and/or teaching work in HE offers an inherent level of flexibility due to the nature of the roles and tasks undertaken, as they tend to be split between teaching, research and administrative tasks.⁹² Flexible working for academics typically comprises working remotely/from home or with flexible hours on an informal basis and as work commitments allow.⁹³ In a survey of nearly 1,000 HE employees, The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education found that a small proportion of HE employees did not feel able to access flexible working opportunities (12% of male employees and 14% of female employees).⁹⁴ Despite this level of flexible working, recent literature published by unions has indicated high levels of stress, workload, a poor perception of work/life balance, and a historic gender gap within the HE teaching profession.⁹⁵

An increase in zero-hour contracts has been raised as an area of concern across the sector, particularly where they are used as a 'flexible working' option for the employment of teaching-only staff. It has been estimated that nearly half of teaching only staff (47%) are employed on zero-hour contracts.⁹⁶ Therefore, there have been calls from unions for institutions to find ways to meet a need for operational efficiency, whilst providing formal policies for working practices and considering different approaches to flexible working.⁹⁷

Thus, in recent years, HEIs have looked towards the formal implementation of flexible working policies and processes as a means to promote HE as a supportive working

⁹² Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (2015), *Leadership and work-life balance: Higher Education Leadership and Management Survey (HELMs)*, p.19.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ The sample comprised 848 members of staff working in HEIs and that had engaged with the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in the preceding ten years. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (2015), *Leadership and work-life balance: Higher Education Leadership and Management Survey (HELMs)*, p.19.

⁹⁵ Bothwell, E., 'Work-life balance survey 2018: long hours take their toll on academics', *Times Higher Education*, 8 February 2018: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/work-life-balance-survey-2018-long-hours-take-their-toll-academics>; UCU (2016), *UCU Workload Survey 2016*; UCU (2013), *Higher stress: A survey of stress and well-being among staff in Higher Education*.

⁹⁶ This information was obtained via a Freedom of Information request to HEIs from the University and College Union. University and College Union (2013), *The Use of Zero Hours Contracts in Further and Higher Education*.

⁹⁷ Ibid.; UCU (2016), *Precarious work in further education: Insecure employment and institutional attitudes within the English FE sector*.

environment, as well as to address the under-representation of women in a range of roles including academic/teaching careers.⁹⁸

3.2 Trialling flexible working in HE

In 2005 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), in partnership with Staffordshire University, completed a four-year Flexible Employment Options (FEO) project.⁹⁹ The FEO project comprised multiple approaches:¹⁰⁰

- Auditing flexible working practices in England's HEIs (through surveys).
- Researching and trialling flexible working options with more than 500 employees in four HE institutions¹⁰¹ plus a control group where flexible working was not trialled, to allow for comparative analysis.
- Case study questionnaires gathering details regarding the experiences of individual members of staff across a range of roles, and their line managers.
- Developing a training module for line managers to help support the implementation of flexible working practices across the sector.

During the audit, it was established that HEIs were more likely to have formal policies in place to cover flexitime and job share arrangements rather than approaches such as working from home (the majority [87%] of HEIs had job share policies in place for academic teaching staff, and 44% reported they had formal policies in place for flexitime).¹⁰² However, formal policies had not generally translated into high levels of take-up. The authors of the study suggested that this may have been due to a lack of perceived support among line managers, particularly for job sharing between those with leadership responsibility (however this was not explored within the study itself).¹⁰³

The FEO project trialled eight approaches to flexible working within HE: seasonal hours, flexitime, reduced or staggered or compressed hours, working from home, taking unpaid leave, and personalised annual leave. The project involved both teaching and non-teaching staff, stating that for flexible working initiatives to be successful in complex

⁹⁸ Universities and Colleges Employers Association (2011), *New JNCHES Equality Working Group Overview Report*.

⁹⁹ HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2004), *Flexible Employment Options (FEO) Project: Summary business case*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Staffordshire University, Christchurch Canterbury, De Montford University and University of Birmingham.

¹⁰² HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education. Job Share: A report*, p.14; HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education. Flexitime: A report*, p.13.

¹⁰³ HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education. Job Share: A report*, p.31.

organisations, they needed to ‘work effectively across all...functional areas’.¹⁰⁴ For example, IT personnel may be asked to ensure that the necessary hardware/software is made available to, and operates efficiently for, those working remotely (both in their own team, and across the institution).¹⁰⁵

During the course of the trial, which involved over 500 HEI employees, a range of challenges and benefits were reported as a result of flexible working. It also established that these differed according to the forms of flexible working in place (see Table 3).¹⁰⁶

Table 2: Outcomes of HEFCE Flexible Employment Options Project (2001-2005)¹⁰⁷

	Challenges	Benefits/outcomes
Flexitime, compressed /staggered hours	<p>Arranging meetings can be more challenging, as can the organisation of workload at peak/quieter times of the years.</p> <p>It may be disruptive having members of staff arrive/leave a different hours, and some line managers can find it difficult to manage this.</p> <p>The apparent flexibility available to academic teaching staff is not always put into practice/ experienced due to high workloads.</p>	<p>Extends the ‘working day’ for the institution, thereby meeting a wider range of student needs and increasing both employee and student satisfaction; these options also helped to support employees in achieving work/life balance.</p> <p>Enables employees to manage personal appointments, emergencies or other responsibilities through the use of flexible start and/or finish times.</p> <p>Ability for staff to have independence to develop work/life balance, and balance teaching, research and admin tasks.</p> <p>Reduces travel time to/from work, and leads to reduced costs of travel or care requirements (e.g. when travelling outside of peak commute hours, journey times can be shorter).</p>

¹⁰⁴ HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education: Homeworking – A report*, p.24.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ An evaluation of the success/impact of the trial was not identified during this review.

¹⁰⁷ HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2004), *Flexible Employment Options (FEO) Project: Summary business case*, p.6-7; HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education. Homeworking: A report*; HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education. Job Share: A report*; HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education. Flexitime: A report*.

	Challenges	Benefits/outcomes
Job share / part-time	<p>Some job share partners reported not having adequate handover time; if communications are not consistent and regularly taking place between partners, information can be missed, risking a lack of continuity.</p> <p>Early implementation challenges can include duplication of effort as partners agree responsibilities and delegation of tasks.</p>	<p>Reduces staff turnover.</p> <p>Reduces costs for universities due to less reliance on temporary/casual staff.</p> <p>Ability to meet care responsibilities and/or pursue further study/CPD.</p> <p>Job sharers also report enjoyment of being able to share ideas, and have someone to solve problems with.</p> <p>It can help with workload – e.g. there is always cover during a period of leave so an individual will not return to a large backlog of work.</p>
Working from home	<p>Staff in HEIs can feel awkward about requesting this option if it is not included within formal policies with clear expectations set out; however, working from home often used informally/ad hoc rather than with a written agreement.</p>	<p>Reduces stress/improved employee wellbeing by reducing travel time to and from work and reducing the costs of travel, childcare or other care needs.</p> <p>Employees more positive about the institution because they feel work/life balance and personal needs are being considered.</p>

Since the FEO trial, the Athena Project has focused on changing the culture in academic scientific research to attract and support women working in the field.¹⁰⁸ In 2014, the Athena Project identified ten core action areas to be addressed across HE, one of which was for university departments to ‘ensure the [provision of] flexibility that underpins successful careers’.¹⁰⁹ It found that ‘family friendly’ policies, although in place, were not always taken up by academic staff due to departmental culture of being seen at work (‘presenteeism’) or a lack of awareness of flexible working policies among staff.¹¹⁰ This

¹⁰⁸ Fox, C. (2014), *The Athena Project Review: A report on the Athena Project’s impact and learning for future diversity programmes*.

¹⁰⁹ Fox, C. (2014), *The Athena Project Review: A report on the Athena Project’s impact and learning for future diversity programmes*, p.20.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.20.

was a particular disadvantage to those with care responsibilities, and female staff were reported to find promotion more difficult in part due to the lack of flexibility in timings of lectures, seminars and networking opportunities.¹¹¹

In addition, a large research study by the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice on managing age diversity across the HE workforce highlighted a lack of awareness of opportunities for phased retirement (71% of 5,763 HE staff did not know if their pension scheme allowed for flexible options).¹¹² In this context, the managers of older academic staff perceived flexible working to be a challenge, particularly in relation to timetabling and managing space. In contrast, senior academics regarded the concept of phased retirement positively, believing it to be a proactive approach to succession planning, helpful in supporting older academics to maintain their 'freshness' and enabling departments to free up funding for junior posts.¹¹³

3.3 Examples of existing practice

Some HEIs have developed and published online guidance and case studies of how flexible working practices are made available and implemented across their workforce to promote and raise awareness of the possibilities and opportunities available to staff.¹¹⁴ Others have been included in flexible working case studies for Acas, unions and broader research projects.¹¹⁵ Across these case studies, practices are described at both organisational and individual levels, and these have been summarised below.

3.3.1 Strategic approaches (organisational level)

- Organisations ensure opportunities for flexible working are made clear in recruitment advertisements, with all posts being eligible for flexible working.¹¹⁶ Job shares are considered for a range of patterns (e.g. 50:50 or 60:40), with a period of overlap guaranteed for handover.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice (2008), *Developing Good Practice in Managing Age Diversity in the Higher Education Sector: An Evidence-Based Approach*, p.56 – 58.

¹¹³ Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice (2008), *Developing Good Practice in Managing Age Diversity in the Higher Education Sector: An Evidence-Based Approach*, p.58.

¹¹⁴ Examples include: SMPCS, 'Flexible Working': <http://www.reading.ac.uk/SMPCS/smpcs-equality-and-diversity-flexible-working.aspx>; University of Exeter, 'Flexible working toolkit': <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/employment/leave/flexibleworking/>.

¹¹⁵ For example: Leeds Metropolitan University in UNISON (2014), *Flexible working: making it work*, p.26-27; Athena SWAN, *Factsheet 2: Best Practice – Work-life balance*; London School of Economics in Acas (2017), *Flexible working for parents returning to work: Maintaining career development*, p.22-24

¹¹⁶ UNISON (2014), *Flexible working: making it work*, p.26-27.

¹¹⁷ University of Exeter, 'Flexible working toolkit': <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/employment/leave/flexibleworking/>.

- To recognise flexible working practices, departments may choose not to specify hours of work in contracts or include references to a 'standard working day', but rather an annualised number of hours required per year.¹¹⁸
- Training and development includes line managers being trained on updates to flexible working policies and how to manage by performance/productivity rather than number of hours worked;¹¹⁹ guidance/toolkit on flexible working being produced for line managers;¹²⁰ the delivery of work/life balance workshops to staff, or events focused on balancing care commitments with work, as well as other opportunities such as the creation of parent-staff networks.¹²¹
- One HEI surveyed its staff to establish awareness of its flexible working policies.¹²²

3.3.2 Operational approaches (departmental/individual level)

- Job share and part-time staff setting expectations by including working hours on email signatures (days, shift patterns/hours), having specific non-working days, monitoring work hours to control workload, working during busy periods of term and taking time off in lieu during quieter periods.¹²³
- Offering one-to-one meetings with HR personnel to ensure tailored advice on flexible working, and employing an advisor for work/life balance to help individuals work out the working practices that will meet their needs such as family/care commitments.¹²⁴
- Software facilities adopted to support remote working and keeping in touch (e.g. online calendars).¹²⁵
- Scheduling meetings for when flexible workers are on-site, during 'family-friendly' hours, extended lunch breaks, or a gradual change in hours to facilitate the return to full-time working.¹²⁶
- HEIs who responded to HEFCE's FEO project emphasised the importance of clear, consistent and regular communication between the individuals involved in

¹¹⁸ University of Exeter HR Services, 'Flexible working: an overview for Education & Scholarship and Education & Research staff'.

¹¹⁹ Athena SWAN, *Factsheet 2: Best Practice – Work-life balance*; UNISON (2014), *Flexible working: making it work*, p.26-27.

¹²⁰ For example: University of Exeter, 'Flexible working toolkit': <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/employment/leave/flexibleworking/>.

¹²¹ Acas (2017), *Flexible working for parents returning to work: Maintaining career development*, p.22-24.

¹²² Athena SWAN, *Factsheet 2: Best Practice – Work-life balance*.

¹²³ SMPCS, 'Flexible Working': <http://www.reading.ac.uk/SMPCS/smpcs-equality-and-diversity-flexible-working.aspx>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ UNISON (2014), *Flexible working: making it work*, p.26-27.

¹²⁶ Athena SWAN, *Factsheet 2: Best Practice – Work-life balance*.

job share arrangements to ensure that both remained up-to-date. This included scheduling time for weekly update meetings with each other, log books for projects, sharing responsibility and workload, and drawing on each other's strengths.¹²⁷

Although impact/evaluation data on these approaches is limited, some evidence has been identified during this review. As a result of its promotion of flexible working opportunities, the University of Reading's School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences (SMPCS) has reported an increase in staff taking up part-time posts, improved retention and an increase in high quality applicants to job roles.¹²⁸ Leeds Metropolitan University reported several members of staff changing their hours to reduced or compressed patterns of work.¹²⁹ The London School of Economics (LSE) were reported by Acas to have achieved improved equality in the workplace, with more male and female employees taking up opportunities available to them.¹³⁰

3.4 Key learning points for schools

- In order for flexible working arrangements to be successful in meeting both individual and institutional need, it may be helpful to consider the perspective of all stakeholders (typically staff, students and senior leaders). It may also be beneficial to have all operational teams on board as several different personnel and/or departments may be integral to their successful implementation (e.g. HR, finance and IT in large schools/across academy trusts).
- The adoption, circulation and promotion of formal flexible working policies may make a difference to the take-up of and support for flexible working across a school. The implementation of formal policies and processes could also be included in promotional materials to attract a wide range of potential recruits.
- Flexible working may be a key recruitment strategy for attracting and retaining a range of skilled and experienced individuals from across different generations, but policies/processes themselves need to be flexible in order to meet the needs of different types of worker.
- As found in the schools sector, those in senior leadership are important role models for creating a work culture that accepts and supports flexible working practices. Training for line managers may be important in the success of implementing effective flexible working practices, as well as clarity and consistency in communications and guidance for leaders and staff.

¹²⁷ HEFCE/Staffordshire University (2005), *Flexible Employment in Higher Education. Job Share: A report*, p.27-28.

¹²⁸ University of Reading (2016), *Normalising flexible working*.

¹²⁹ UNISON (2014), *Flexible working: making it work*, p.26-27.

¹³⁰ Acas (2017), *Flexible working for parents returning to work: Maintaining career development*, p.22-24.

4. Case Study: Health and social care

This case study focuses on perceptions and experiences of flexible working in the health and social care sector across the UK.

4.1 Context

In December 2017, a draft workforce strategy for the health and social care sector was published, noting high levels of staff turnover across the workforce and citing one of the reasons as a lack of flexibility in working practices.¹³¹ The strategy did not include a definition of flexible working or what it would look like in practice. Instead, it suggested that the sector ‘has much to learn’ about the value employees place on being able to manage their work/life balance and access flexible working options. A key priority for the National Health Service (NHS) was therefore identified as a need to ‘enable’ a flexible and adaptable workforce, ensuring employers offer working patterns to ‘reflect the way people live now’.¹³²

As in HE, meeting the needs of different generations of workers has been cited by the NHS as a major challenge facing employers across health and social care.¹³³ Despite the perceived challenges, increased flexibility has also been posited as an opportunity to meet an increasing demand for recruits.¹³⁴ For example, a review of the UK’s care workforce for the International Longevity Centre (ILC) suggested that offering part-time hours particularly could be an advantage for the sector in attracting individuals to work longer or in more than one role.¹³⁵

4.1.1 Healthcare

It is difficult to establish how many staff working within the NHS are working flexibly. Many of the arrangements are informal and made at a local level, yet alongside retirement and relocation, poor work/life balance has been one of the main reasons why individuals have reported leaving the NHS since 2011.¹³⁶ Furthermore, poor work/life balance and a lack of flexible working is cited as:¹³⁷

¹³¹ NHS (2017), *Facing the Facts, Shaping the Future: A draft health and care workforce strategy for England to 2027*.

¹³² Ibid., p.18 – 19.

¹³³ Ibid., p.7; Franklin, B. (2017), *The Future Care Workforce*.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Franklin, B. (2017), *The Future Care Workforce*.

¹³⁶ See: NHS Digital (2018), ‘Reasons for Leaving, Staff Movements’: <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/56059f48-e736-4345-ad83-3b05b05d2557/nhs-workforce-reasons-for-leaving-staff-movements>.

¹³⁷ Deloitte (2018), *Time to care: Securing a future for the hospital workforce in the UK*, p.16-17; Jones, K., Warren, A., and A. Davies, (2015), *Mind the Gap: Exploring the needs of early career nurses and midwives in the workplace*, p.6-7.

- Affecting levels of job satisfaction among doctors and nurses.
- A contributing factor in the declining number of applications to study nursing.
- A significant concern for early career midwives.

4.1.2 Social care

Skills for Care manages the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC),¹³⁸ which collects data on the adult social care sector in England. In its latest analysis (2017), Skills for Care established a workforce of approximately 1.34 million in the independent and local authority (LA) sectors, with 37% working part-time and 12% having no fixed hours (the remainder were employed full-time).¹³⁹ Due to the changing care needs of the population¹⁴⁰ the sector is seeking to identify new ways to attract and retain high quality staff. Among these approaches are options for flexible working.¹⁴¹

4.2 Perceptions and experiences of flexible working

4.2.1 Healthcare

Whilst all NHS Trusts have a flexible working policy in place, levels of staff satisfaction with flexible working opportunities is variable across Trust types and occupational groups.¹⁴² In order to gain more flexibility in their working life, nursing staff and hospital doctors in particular have been reported as choosing agency work rather than permanent employment.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Skills for Care, National Minimum Data Set for Social Care: <https://www.nmds-sc-online.org.uk/content/view.aspx?id=researchtext>.

¹³⁹ Skills for Care (2017), *The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England*, p.26.

¹⁴⁰ As examples: Age UK (2017) *The Health and Care of Older People in England 2017*; Local Government Association (2016), *Adult social care funding: 2016 state of the nation report*; House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (March 2017), *Adult social care: Ninth report of Session 2016-17*.

¹⁴¹ Skills for Care (2016), *The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England*.

¹⁴² NHS Staff Surveys: <http://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/Page/1064/Latest-Results/2017-Results/>; Timewise Foundation (2018), *Flexible Working in the NHS: The Case for Action – How designing roles flexibly will help the NHS find and keep talented staff*, p.12-13.

¹⁴³ Deloitte (2018), *Time to care: Securing a future for the hospital workforce in the UK*, p.13; Royal College of Nursing and HCL Nursing (2016), *Agency nursing under the microscope: understanding flexibility in the NHS*.

In reviewing and piloting flexible working practices within several NHS Trusts, including a review of the NHS Jobsite,¹⁴⁴ Timewise reported that flexible working opportunities generally focused on those employees with family or other care responsibilities rather than the workforce as a whole.¹⁴⁵ The literature tends to support this view, with several studies citing that care responsibilities were the main reason given by frontline staff in hospitals for working part-time.¹⁴⁶

As part of a 2014 literature review focusing on the relationship between teacher wellbeing and student outcomes (which found a lack of evidence overall), The Work Foundation carried out a comparative review on the literature available in relation to the healthcare sector.¹⁴⁷ This review reported strong evidence of ‘causal links between staff health and wellbeing and positive patient outcomes’.¹⁴⁸ It therefore suggested a need for more research in the education sector to establish whether these causal links can be ‘replicated in teaching’.¹⁴⁹

A 2008 study by the Medical Women’s Federation carried out telephone interviews and focus group discussions with 86 doctors who were either working part-time, or had worked part-time during the previous two years.¹⁵⁰ Although a small sample, the benefits of working part-time were reported by participants as:¹⁵¹

- Institutions retaining skills and expertise.
- Practitioners having a life outside of work, which helped to inform empathy with patients.
- Greater flexibility for a team/department in terms of service coverage, but also shared expertise for patients.
- Increased productivity as a result of increased focus, i.e. getting more done in a shorter time period, in comparison to full-time colleagues.
- Perceived improvements in motivation and enthusiasm for work/lack of burnout.

¹⁴⁴ NHS Jobsite, <https://www.jobsite.co.uk/jobs/nhs>. Case study examples are provided in section 4.3.

¹⁴⁵ Timewise Foundation (2018), *Flexible Working in the NHS: The Case for Action – How designing roles flexibly will help the NHS find and keep talented staff*, p.4. Note that although it has carried much of the recent research into the area, the remit of Timewise is to promote flexible working. As such, its findings and case studies focus on solutions and benefits rather than detail regarding challenges or barriers.

¹⁴⁶ Timewise Foundation (2018), *Flexible Working in the NHS: The Case for Action – How designing roles flexibly will help the NHS find and keep talented staff*; Medical Womens Federation (2008), *Making Part-time Work: Summary Report*; Prowse, J., and Prowse, P., (2015), ‘Flexible working and work-life balance: Midwives’ experiences and views’, *Work, Employment and Society* 29 (5).

¹⁴⁷ The Work Foundation (2014), *Healthy teachers, higher marks? Establishing a link between teacher health and wellbeing and student outcomes*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Medical Womens Federation (2008), *Making Part-time Work: Summary Report*.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.5

It was reported, however, that among full-time colleagues 'part-time was still seen as part-committed'.¹⁵² This was despite part-time doctors reporting working additional hours and making themselves available outside of contracted hours.¹⁵³ Senior doctors reported being more likely to find it easy to work part-time due to increased confidence and autonomy in the role, although noted that it could create gaps in expertise if a senior member of staff was not working on a particular day.¹⁵⁴ Potential risks with part-time work were reported by doctors to be:¹⁵⁵

- Difficulties in maintaining competence if skills were not deployed regularly.
- Not finding time for CPD/non-clinical tasks.
- Limiting career progression if it was not possible to work the hours required to broaden expertise or retrain.
- Some colleagues being resistant to change (e.g. where part-time arrangements were introduced).
- Poor or inefficient communication when handing over to a job share partner or when communicating issues or developments to colleagues.

Interviews with 22 midwives and 20 midwifery lecturers in England (Prowse and Prowse, 2015) identified that flexible working was used as a strategy to recruit and retain individuals into the profession. Although this was a small study, its definition of flexible working covered not just part-time or job share but also considered term-time working, twilight shifts and flexi-hours.¹⁵⁶ It found flexible working to enable midwives to balance work with personal care commitments, work longer, and gain a sense of control over their working lives. Challenges reported by midwives included receiving short notice for shift patterns, resentment among colleagues where they covered the absence of those working flexibly, and (as with hospital doctors) a perceived lack of commitment of part-time staff among full-time colleagues.¹⁵⁷ These resentments were felt by the midwives interviewed to be intensified by the challenge of providing flexible working whilst ensuring that services for users were adequately staffed at the point of need.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.9

¹⁵⁴ Medical Womens Federation (2008), *Making Part-time Work: Summary Report*, p.9.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.10-11.

¹⁵⁶ Prowse, J., and Prowse, P., (2015), 'Flexible working and work-life balance: Midwives' experiences and views', *Work, Employment and Society* 29 (5).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.15 – 18.

4.2.2 Social care

As in healthcare, a systematic review of the role of the social work profession in England (Moriarty et al., 2015) identified that social workers are increasingly attracted to agency work in order to gain access to more flexible working patterns.¹⁵⁸

In 2017, Timewise conducted focus groups and interviews with over 200 carers, support workers and managers working across east and southeast London.¹⁵⁹ This study aimed to identify the ways in which flexible working and rostering could assist recruitment and retention in the sector. Although limited geographically, the study identified confusion as to what flexible working meant in practice (including who flexible arrangements were aimed at, and who benefited from them). For example, the needs of a range of stakeholders were highlighted (employers, carers and service users all require some form of 'flexibility').¹⁶⁰ Secondly, carers reported that although they had joined the sector with a perception that social care was a flexible and family-friendly role, the realities of the job had not borne this out in practice.¹⁶¹ The key barriers to providing flexible working in the social care sector were reported by carers and their managers to be: unpredictability, tight resources (creating an 'absence of slack' within a team), unsociable hours, and long travelling time/distances between service users.¹⁶² Carers reported that they had little control over their working patterns, despite in theory having choice in their hours/rostering, and experienced short notice of working schedules and changes to them.¹⁶³

These findings led to a six-month action research pilot, implementing a team-based approach to 'compatible scheduling' for ten support workers. 'Compatible scheduling' meant working with carers to design jobs and working patterns across the team that were 'as far as possible, compatible with carers' non-work lives'.¹⁶⁴ It identified that a team-based approach 'gave carers greater control and input into their working times', and perceptions of increased fairness across schedules. It was also suggested that some roles could be re-designed to provide balance between tasks that were non-time specific (e.g. administration) and those that were time specific (e.g. providing direct care/meals) thus enabling shifts to be scheduled in blocks.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ Moriarty, J., Baginsky, M., and Manthorpe, J. (2015), *Literature review of roles and issues within the social work profession in England*, p.16.

¹⁵⁹ Timewise Foundation (2017), *Caring by Design: How care providers can improve recruitment and retention by redesigning care jobs to be more compatible with carers' non-work lives*.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10-11.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁶⁴ Timewise Foundation (2017), *Caring by Design: How care providers can improve recruitment and retention by redesigning care jobs to be more compatible with carers' non-work lives*, p.4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.23.

4.3 Examples of existing practice

The following examples are drawn from case studies that highlight how organisations have implemented flexible working policies across the health and social care workforce. In many examples these policies and practices are promoted alongside a range of additional initiatives, particularly those related to enhanced leave entitlements.

- UNISON has provided examples of initiatives put into place across a range of different public sector organisations to support flexible working.¹⁶⁶ This includes Kings College Hospital NHS Trust reducing absenteeism and boosting recruitment rates through flexible rostering, and implementing part-time working widely throughout the organisation. A guidance booklet to help employees and managers select the most appropriate flexible working options for their needs has also been introduced.¹⁶⁷
- Timewise is working with several NHS Trusts in England¹⁶⁸ to scope the potential for flexible working and possible impacts on staff retention:¹⁶⁹
 - An 18-month project ('FLEX-Ability in Nursing') is being undertaken in partnership with three hospitals.¹⁷⁰ A small team collaborates on creating a rota and communicating this to others, negotiating any changes required. Anecdotal feedback from the staff involved includes that the trial has created a sense of 'collective responsibility and cooperation' among colleagues, nurses have a better understanding of how the rostering system works, and an increased level of flexible working preferences have been accommodated due to clearer communication across the team.¹⁷¹
 - Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Trust's speech and language therapy service team reviewed its flexible working policy to encourage applications for flexible working. This included training managers on how to manage requests, introducing health and wellbeing champions to promote flexible working, and allocating meeting time for teams to share needs and establish how to balance operational and individual requirements. The project led to 63% of staff agreeing flexible working arrangements (although

¹⁶⁶ UNISON (2014), *Flexible working: making it work.*, p.24 – 28.

¹⁶⁷ UNISON (2014), *Flexible working: making it work*, p.27-28.

¹⁶⁸ Birmingham Children's Hospital, Nottingham University Hospital, Southampton, Guys and St Thomas, and Gloucester Care Trust.

¹⁶⁹ Timewise Foundation (2018), *Flexible Working in the NHS: The Case for Action – How designing roles flexibly will help the NHS find and keep talented staff*, p.14.

¹⁷⁰ Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospital, Nottingham University Hospital and University Hospital Southampton.

¹⁷¹ Timewise Foundation (2018), *Flexible Working in the NHS: The Case for Action – How designing roles flexibly will help the NHS find and keep talented staff*; Gascoigne, C. 'Piloting team-based rostering for FlexAbility in Nursing', *Timewise*, <https://timewise.co.uk/article/piloting-team-based-rostering-flexability-nursing/>.

it is not made clear how many staff this comprised), and increased levels of staff satisfaction and attendance.¹⁷²

- Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is reviewing its flexible working policy, involving an assessment of what the key aims of flexible working are. Work to date has included an update of its flexible working policy, development and distribution of guidance on flexible working to staff, and workshops to identify challenges for specific roles.¹⁷³

4.4 Key learning points for schools

- As per the schools sector, research in health and social care has highlighted that part-time workers may undertake more contracted hours, thus limiting the potential work/life balance benefits of working flexibly. This suggests the need to ensure that cultural change takes place across an organisation when introducing new or changing working practise. Agreeing and communicating objectives of flexible working to all team members (and what the main aims are) may be beneficial.
- Resentment between colleagues on different working arrangements may occur due to the challenges of trying to provide flexible working and ensuring that the organisation is staffed at the point of need. Therefore, as identified in the HE case study, training for senior leaders/line managers may be beneficial for the effective organisation of flexible working arrangements.
- The findings in health and social care suggest the need for organisations to consider varying flexible working arrangements and job design solutions according to role and job types.
- It is notable that where hospitals report improvements in staff retention, productivity or reduced absenteeism, they have tended to focus on small-team approaches to flexible working. For schools, this may be possible where personnel in the same key stage, subject leaders or departments/faculties can work together to create flexible working arrangements to suit their team.
- There was an apparent contradiction that the health and social care workforce requires flexibility in their working patterns, but also predictability in terms of knowing when they will work. Subsequently, this creates challenges for managers and those responsible for scheduling shifts. One approach taken by employers within social care and potentially transferable to schools, was to balance employee

¹⁷² Timewise Foundation (2018), *Flexible Working in the NHS: The Case for Action – How designing roles flexibly will help the NHS find and keep talented staff*, p.15. The service has produced a video describing the impact of flexible working on the workforce and how requests are managed. This includes case studies from individual staff members. See: Derbyshire Community Health Services (2017), 'Speech and Language Therapy: Flexible Working Impact', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9N-d2q8Ux4&feature=youtu.be>.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.17.

time between time specific and non-time specific tasks (thus in a school setting this would relate to teaching and non-teaching time). This approach enables the hours of flexible workers to be scheduled according to blocks of time.

6. Case Study: Private sector

This case study focuses on perceptions and experiences of flexible working in the private sector, and ways in which challenges to flexible working have been overcome.

6.1 Context

Over the last ten years, there has been much focus on flexible working across UK business. A significant basis for this was the outcome of a two-year research project undertaken by Cranfield University and published in 2008.¹⁷⁴ This study involved seven multi-national companies¹⁷⁵ comprising 3,580 survey responses, 123 interviews, and focus groups with 60 staff and stakeholders.¹⁷⁶ Overall, the study identified a positive relationship between flexible working and employee performance.¹⁷⁷ It contributed evidence to the Walsh Review, which led to legislative changes relating to the rights of parents to request flexible working.¹⁷⁸

Other drivers of increased flexible working in the private sector include:¹⁷⁹

- Globalisation.
- Increased competition and emphasis on developing high quality customer services.
- The changing demographics and make-up of the workforce.
- An increasing demand for work/life balance from employees.
- New forms of technology making it possible for employees to work flexibly and share information and ideas quickly.
- A drive for sustainability, meaning that employers are looking at ways to cut travel and carbon emissions.

¹⁷⁴ Cranfield University (2008), *Flexible Working and Performance: Summary of Research*.

¹⁷⁵ These were: Centrica, Citi, KPMG, Lehman Brothers, Microsoft, Pfizer and the Defence Aerospace branch of Rolls Royce.

¹⁷⁶ Respondents represented those who adopted a range of flexible working patterns, those who were colleagues or managers of flexible workers, and those who did not participate in flexible working at the time of the study.

¹⁷⁷ Cranfield University (2008), *Flexible Working and Performance: Summary of Research*, p.3.

¹⁷⁸ Walsh, I. (2008), *The Walsh Review of Flexible Working*.

¹⁷⁹ Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, *Agile Working: A Guide for Employers*, p.6 – 8; The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.3.

The UK Labour Force Survey shows that 26% of the workforce works part-time, and 14% work from home.¹⁸⁰ Historically there has been a gender disparity in part-time working, with proportionally more women than men taking these roles. However, the gender gap for all forms of flexible work (including part-time) – while still significant – appears to be decreasing.¹⁸¹ The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index currently puts jobs that are openly advertised with flexible working options at 11.1%.¹⁸²

The Work Foundation (2016) has established that mobile working is no longer a phenomenon restricted to a small minority, with over half of 500 medium-to-large sized employers surveyed suggesting that they would have adopted mobile working by 2017 – and 70% suggesting they will have done so by 2020.¹⁸³ However, there remains some disparity in the availability of flexible working across different employer types. For example, during the longitudinal *Working Lives* project, 34% of 1,500 private sector employers reported that they did not offer any form of flexible working.¹⁸⁴ However, 97% of 2,011 employers interviewed during *The Fourth Work-Life Balance Survey* (BIS, 2014) reported that they offered at least one form of flexible working.¹⁸⁵ Whilst the latter survey focused on employers with five or more employees (including private, public and third sector organisations), the *Working Lives* study engaged with employers of all sizes including small and micro businesses across the private sector only, which helps to explain this discrepancy.

‘Across all forms of flexible working practices, availability was higher as establishment size increased... Availability of flexible working practices was also higher in establishments with a higher proportion of women in the workforce. In establishments where there were no women, 30 per cent had no flexible working arrangements available but in those where a majority of the workforce was female only one per cent had no flexible

¹⁸⁰ ONS Labour Force Survey data, 11 September 2018, ‘Full-time, part-time and temporary workers (not seasonally adjusted): <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/fulltimeparttimeandtemporaryworkersnotseasonallyadjustedemp01nsa>; ONS (2014), Characteristics of Homeworkers.

¹⁸¹ ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.10; for data on part-time employment by gender, see ONS (2018), ‘LFS: Part-time workers: UK: Female: Thousands’: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/yccw/lms> and ONS (2018), ‘LFS: Part-time workers: UK: Male: Thousands’: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/yccv/lms>.

¹⁸² Of roles with a full-time equivalent salary of £20,000 or more. This is based on analysis of six million adverts from over 300 job boards during the first quarter of 2018. Timewise Foundation (2017), *Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative. A research study into the UK Workforce: Who wants flexibility, for what reasons, and how much it matters to them*, p.2; Timewise Foundation (2018), *The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2018: An annual index of the proportion of UK jobs advertised with flexible working options*, p.2.

¹⁸³ The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.5.

¹⁸⁴ Aviva (2017), *Working Lives Report 2017: A research report into employer and employee attitudes to workplace pensions, savings and benefits*, p.18.

¹⁸⁵ BIS (2014), *The Fourth Work-Life Balance Employer Survey* (2013), p.7.

working practices available to employees... Conversely the availability of flexible working practices was lower in small, private sector or male-dominated establishments.’¹⁸⁶

6.2 Perceptions and experiences of flexible working

Since the Flexible Working Regulations were introduced, there has been much research undertaken to develop an evidence base of the UK workforce’s experiences of flexible working.¹⁸⁷ Generally this research has focused on the experiences of employees, those in managerial positions or with responsibility for recruitment decisions. Many studies include analysis by gender, and a limited amount of research focuses on the experiences of older workers (those aged 50 and over).

6.2.1 Perceived benefits of flexible working

Within the literature, a number of reasons are provided by employees as to why they take up flexible working options. These are:¹⁸⁸

- Improved productivity, performance and engagement, and more creativity and innovation.
- Better work/life balance, positive impact on wellbeing and happiness (including reduction in stress and pressure, and ability to pursue or integrate other activities into daily life).
- Improved ability to manage care responsibilities for children/other family members.
- Improved job satisfaction.
- Reduced travel time and costs.

An online survey with 3,001 UK adults was carried out by ComRes on behalf of Timewise (2017), and found that those aged 18-34 were more likely to cite leisure or childcare as their reason for flexible working, those 35-54 cited travel time for the commute, and those

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.27-28.

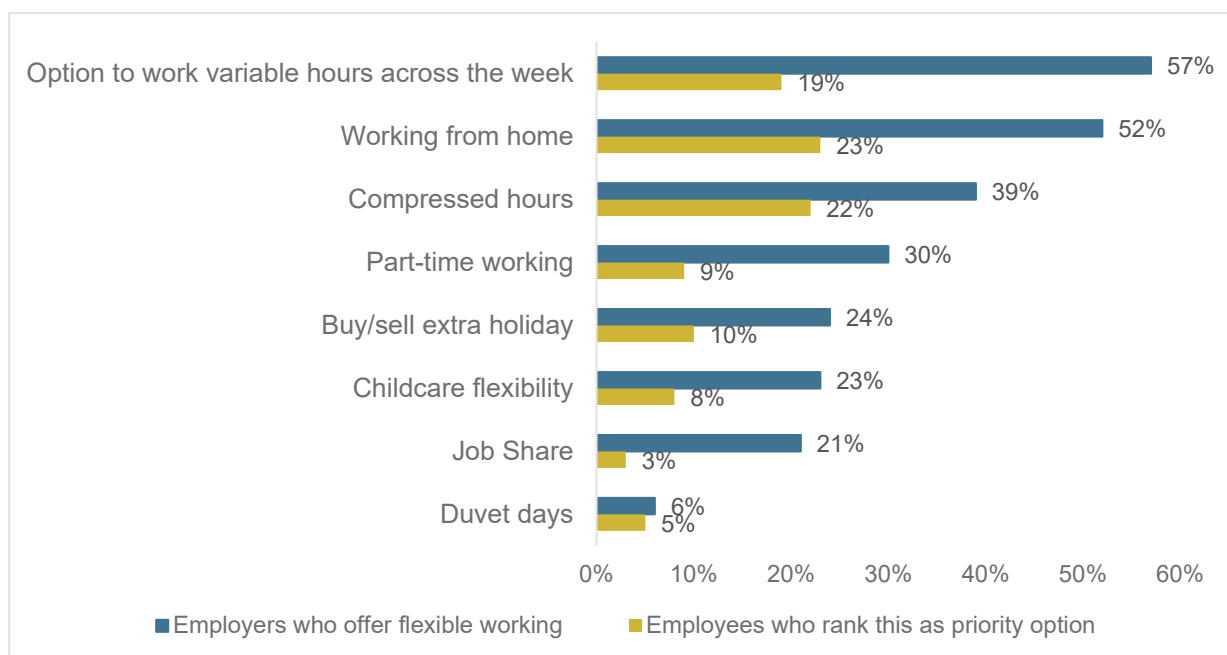
¹⁸⁷ As examples: CIPD (2012), *Flexible working provision and uptake*; Recruitment and Employment Confederation (2012), *REC Flexible Work Commission Report*; BIS (2014), *The Fourth Work-Life Balance Employer Survey*; Timewise Foundation (2017), *Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative. A research study into the UK Workforce: Who wants flexibility, for what reasons, and how much it matters to them*; Regus (2017), *The workplace revolution: A picture of flexible working 2017*.

¹⁸⁸ Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, *Agile Working: A Guide for Employers*; The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.11; CIPD (2016), *Employee Outlook: Employee Views on Working Life – Commuting and flexible working*, p.2-3; Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*, p.6-7; ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*; Timewise (2017), *Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative. A research study into the UK Workforce: Who wants flexibility, for what reasons, and how much it matters to them*; Aviva (2017), *Working Lives Report 2017: A research report into employer and employee attitudes to workplace pensions, savings and benefits*, p.18.

aged 55+ most commonly cited work/life balance or convenience.¹⁸⁹ The same study also identified a gender-gap in the reasons for part-time working specifically: 42% of female part-time employees cited care responsibilities as a motivation for part-time working, compared to 17% of male employees.¹⁹⁰

The *Working Lives* report (2017) published results of an online survey of 1,500 private sector employers and 6,000 private sector employees between 2013 and 2017 (across the UK).¹⁹¹ This identified that working from home is the preferred form of flexible working among private sector employees, with employers most commonly offering the ability to work variable hours across the week (not including part-time) and over half offering working from home (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Types of flexible working offered to employees compared to those most valued¹⁹²



(Base: 6000 private sector employees; 1500 employers)

¹⁸⁹ The interview sample comprised 1,250 full-time employees; 750 part-time employees; 500 self-employed people; 501 people who were not working but wanted to work. The data for full-time employees and for part-time employees were weighted to be representative of the UK working population for those employment types. Timewise Foundation (2017), *Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative. A research study into the UK Workforce: Who wants flexibility, for what reasons, and how much it matters to them*, p.6.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Aviva (2017), *Working Lives Report 2017: A research report into employer and employee attitudes to workplace pensions, savings and benefits*.

¹⁹² Source: Aviva (2017), *Working Lives Report 2017: A research report into employer and employee attitudes to workplace pensions, savings and benefits*, p.20.

Private sector employers also report their perceived benefits of flexible working within a range of research studies:¹⁹³

- Increased productivity and efficiency, including reduced costs and evidence of greater commitment and loyalty to an organisation (e.g. using less office space, less travel, improved staff performance, reduced absenteeism and staff turnover).
- Improved business continuity and customer service (e.g. extended business hours), being able to operate and compete effectively in an increasingly 24/7 culture, offering customer service outside of the traditional '9 to 5' hours, filling gaps and meeting organisational need.
- Development and innovation (e.g. attracting high quality recruits, reducing carbon footprint by enabling homeworking).

The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) has established (as in schools) that previous experience of flexible working can be a key factor in managers perceiving it positively. Those less experienced were found to be 'understandably wary' about how it works in practice, particularly in terms of its impact on productivity and effectiveness of team working.¹⁹⁴

6.2.2 Perceived challenges to flexible working

In 2008, the impact study of flexible working on employee performance by Cranfield University (discussed earlier) established that 'the key issue for organisations is culture...the majority offer a well-developed suite of flexible working options and attendant benefits. However, the culture of the organisation will often reflect how far these policies have penetrated'.¹⁹⁵ In the ten years since the publication of the Cranfield study, little appears to have changed in terms of the perceived challenges to flexible working. Research continues to identify that the most significant barriers to adopting flexible working are organisational cultures, processes and management practices.¹⁹⁶ For example, ILM (2016) established that, despite most managers being positive about flexible working and most organisations offering it, there remained a 'visible undercurrent of negativity and resentment...surrounding flexible working'.¹⁹⁷ For example:

¹⁹³ Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, *Agile Working: A Guide for Employers*, p.4; The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.15 – 16; Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012), *Building a Sustainable Quality Part-Time Recruitment Market*, p.4; ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*; BIS (2014), *Costs and Benefits to Business of Adopting Work Life Balance Working Practices: A Literature Review*.

¹⁹⁴ ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.11.

¹⁹⁵ Cranfield University (2008), *Flexible Working and Performance: Summary of Research*, p.5.

¹⁹⁶ The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.7; CIPD (2016), *Employee Outlook: Employee Views on Working Life – Commuting and flexible working*, p.3.

¹⁹⁷ ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.13.

‘While managers believe that flexible workers are often skilled and experienced, more than two thirds (69 per cent) believe flexible workers are ‘less ambitious’ than full time workers.’¹⁹⁸

Employers were reported by Acas to be concerned about a reduction in productivity if they introduced flexible working across their workforce.¹⁹⁹ Timewise identified during a survey of 500 UK-based managers with responsibility for key recruitment decisions that although nearly three quarters (7 in 10) felt that flexible workers were ‘underused as a pool of talent’, the same proportion had not received training on how to deal with enquiries from those looking to take up work on a flexible basis. Less than one third reported that their business was ‘open’ to offering flexible working as part of managerial-level roles, dropping to 14% for director-level and 9% for leadership.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, making a request for flexible working may not always be easy. The *Working Lives* (2017) report found that 21% of the workforce would not feel confident to ask their employer for flexible working,²⁰¹ and one-third of managers reported to ILM either that they did not feel they could ask for flexible working, or it was not embraced fully by their organisation.²⁰² Earlier research by Timewise (2013) indicated that employees can feel anxious and uncertain about when to ask for flexible working, and believe that it may damage their chances of securing employment.²⁰³

When asked why they did not offer flexible working, employers participating in the *Working Lives* study who did not offer flexible working (510 employers) most commonly cited concerns for a loss of efficiency (39%) or the need for core business hours to be staffed (30%). Other reasons were cost implications (e.g. salary, national insurance contributions, and HR time for employing more than one person in a part-time/job share capacity), potential detrimental effect on customers, rota complexities, not thinking staff will want the option, or not having enough staff to make processes work.²⁰⁴

Perceived disadvantages of recruiting flexible workers are commonly cited by employers in existing literature to be:²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁹⁹ Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*, p.1.

²⁰⁰ Timewise Foundation (2014), *A flexible future for Britain?*, p.2.

²⁰¹ Aviva (2017), *Working Lives Report 2017: A research report into employer and employee attitudes to workplace pensions, savings and benefits*, p.2.

²⁰² ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.13.

²⁰³ Timewise Foundation (2013), *The Flexibility Trap*, p.4.

²⁰⁴ Source: Aviva (2017), *Working Lives Report 2017: A research report into employer and employee attitudes to workplace pensions, savings and benefits*, p.22.

²⁰⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012), *Building a Sustainable Quality Part-Time Recruitment Market*, p.4; ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*; Aviva (2017), *Working Lives Report 2017: A research report into employer and employee attitudes to workplace pensions, savings and benefits*; Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*.

- Inability to meet core business hours/need.
- Employee conflict/workload issues (e.g. where several want concurrent time off, or where individuals feel they take on more workload due to a colleague working flexibly/fewer hours).
- Perceptions of lower commitment or ambition, additional HR and management issues (e.g. making it more difficult to manage teams, difficulties scheduling team meetings, concerns about building effective relationships with those who work remotely, and difficulties with performance management).

Research by The Work Foundation (2016) has identified that these barriers can be overcome 'when the benefits to the organisation and the individual are aligned [with] formal and agreed ways of working.'²⁰⁶ Furthermore, the *Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices* has emphasised a need to ensure that, whilst flexible working is encouraged and supported, those who may be disadvantaged through others working flexibly should be protected through the implementation of clear workplace policies and entitlements.²⁰⁷ Acas also notes that managers 'need to ensure fairness and consistency', including the avoidance of 'ad hoc arrangements' so as to build 'trust and confidence' and ensure that those working flexibly are not under-valued in the workplace.²⁰⁸ This may be particularly significant, as the ILM identified that 63% of practising managers reported that they offer 'informal flexible working hours.'²⁰⁹

6.3 Overcoming challenges: examples of practice

To overcome the challenges cited above, a series of approaches for private sector employers are synthesised below from a range of sources, including research recommendations, case studies of existing practice and employer guidance.

- Establish clear and transparent communications across the workforce, ensuring all are aware of policies, expectations and arrangements in place.²¹⁰
- Establish formal arrangements, with an understanding that at times there will be a requirement for employees to be flexible about their flexible working arrangements.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.14.

²⁰⁷ Taylor Review (2017), *Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*, p.34.

²⁰⁸ Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*, p.7.

²⁰⁹ ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.11.

²¹⁰ The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.18; Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*, p.33; ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.17.

²¹¹ Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*, p.33.

- Be consistent in practices related to the implementation of flexible working policies.²¹²
- Consider flexible working requests on an individual basis.²¹³
- Make flexible working more transparent within recruitment processes, particularly within job advertisements to show how these may work within an advertised role.²¹⁴
- Encourage flexible working among those in senior positions / with management responsibilities, to provide role models,²¹⁵ and also to attract high quality recruits (particularly those returning from a career break) back into employment.²¹⁶
- Trial flexible working where it is not currently a standard practice within an organisation; this can be done in a controlled way, to test approaches and understand the impact before rolling out a programme more widely.²¹⁷
- Ensure training is available for those managing flexible working within their teams so that effective and trusting management can be fostered.²¹⁸ CPD for line managers is crucial in helping them to manage flexible workers effectively, to reduce their judgements around the ambition/value of flexible workers and in supporting flexible workers themselves in maintaining their own ambitions and aspirations.²¹⁹

Emerging from its own research into flexible working,²²⁰ Vodafone has produced guidance on reviewing and developing flexible working environments at all levels of a business, from its workforce through to the spaces it uses to carry out its business, and the work settings it provides. The guidance also provides information on the tools deployed to support effective flexible working (e.g. software).²²¹

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*, p.33; AgeUK (2012), *A means to many ends: Older workers' experiences of flexible working*, p.9.

²¹⁴ Timewise Foundation (2014), *A flexible future for Britain?*, p.3.

²¹⁵ The Work Foundation (2016), *Working Anywhere: A Winning Formula for Good Work?*, p.17; Acas (2017), *Flexibility in the Workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations*, p.34; Timewise Foundation, *Jobs not careers: Summary findings of a 3 year longitudinal study of 80 mothers in London, who have been searching for work*, p.11.

²¹⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016), *How Flexible Hiring Could Improve Business Performance and Living Standards*, p.3.

²¹⁷ ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.17.

²¹⁸ Cranfield University (2008), *Flexible Working and Performance: Summary of Research*, p.5; AgeUK (2012), *A means to many ends: Older workers' experiences of flexible working*, p.9.

²¹⁹ ILM (2016), *Flexible working: Goodbye nine to five*, p.17.

²²⁰ Thompson, J. and Truch, E. (2013), *The Flex Factor: Realising the value of flexible working*.

²²¹ Vodafone Enterprise, *Guide to flexible working*: <https://www.vodafone.com/business/news-and-insights/white-paper/flexible-friend-or-foe-a-guide-to-flexible-working>.

6.4 Key learning points for schools

- A fundamental basis for successful flexible working practices appears to be a workplace culture that embraces and accepts flexibility, understands how it can work, and the expectations to be met. Where workplace cultures or management processes do not view flexible working positively, these may pose a significant barrier to their implementation and effectiveness.
- As identified in other sectors including education, once those in management roles have had experience of dealing with flexible working arrangements, they may be more likely to view the implementation of further options positively. This supports the idea that training and information for those in senior leadership roles is a key aspect of piloting flexible working arrangements.
- Although some arrangements may be made informally or ad-hoc, the agreement of formal policies and management processes can support flexible working arrangements as this enables expectations, boundaries and needs to be communicated clearly between employer, employee and other team members. It is also important to ensure that such policies and processes are applied consistently across the workforce to ensure transparency and equality.

7. International Case Study: Australia

This case study focuses on the ways in which flexible working is implemented in Australia's education sector and the guidance made available to schools, particularly for job share arrangements between teachers.

7.1 Context

Levels of teacher turnover in Australia are high, particularly among early career teachers (those within the first five years of their career), with an overall attrition rate between 40% and 50% across the country.²²² Each state or territory of Australia collects separate data on teacher recruitment and retention, so it is difficult to obtain a clear picture of the potential movement of teachers between areas. However, in remote locations, teacher shortages are prevalent.²²³

Australia's Fair Work Act 2009 is similar to the Flexible Working Regulations in the UK, with employees having a right to request changes in their working patterns, location or hours.²²⁴ Recently, there has been an increased focus on how flexible working could support employers to retain their workforce, and how work/life balance is 'now a strategic human resource issue' across the country.²²⁵ Similarly to the UK, creating 'more flexible working conditions' across the education sector has been suggested anecdotally as a means to tackle teacher recruitment and retention problems in Australia, alongside an improved system of longer-term mentoring and support for new teachers.²²⁶

Australia has one of the highest incidences of part-time working across all OECD countries and in the schools sector specifically this is thought to be increasing.^{227'228} A

²²² Ewing, R. (2005), 'Retaining quality early career teachers in the profession: New teacher narratives', *Change: Transformations in Education* vol. 8.1.; Gallant, A. and Riley, P. (2014), 'Early career teacher attrition: new thoughts on an intractable problem', *Teacher Development* 18:4, pp.562-580; Vukovic, R. (2015), 'Early career educators are resigning from their jobs at an alarming rate', *Education HQ Australia*, 25 August 2015; <https://au.educationhq.com/news/32435/early-career-educators-are-resigning-from-their-jobs-at-an-alarming-rate/>.

²²³ McKinnon, M. (2015), 'Teachers are leaving the profession: here's how to make them stay', *The Conversation*, 10 January 2016: <http://theconversation.com/teachers-are-leaving-the-profession-heres-how-to-make-them-stay-52697>.

²²⁴ Federal Register of Legislation, *Fair Work Act 2009*; <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2009A00028>.

²²⁵ Hudson Group (2005), *The Case for Work/Life Balance: Closing the Gap Between Policy and Practice*; Taylor, P., Rolland, L., and Zhou, Jing, (2017), 'Retaining Australian Older Workers – A Literature Review', *CSIRO-Monash Superannuation Research Cluster: Working Paper No. 2017-01*; Career Inside Track (2017), *Flexible Working. What's Working and What's Not?*.

²²⁶ McKinnon, M. (2015), 'Teachers are leaving the profession: here's how to make them stay', *The Conversation*, 10 January 2016: <http://theconversation.com/teachers-are-leaving-the-profession-heres-how-to-make-them-stay-52697>.

²²⁷ OECD (2014), *OECD Family Database*.

²²⁸ Australian Council for Educational Research (2015), *The Teacher Workforce in Australia: Supply, Demand and Data Issues*.

study of the schools workforce (receiving responses from over 13,000 individuals working across all phases of the teaching profession throughout Australia) established that over one quarter of primary teachers were working part-time, and around 20% of secondary teachers (a higher proportion than that reported by the OECD, at 16%).²²⁹ These figures are comparable to the proportion of teachers working part-time in England, which is 23% overall, according to the latest School Workforce Census.²³⁰ Teachers aged 35-44 and over 55 most commonly work part-time, and whilst it is an approach that has been credited with enabling older teachers in Australia to remain in the profession for longer,²³¹ the challenge of meeting the needs of different generations of teachers is ongoing.²³²

7.2 Perceived benefits and challenges

Job shares are the most commonly cited flexible working arrangement in literature related to teaching in the Australian education system. In 2012, the Australian Government's Productivity Commission suggested that school leaders particularly, and the teaching workforce more generally, could benefit from increased job share arrangements to tackle the needs of the workforce and improve its effectiveness and efficiency.²³³ The Commission highlighted that increased job shares would help to retain the skills and expertise of qualified teachers who may otherwise leave the profession.²³⁴ The Commission also noted that job sharing could 'facilitate specialisation', for example where one teacher in a primary job share specialises in mathematics whilst the other targets learning across humanities.²³⁵

Focused case study research has since been undertaken to explore job share arrangements across a network of teachers in 29 primary and eight secondary schools, employed by a regional provider in which nearly 12% of its employees were in formal job sharing roles.²³⁶ Although the study acknowledges the limitations of basing findings on one case study area, it notes that employment terms and conditions are comparable in the sector across Australia and thus suggests the findings are applicable more broadly.

²²⁹ ; McKenzie, P. (2014), *Staff in Australia's Schools*; Australian Council for Educational Research (2015), *The Teacher Workforce in Australia: Supply, Demand and Data Issues*, p.10; OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*; OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013: Country Note – Australia*.

²³⁰ Note that TALIS recorded data from teachers of years 7 – 10 only. DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>.

²³¹ Australian Council for Educational Research (2015), *The Teacher Workforce in Australia: Supply, Demand and Data Issues*, p.10.

²³² Australian Government (2014), *National Teaching Workforce Dataset: Data Analysis Report*.

²³³ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2012), *Schools Workforce: Productivity Commission Research Report*.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Williamson, S., Cooper, R., and Baird, M. (2015), 'Job-Sharing among teachers: positive, negative (and unintended) consequences', *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 26:3.

Those involved comprised teachers working in job shares, and those managing job sharing arrangements.

Job share partners reported few problems in working together. Where the arrangements were not successful this was attributed to partners having different teaching styles, philosophies or skills, and thus the partnership felt 'relatively unequal'.²³⁷ Some schools found arranging planning time for teachers in job share arrangements to be challenging, particularly where a relief teacher was required to cover a class whilst job share partners held a handover meeting. Headteachers in secondary schools found timetabling easier for job share arrangements, where they could schedule teachers in blocks of time teaching their specialist subjects rather than them being responsible for the 'full daily activities of a single class'.²³⁸

The benefits of job sharing were identified to be:²³⁹

- For teachers, the ability to work closely with a partner, share ideas but also reconcile responsibilities outside of work with the demands of school life. They also valued being able to maintain what they regarded as a 'quality' part-time job.
- For the school community, the contributions, commitment and expertise from two individuals (rather than one) improved retention rates and reduced levels of attrition.

Challenges included: job share teachers working unpaid overtime (for example, the high communications workload required to maintain effective job shares), and headteachers or HR personnel experiencing difficulties around implementing and administering flexible working arrangements. However, headteachers generally reported that they preferred the management of job share arrangements to permanent part-time, as they found it 'easier to schedule teachers based on equivalent full-time workloads'.²⁴⁰ Where teachers held a teaching and learning responsibility, such as subject co-ordinators, they reported challenges related to being required to complete a full-time workload for that part of their role within a part-time contract.

An unintended consequence of the increase in job-share/part-time teachers in the workforce was a subsequent increase in the numbers of temporary teachers being recruited to fill the other part of the job share or to cover leave; rather than employ on a permanent basis, schools were recruiting on temporary term-time contracts. Temporary teachers were therefore reporting precarity in employment over several years, with frustration and anxiety at not being able to secure permanent roles (and thus the financial

²³⁷ Williamson, S., Cooper, R., and Baird, M. (2015), 'Job-Sharing among teachers: positive, negative (and unintended) consequences', *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 26:3, p.8.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid., p.9-10.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

security and confidence that comes with them).²⁴¹ Furthermore, a 2013 *Longitudinal Teacher Education and Workforce Study* found that thirty percent of teaching graduates in part-time or temporary work in their first year of teaching remained in this form of employment through their second year, attributing this as a factor in hindering career progression and development due to 'inadequate access to induction programs and professional development resources and networks.'²⁴²

A small 2007 Masters by Research study aimed to fill perceived gaps in the evidence of the extent to which senior leaders in schools can achieve a work/life balance, and how they can do this practically.²⁴³ This involved a literature review along with exploratory case study interviews with twelve senior leaders across eight schools that had been involved in the Australian Department of Education's Flexible Work in Schools project or Flexible Work Working Party.²⁴⁴ The senior leaders commonly reported in their interviews that 'shared or distributed leadership' was linked to developing a positive work/life balance among this cohort of school staff.²⁴⁵

7.3 Examples of existing practice

- To create effective flexible working practices, case study research into job share arrangements identified that in one school, all teachers (not just those already working flexibly) were asked to complete a form in October 'detailing their preferred working arrangements for the following year', through which staff could specify changes such as reduced hours or job share, and any special requests, e.g. specific days to work/not work. The headteacher then drafted a timetable for the following year, taking into account as many of these requests as possible.²⁴⁶ In other schools, headteachers would timetable per class based on a full-time equivalent role and give job share partners the autonomy to agree their own time allocations.²⁴⁷
- Those in job shares emphasised the need to communicate regularly with their partners, checking emails and using a log book or communications record where

²⁴¹ The proportion of participants reporting this issue during the study is not clear. Williamson, S., Cooper, R., and Baird., M. (2015), 'Job-Sharing among teachers: positive, negative (and unintended) consequences', *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 26:3, p.12-13.

²⁴² Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (2013), *Longitudinal Teacher Education and Workforce Study (LTEWS): Final Report*, p.52-53.

²⁴³ Crozier-Durham, M. (2007), 'Work/Life Balance: Personal and Organisational Strategies of School Leaders', Master of Education thesis, Victoria University.

²⁴⁴ No published details of the project or Flexible Work Working Party have been identified through this review.

²⁴⁵ Crozier-Durham, M. (2007), 'Work/Life Balance: Personal and Organisational Strategies of School Leaders', Master of Education thesis, Victoria University, p.147.

²⁴⁶ Williamson, S., Cooper., R., and Baird., M. (2015), 'Job-Sharing among teachers: positive, negative (and unintended) consequences', *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 26:3, p.7.

²⁴⁷ Williamson, S., Cooper., R., and Baird., M. (2015), 'Job-Sharing among teachers: positive, negative (and unintended) consequences', *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 26:3, p9-10.

the day's activities were recorded. They met weekly to hand over information and keep in touch.²⁴⁸

- Schools in the Australian State of Victoria are provided with governmental guidance on how to identify, implement and support flexible working practices across their workforce.²⁴⁹ This includes checklists and frameworks for practice, and guidance for both requests and managing requests for flexible working; it also recommends regular reviews of arrangements to ensure that progress is monitored and that arrangements can be amended where required. This guidance is based on a series of 'Flexible Work Guiding Principles' for school leaders to follow (Table 5).

Table 3: Flexible Work Guiding Principles²⁵⁰

Flexible working is...	What this means in schools
...valued and supported	The case for flexibility is understood and supported in schools, with planning and decision-making undertaken through a positive and open approach (a 'can-do' attitude). Headteachers apply 'a strategic and proactive approach' to flexible working and work/life balance, including support management – communication, feedback, mentoring, trust, respect, consistency.
...aligned with school outcomes	Achievement of outcomes remains the priority and is addressed when deciding upon, designing and timetabling flexible working. The impact of flexible working on all school stakeholders is reviewed and understood.
...a two-way process to consider teacher and school needs	This means organisational accountability and individual responsibility for making flexible working practices work effectively. Teaching and learning is at the centre of senior leader decisions, with acknowledgement of potential positive outcomes in teachers' requests for flexible working and in their efforts to make them work in practice. Flexible working arrangements are not a barrier to career progression.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p.8-9.

²⁴⁹ State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2011), *Human Resources: Flexible Work in Victorian Government Schools*.

²⁵⁰ Taken from: State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2011), *Human Resources: Flexible Work in Victorian Government Schools*, p.1.

Flexible working is...	What this means in schools
...available to all, with decisions made on an individual basis	Made available to all employees including school leaders and decided case-by-case (although equality, flexible working decisions does not mean the same decision made for all).
...requires clear, transparent communication and decision-making	<p>Information on the flexible working options available to teachers are circulated to all with open and honest discussions with headteachers 'critical for evaluation and assessment' of requests and when making arrangements.</p> <p>Ensure all discussions and key outcomes are documented to minimise any misunderstandings related to agreements put in place.</p>
...open to review and change	It should be possible to amend flexible working arrangements 'to meet changing circumstances in the school or for the employee'; thus, arrangements in place need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

7.4 Key learning points

- Where job shares can enable older teachers, or those with care responsibilities, to remain in the profession, early career teachers may experience challenges in accessing full-time or permanent roles. It may therefore be important to be aware of potentially differing needs of different types of teacher through flexible working strategies, including opportunities for career progression in addition to working longer or for phased retirement.
- An increase in part-time or job share roles may increase the numbers of temporary teachers being recruited to fill job shares or cover leave. This may create challenges for schools in managing several temporary term-time contracts.
- Varying approaches to job share (e.g. timetabling in blocks or partnering specialists in complementary aspects of the curriculum) offer a useful range of possibilities for schools to consider when assessing flexible working opportunities as part of timetabling/scheduling and management processes.

8. International Case Study: Finland

This case study focuses on experiences and perceptions of flexible working in schools in Finland.

8.1 Context

Finland ranks highly in OECD's 'Better Life Index', including slightly above average work-life balance.²⁵¹ According to the OECD, teaching is one of the country's most highly regarded and sought after professions; in 2010, there were ten applicants per place on university training courses for primary school teaching.²⁵² Six percent of teachers report working part-time (55% of these did so by choice, while the remaining proportion reported that they were not able to work full-time, although the reasons for this were not explored in the survey).²⁵³ However, within their working week teachers generally enjoy a great amount of autonomy as to the organisation of their work, the content and pedagogical techniques that they employ.²⁵⁴ This has been referred to as 'temporal flexibility', where employees can decide how to distribute their working hours as long as they meet contractual obligations.²⁵⁵

The amount of flexibility that teachers will have during their working day at school will depend on their role and the number of lessons/subjects that they are required to cover. Some teachers will have more non-teaching hours during the day than others, as the number of lessons pupils receive per week increases as they get older (19 lessons per week for the youngest, 30 per week for 12-15 year olds).²⁵⁶ Overall, the minimum number of compulsory teaching hours are among the lowest across OECD countries,²⁵⁷ and teachers are not required to be on site on days when they have no lessons or other specified duties.²⁵⁸ The findings of a small study of 24 vocational teachers indicated that

²⁵¹ OECD, 'Better Life Index: Finland'; <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/finland/>. This was measured by OECD by comparing the proportion of hours per day a full-time worker spends on average on personal care and leisure, with the proportion of hours spent on paid work. In Finland, full-time workers spend 63% of their time on personal care and leisure compared to 62% OECD average.

²⁵² OECD, 'Better Life Index: Education'; <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/education/>.

²⁵³ OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: A International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*

²⁵⁴ Finnish National Board of Education (2013), *Teachers in Finland – trusted professionals*; Finnish National Agency for Education (2018), *Finnish Teachers and Principals in Figures*; Hart, J. (2017), 'The big lesson from the world's best school system? Trust your teachers', *The Guardian*, 9 August 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2017/aug/09/worlds-best-school-system-trust-teachers-education-finland>; Google for Education (2016), *Teacher status in Finland*.

²⁵⁵ Nijp, H. et al (2016), 'Effects of new ways of working on work hours and work location, health and job-related outcomes', *Chronobiology International* 33:6.

²⁵⁶ Risku, M. and Aalto, E. (2014), 'Finland puts flexible holidays ahead of longer school days', 20 February 2014, *The Conversation*; <http://theconversation.com/finland-puts-flexible-holidays-ahead-of-longer-school-days-23378>.

²⁵⁷ Finnish National Agency for Education (2018), *Finnish Teachers and Principals in Figures*, p.11; OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2016*.

²⁵⁸ Finnish National Board of Education (2013), *Teachers in Finland – trusted professionals*.

this level of autonomy, if coupled with ability to practise agency when negotiating content of their work, potentially increased a teachers' loyalty and commitment towards an institution, although this would require further investigation in primary and secondary settings.²⁵⁹

Data suggests that 74% of the primary and secondary teaching workforce in Finland in 2015 was female.²⁶⁰ Although the country has a history of mothers returning to work soon after having a child, since the 1990s increasing numbers of women have stayed at home for longer periods (up to three years) to care for young children.²⁶¹ This has been associated with the availability of a child home care allowance that provides financial support for childcare at home until a child is three years old; in addition, women have cited poor work-life balance as one of the reasons for remaining at home for longer periods.²⁶²

More generally, for older workers, the Finnish concept of 'work ability' promotes interventions and adjustments that can be made to working conditions to ensure that the aging workforce (those aged 50 and over) can continue in work.²⁶³ A core part of this is ensuring that employers monitor working hours and support changes to working practices or enable flexible working times where requested.²⁶⁴ This is accompanied by a flexible retirement age (any time between the ages of 63 and 68), which 'puts more emphasis on the importance of working conditions'.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁹ Vähäsantanen, K. et al (2008), 'Teachers' professional identity negotiations in two different work organisations', *Vocations and Learning: Studies in Vocational and Professional Education*, 1(2) pp. 131–148.

²⁶⁰ This is comparable to England, with 76% of qualified teachers reported to be female: DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>. OECD (2017), *Education at a Glance – D.5.2 Gender distribution of teachers* (2015), https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2017/d5-2-gender-distribution-of-teachers-2015_eag-2017-table209-en. This includes primary and lower secondary teachers, plus upper secondary teachers delivering general programmes (but not vocational programmes) in Finland.

²⁶¹ Wekström, S. (2011), 'Working Mothers in Finland: A Cross-Country Comparison of Work to Family Interference, Work Characteristics and Satisfaction with Life', *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research XLVI*, pp.71-94.

²⁶² Wekström, S. (2011), 'Working Mothers in Finland: A Cross-Country Comparison of Work to Family Interference, Work Characteristics and Satisfaction with Life', *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research XLVI*, p.71.

²⁶³ The average age of teachers in Finland is 44 for primary teachers (the same as the OECD average) and 48 for secondary teachers (three years older than the OECD average). OECD (2017), *Education at a Glance – D.5.1 – Average age of teachers by education level* (2015), https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2017/d5-1-average-age-of-teachers-by-education-level-2015_eag-2017-graph205-en.

²⁶⁴ Ilmarinen, J. (2006), 'Promotion of work ability and employment of ageing workers in Finland'; http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs/Plus_pre_zeny_45/Ilmarinen_15_11.ppt#2.

²⁶⁵ Finnish Centre for Pensions (2013), *Flexible retirement age in Finland*, p.4.

8.2 Experiences and perceptions of flexible working

There is little direct research on the experiences and perceptions of flexible working in the education sector in Finland. This reflects that, as a profession, teaching is largely autonomous and flexibility is inherent within the working life of teachers of primary and secondary education across the country.

A 2010 study considered teachers' wellbeing across different school types in Finland (elementary through to secondary), through the use of a 'wellbeing evaluation tool' that surveyed 1,300 teachers. This focused on school conditions, social relationships, health and strategies for 'self-fulfilment'. This study identified that overall, the wellbeing of teachers in part-time positions was higher than that of full-time colleagues.²⁶⁶ The range of variables this study covered (including working environment and relationships) makes it difficult to ascertain how integral flexible working arrangements were to this finding. However, research with Finnish working mothers carried out the following year also found that the only aspect of working life that made a statistically significant difference to the life satisfaction was the ability to decide when to start and finish their working day.²⁶⁷

Nonetheless, the ability to reduce working hours is treated with caution by some. Female teachers have reported across two surveys that reducing their working hours may endanger their position in the workplace or lead to an intensification of work (i.e. same workload to be completed in shorter hours).²⁶⁸

A qualitative study into the perceived impact of flexible working on the work-life balance of teachers in Finland was carried out in 2017, including a review of existing international literature and face-to-face interviews with middle and high school teachers. Findings from the interviews should be treated with caution, as they are based on a sample of ten teachers. Generally, these teachers found their work-life balance to be positive.²⁶⁹ When not teaching in class, the remainder of work time was flexible and could be conducted according to their own schedule.²⁷⁰ This autonomy was felt to create 'freedom' for a teacher and support their wellbeing, improve their performance/innovation and balance their working and non-working life. Teachers reported feeling better organised, better able to respond to unforeseen issues, and appreciated the convenience of being able to

²⁶⁶ Konu, A. et al (2010), 'Teachers' wellbeing and perceptions of leadership practices', *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 3:1.

²⁶⁷ OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*.

²⁶⁷ Wekström, S. (2011), 'Working Mothers in Finland: A Cross-Country Comparison of Work to Family Interference, Work Characteristics and Satisfaction with Life', *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research XLVI*, p.85.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.88; Lehto, A-M, and Sutela, H. (2008), *Three decades of working conditions. Results from quality of work life surveys 1977 – 2008*.

²⁶⁹ Lahti, A. (2017), *The Perceived Impact of Flexible Working Hour on Work-Life Balance in the Educational Sector in Finland: A qualitative research study*, p.21.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.32.

arrange non-work-related appointments during business hours.²⁷¹ In this sense, flexibility was regarded as a 'resource', helping teachers to plan both work and non-work priorities. Interestingly, these teachers also described flexibility as a 'necessity' in order to complete the volume of workload and tasks required.²⁷²

However, one of the main challenges identified through this study and requiring further investigation was that flexibility in working schedules can lead to long working hours if an individual found it challenging to implement strategies or boundaries in order to maintain a work/life balance.²⁷³ It was also suggested that (as in Australian research) flexible working practices such as working at home could make it difficult to transition between work and non-work, meaning that an individual teacher risks being 'always on', for example via email communication.²⁷⁴

8.3 Key learning points

- A general culture based around flexible approaches to working can generate benefits for work/life balance. However, this may undermine the need for formalised part-time working (which is relatively low among teachers in Finland).
- Flexible working in schools can refer to a range of practices that do not include part-time working, but instead accommodate teachers' needs through a range of timetabling practices (e.g. blocks of teaching time through the week and flexible additional hours to complete other tasks such as preparation and administration).²⁷⁵
- As found in schools in England and other sectors, flexibility in working schedules can lead to long working hours if an individual finds it challenging to implement strategies or boundaries in order to maintain a work/life balance.
- Enabling teachers to be off-site when they are not required to be in the classroom, with freedom to select teaching content and approaches, may provide a sense of autonomy that could lead to increased retention and teacher wellbeing. It is important to note that this would require further testing in school environments as to the practical implications and impact on schools and teachers, especially given the research highlights that boundaries may need to be set for teachers working from home, to ensure it does not generate additional work-life balance issues.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p.26-27.

²⁷² Lahti, A. (2017), *The Perceived Impact of Flexible Working Hour on Work-Life Balance in the Educational Sector in Finland: A qualitative research study*, p.28-29.

²⁷³ Ibid. p.31.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.27-30.

²⁷⁵ In addition to this flexibility, TALIS 2013 identified that 'Finnish teachers spent less time on administrative tasks, cooperation with their colleagues and student counselling' than other OECD countries'. Finnish National Agency for Education (2018), *Finnish Teachers and Principals in Figures*, p.12.

- Flexible working arrangements that lead to a sense of positive work/life balance and job satisfaction may be delivered in coordination with other initiatives and work cultures rather than being effective in isolation (i.e. not just part-time teaching, but a reduced teaching workload along with a flexibility to balance teaching and non-teaching tasks, or agency to negotiate how tasks are completed and when).

9. International Case Study: Singapore

This case study focuses on flexible working across Singapore. It considers practices across the public sector more broadly as well as within schools, to provide comparisons with those found in England.

9.1 Context

There are currently around 33,000 teachers in Singapore, in 360 schools.²⁷⁶ Teaching is a high-status occupation, with recruitment based on strict criteria from the top third of their age group.²⁷⁷ The rate of part-time teaching in Singapore is low; 4% of teachers reported working part-time in 2013, although the majority of these (94%) did so by choice (as opposed to reporting that full-time roles were unavailable).²⁷⁸ As in Finland, the proportion of direct teaching hours for individuals in Singapore is lighter compared to teachers in most other OECD countries and also varies according to length of service (averaging 15 hours per week for early career teachers to 19 hours per week for more experienced teachers).²⁷⁹ This provides room for flexibility and autonomy as to how to approach tasks within each working day. Typically, school days in Singapore begin at 7.30am and end at 1.30pm.²⁸⁰

More generally, flexible working arrangements have been available in the civil service in Singapore since the 1980s.²⁸¹ They have predominantly been taken up by women requiring flexibility for childcare and other family responsibilities. In comparison to the UK and Australia, the right to flexible working is not mandated in Singapore, and has taken time to spread beyond the civil service.²⁸² However, in October 2017 the Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress and Singapore National Employers Federation agreed a Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements.²⁸³ This Standard is signed up to voluntarily by employers, to ensure that flexible working requests are processed efficiently and agreed where possible (with training provided by

²⁷⁶ Low, E-L. and Tan, O-S. (2017), 'Teacher Education Policy: Recruitment, Preparation and Progression'. In O-S. Tan et al. (eds.) *Teacher Education in the 21st Century*. Springer.

²⁷⁷ Slater, L. (2013), *Building high-performing and improving education systems: Teachers*.

²⁷⁸ OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*; Wang, C.K.J. et al (2017), *Teacher Burnout and Teaching Effectiveness in Singapore*. NIE Research Brief Series N. 16-013.

²⁷⁹ Note, this is comparable to OECD data on number of hours spent teaching by teachers in England, which is just under 20 hours per week. DfE (2014), *Teachers in England's Secondary Schools: Evidence from TALIS 2013*, p.49.

²⁸⁰ National Library Board (2018), 'How Much School is Too Much School?', <http://www.nlb.gov.sg/sure/how-much-school-is-too-much-school/>.

²⁸¹ Minya, C. (2011), *Women, Work and Choice Making in Singapore*. National University of Singapore.

²⁸² Straughan, Paulin Tay, & Tada, Mindy E., (2016), 'Addressing the implementation gap: An integrated approach to identifying barriers and facilitators to flexi work arrangements in Singapore', *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, p.2.

²⁸³ Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices, 'Flexible Work Arrangements', <https://www.tafep.sg/flexible-work-arrangements>.

employers to line managers to help them support flexible workers).²⁸⁴ In addition, employers can apply for an enhanced Work-Life Grant, to incentivise sustained implementation of flexible working arrangements, with a specific grant for supporting job sharers.²⁸⁵

9.1.1 Ministry of Education initiatives

There have been several government initiatives implemented to encourage teachers to take up flexible working opportunities (these have focused on the aim to encourage more women into work more generally, see below), however there is no information available regarding evaluation or impact of these.

The Ministry of Education introduced the GROW 2.0 initiative in 2008,²⁸⁶ which had four priorities including teacher wellbeing. The wellbeing package aimed ‘to encourage pro-family practices and help teachers achieve better work-life harmony’ through the expansion of the Part-Time Teaching Scheme. This had initially been set up to create flexibility for female teachers with children under the age of six, and teachers over the age of 55, but was then expanded to teachers with children under the age of twelve. The GROW initiative also included provision of five additional part-time teachers per school cluster (of which there are 28 in Singapore) to provide support and cover for schools where required, as a result of increased take-up of the Part-Time Teaching Scheme. Furthermore, an unpaid leave scheme was expanded, enabling teachers to pursue professional development while on unpaid leave. Ministry of Education data showed that 2% of teachers in schools in Singapore were on the Part-time Teaching Scheme in 2014 - a small increase from 2008 when 310 of 28,000 teachers (1%) had joined the scheme.

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A Contract and Flexi-Adjunct Teaching Scheme enables former teachers to re-enter the profession, working on a flexible basis to supplement the core teaching workforce. They are deployed in schools either to cover teaching requirements or to meet other needs

²⁸⁴ Ibid. A resource portal to support employers in Singapore implement flexible working and other work/life balance strategies was also set up by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices at <https://www.worklifeworks.sg>.

²⁸⁵ Ministry of Manpower, ‘Enhanced Work-Life Grant for flexible work arrangements’, <https://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/good-work-practices/work-life-grant>. Data on take-up of the grant have not been possible to identify during this review.

²⁸⁶ Ministry of Education (2008), *The GROW 2.0 Package for Education Officers*

²⁸⁷ Chee (2014), ‘A Staff Well-Being Framework for The 21st Century (SWF21)’. Doctoral thesis. University of South Queensland. More recent data has not been possible to identify as part of this review.

²⁸⁸ Li, H.A., (2008), ‘More opting to teach part-time’, *The Straits Times*; www.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20080107-43904.html; OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*.

within schools and receive the same benefits of permanent teachers except access to CPD opportunities, promotion and performance-related bonus payments.²⁸⁹

The Flexi-Adjunct Scheme offers individuals a range of placement durations (rather than a contract in a single school), with a workload commitment of 27.5 hours per week maximum.

9.2 Experiences and perceptions of flexible working

The Ministry of Manpower's 2017 Labour Force Survey for Singapore reported that large numbers of women are out of the workforce due to family and care commitments.²⁹⁰ The survey authors recommended that greater flexibility in work arrangements could enable many of these potential workers to re-engage in the labour market.

A literature review and case study research with thirty part-time workers in Singapore (Straughan and Tadai, 2016) sought to identify the ways in which barriers to flexible working could be addressed across the country's workforce. Despite several governmental initiatives to promote part-time and flexible working practices in Singapore,²⁹¹ researchers found that employees in a range of industries were unaware of flexible working arrangements, and most approached their manager with a request feeling that it was not standard practice.²⁹²

Directly related to schools, employees in Singapore have reported challenges regarding the effect of flexible working on their remuneration. For example, in roles which are rewarded based on performance (including teaching), there are concerns that working fewer hours may impact on such performance related pay.²⁹³ Part-time workers have also reported that their workload did not decrease in line with their hours, so they were expected to achieve the same work in less time.²⁹⁴ Others felt that they took on additional responsibilities out of a sense of guilt for the favour granted to them.

²⁸⁹ Ministry of Education Singapore, 'Adjunct Teachers'; <https://www.moe.gov.sg/careers/teach/how-to-apply/teaching-schemes/adjunct-teachers>. No further detail has been identified within the literature regarding the impact this has on opportunities for progression available to teachers working flexibly (or the impact of these restrictions on the scheme's attractiveness to former teachers).

²⁹⁰ Ministry of Manpower (2017), *Labour Force in Singapore*.

²⁹¹ These have been particularly family-orientated and include tax incentives for working mothers, and the 'Hey Baby' initiative that provides support for parents including enhanced family leave. See: 'Hey Baby', <https://www.heybaby.sg/>.

²⁹² Straughan, Paulin Tay, & Tadai, Mindy E. (2016), 'Addressing the implementation gap: An integrated approach to identifying barriers and facilitators to flexi work arrangements in Singapore'. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 1-20.

²⁹³ Lee, C. K-E and Tan, M.Y. (2010), 'Rating Teachers and Rewarding Teacher Performance: The Context of Singapore'. 'Paper presented at Replicating Exemplary Practices in Mathematics Education among APEC Economies, July 2010.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

Anecdotal reports from school leaders in Singapore suggested that recruiting increasing numbers of teachers on a part-time basis negatively impacted working relationships between staff where there was less face-to-face contact, and potentially increased the workload of full-time members of staff when part-time colleagues were not present.²⁹⁵ A study focusing on flexible working arrangements for older workers specifically found that the challenges in their implementation were generating a perception of fairness, balancing the needs of employees and organisations, and the need to ensure managers have a positive mindset towards flexible working.²⁹⁶

9.3 Examples of existing practice

Examples of existing practice in Singapore represent a range of flexible working arrangements including part-time, staggered starts, job sharing, flexitime and compressed hours.

- The Part-Time Teaching Scheme has enabled existing teachers to reduce their working hours or to work fewer days, to allow for external commitments such as childcare or further study. For example, an English teacher took advantage of the part-time teaching scheme to have time to complete her Masters in English Literature, reducing her teaching commitment to three days while she studied.²⁹⁷ A mathematics teacher similarly used the Part-Time Teaching Scheme to give her more time with her young son. She reduced her working week to four days, as well as reducing her working hours to 10am until 3pm on each of those four days.²⁹⁸
- At Fernvale Primary School, staff are able to request later start times if they are working beyond the end of school, for example on extracurricular activities. Similarly, staff who need to take their children to childcare can request a start time of an hour later. The school operates a duty rota to cover these times to ensure that there are sufficient staff on site. In addition to ongoing arrangements, the school also operates a Time Off Scheme to enable staff to attend family emergencies or doctor's appointments at the beginning or end of the school day without losing a day's work.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Li, H.A (2008), 'More opting to teach part-time', *The Straits Times*; www.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20080107-43904.html.

²⁹⁶ Employer Alliance (2010), *Research on flexible work arrangements for older employees in Singapore: growing older, working strong – how do we do it?*

²⁹⁷ Sim, B. (2011), 'Crunch Time', *The New Paper*.

²⁹⁸ Li, H.A. (2008), 'More opting to teach part time', *The Strait Times*; www.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20080107-43904.html.

²⁹⁹ TAFEP (2014), 'Flexi-time/Staggered Start and End Time' www.tafep.sg/flexi-timestaggered-start-and-end-time-0.

- At Tampines Primary School, teacher workload is shared across teaching staff. The number of teaching periods have been reduced, allowing teachers more time to prepare lessons, follow-up with pupil administration, and participate in CPD which they share with each other during this time. The school also operates an e-forum where teachers can ask school management questions about their work-life needs, although few details about the operation of this system are available publicly.³⁰⁰
- Within the health and social care sectors, allowing staff to take time off for family emergencies and medical appointments is seen as a means to reduce staff absence while increasing staff morale. For example, Changi General Hospital offers paternity leave and family care leave which allows staff to attend to children, parents and in-laws without losing a day of leave. Similarly, the School for Further Education has adopted flexitime for staff to attend medical/care appointments after finding themselves increasingly short-staffed when staff took days off to be with family.³⁰¹ Other employers such as the Singapore Management University consider that similar arrangements have enabled them to recruit and retain staff due to the flexibility offered.³⁰² In the healthcare sector, compressed hours have been used successfully; nurses work longer shifts over fewer days, leaving them time for other commitments while not affecting staffing levels. Shift rotas are designed to overlap so there is no need for additional handovers at the end of a shift.³⁰³

9.4 Key learning points

- In order for flexible working practices to work, key factors are organisational and management cultures. Where managers are seen to be receptive of requests for flexible working, or even take advantage of such arrangements themselves, employees may be more likely to feel able to make such requests should they need. Increasing the availability of flexible working arrangements may also create benefits for schools too through increased retention and improved morale.
- As with other sectors, employing part-time teachers may have the potential to increase the workload of full-time members of staff when part-time colleagues are not present.

³⁰⁰ TAFEP (2014), 'Job Sharing', www.tafep.sg/job-sharing-0.

³⁰¹ NTUC (2014), *Flexibility in the Workplace*, p.9.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ministry of Manpower (2006), *Work-Life Harmony Report: Findings and Recommendations for Employers on how to use Work-Life Strategies to Optimise Business Performance*.

- The range of flexible working arrangements available indicates that flexible working does not always entail working reduced hours with a consequent loss of earnings. The availability of a range of flexible working arrangements, such as flexitime which allows for a later start or earlier finish time, can be beneficial to all employees, not just those with caring responsibilities.
- Initiatives such as the Part-Time Teaching Scheme, which enables teachers to work part-time while continuing their professional development through further study, may encourage staff to regard part-time work as a positive aspect of their working environment, while increasing teachers' skills.

10. Conclusions

Research and wider published commentary around flexible working tends to be framed by broader discussions of recruitment and retention, work/life balance and gender equality. Although limitations are evident (see 10.3 below) findings of this review undertaken across the schools sector and six additional case study areas has enabled a range of common themes to be drawn out of the existing literature.

10.1 Perceptions of flexible working

Although incorporating a variety of sectors and contexts; perceptions and experiences of flexible working tended to be similar across case study areas. This includes the reasons for requesting flexible working, and the perceived challenges in implementing them.

- Commonly, research into flexible working tends to be synonymous with explorations of part-time arrangements, although individuals tend to look for a range of flexible opportunities that can also incorporate full-time hours (such as home/remote working and flexitime).
- In sectors where part-time working is prevalent, this can create disadvantages in terms of part-time workers working a disproportionate number of hours above their contract (sometimes to show evidence to colleagues of their commitment), and where resentment occurs among full-time counterparts (e.g. where there is less face-to-face contact, or when covering tasks not undertaken by a part-time colleague).
- Reasons for requesting flexible working appear to change for different age groups, with those aged 35-45 and over 55 citing care/family responsibilities, or phased retirement, and younger workers opting for convenience and a wish to pursue other interests as well as work. This can create opportunities (recruiting and retaining a wider range of individuals), but also challenges for employers in managing the different needs of the workforce.
- Awareness of the availability of flexible working opportunities among employees appears to be mixed across the range of sectors, with some countries mandating them through legislation and others generating a cultural mindset that embraces flexibility and therefore undermines the requirement for more formalised policies and practices.
- Barriers that employers report in implementing flexible working practices tend to focus on the perceived inability to meet business need, or recruitment challenges. For schools in particular, logistical issues of timetabling are also perceived to be too challenging to overcome among some senior leaders. Thus, the attitudes of senior leadership teams towards flexible working can be crucial in their effectiveness and clarity across an organisation.

10.2 Common approaches to flexible working

Below is a series of common features identified where flexible working practices have been reported in the literature to work well.

- Regular reviews of roles within the school, ensuring the needs of all types of stakeholder are being met (senior leaders, teachers, pupils and parents).
- Continuous and consistent communication between leadership teams and staff.
- Leadership teams trusting their staff to manage their time at school effectively, and teachers being given autonomy and control over their working day (e.g. choice to take PPA time at home or in school), can improve staff perceptions of the organisation (and potentially retention as a result).
- Piloting approaches across a small team/group to identify what works well and where improvements could be made before rolling out to all staff can be informative. Reviewing impact and progress and gathering feedback from staff as systems progress is also valuable.
- Willingness of those benefitting from flexible working patterns to also be flexible themselves can help maintain positive working relationships between colleagues. For example, they may return to school when needed for some meetings. However, this requires careful management to ensure part-time staff are not regularly and consistently working longer hours as a result.
- The adoption, circulation and promotion of formal flexible working policies can make a difference to the take-up of and support for flexible working across an organisation. The implementation of formal policies and processes can also be included in promotional materials to show an institution is an attractive, supportive environment to potential recruits.
- Flexible working can be a key recruitment strategy for attracting and retaining a range of skilled and experienced individuals from across different generations, but policies/processes themselves need to be flexible in order to meet the needs of different types of worker.
- Managers/senior leaders are important role models in creating a work culture that accepts and supports flexible working practices. Therefore, training for line managers is important in the success of implementing flexible working practices, as is clarity and consistency in communications and guidance.
- Small-team approaches to flexible working, and co-designing elements such as self-rostering and collaborative or compatible scheduling, can be effective for public sector roles. Strategies for implementing effective flexible working within teams include: agreeing and communicating objectives of flexible working to all team members; scheduling team meetings weekly to ensure regular

communication and peer support can be maintained; asking all staff to be open and clear about their needs and preferences for flexible working or work/life balance; and evaluating and tracking changes/impact over time.

- Piloting approaches across a small team/group to identify what works well and where improvements could be made could be a useful approach for schools to adopt when trialling new approaches to flexible working.

10.3 Gaps in evidence

The following gaps in evidence were identified during this literature review. They suggest a range of areas where additional research may be valuable for understanding more about the implications for flexible working in schools.

- Focused research on flexible working in education is limited. Where it has taken place, studies tend to use small samples, such as geographically limited case study approaches with no control/comparison group. Furthermore, most research exploring the impact of flexible working is based on perceptions and attitudinal responses rather than obtaining direct evidence of impact, such as outcomes data or absentee/retention rates.
- Within the current literature, flexible working in schools tends to be regarded as predominantly being related to part-time opportunities. This is generally attributed to the nature of school timetabling and the requirement to be onsite which is felt to preclude home working. Discussion and consideration of opportunities such as compressed or staggered hours, phased retirement or some home working where an individual is not timetabled for teaching, are not common and could be explored further.
- Generally, there is a sense in the literature of a disjunct between flexible working and full-time working (or that 'flexible' equates to part-time or otherwise reduced hours). For example, some of the challenges reported in relation to flexible working in a range of sectors are perceived to come from full-time staff who are tasked with overseeing duties whilst a 'flexible worker' is not present. However, this does not take into account that flexible workers can, and do, undertake full-time hours (for example through compressed, annualised or flexitime arrangements).
- Little published research focuses on the direct experiences of schools in encouraging, enabling and managing flexible working opportunities, nor the experiences of teachers in accessing flexible working and good practice in making it an effective approach to teaching and learning.
- Much of the research focuses on the experiences of female employees; however, some findings have indicated that male workers are increasingly looking for flexible working opportunities and opportunities need to be made available (and supported) for all.

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