



Department
for Education

Exploring flexible working practice in schools

Interim report

June 2019

CooperGibson Research



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Definitions of flexible working

The following definitions of flexible working practices were provided to survey respondents when considering their answers and have been applied to the findings throughout this report. This expands on the core forms of flexible working outlined in the 2017 DfE guidance.¹

- **Part-time:** working less than full-time hours and/or working fewer days.
- **Job share:** two or more people do one job and split the hours.
- **Split role:** tasks divided between two part-time job holders.
- **Split shifts:** a working shift comprising two or more separate periods of duty in a day.
- **Staggered hours:** the employee has different start, finish and break times from other staff.
- **Staggered weeks:** a formal agreement to work outside term time to deliver booster classes/sports programmes/enrichment activities.
- **Compressed hours:** working full-time hours but over fewer days.
- **Home/remote working:** regularly or formally agreed as part of directed time/timetabled hours.
- **Phased retirement:** gradually reduced working hours and/or responsibilities to transition from full-time work to full-time retirement.
- **Annualised hours:** working hours spread across the year, which may include some school closure days, or where hours vary across the year to suit the school and employee.
- **Sabbatical:** employee takes a period of time away from work, over and above annual leave; usually the job is kept open for them to return.
- **Career break:** employee takes unpaid time off work. Contract is suspended or ended, without a guaranteed return, depending on policy and individual agreement.
- **Flexi/lieu time:** the paid time off work an employee gets for having worked additional hours.
- **Personal/family days:** days of authorised leave during term time to which all teachers in a school are entitled.

¹ DfE (2017), *Flexible working in schools*: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools>

Executive Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) has committed to promoting flexible working within schools.² To support that work, CooperGibson Research (CGR) was commissioned to conduct research to gather evidence on flexible working practices in schools, and how these may be effectively implemented.

Aims and objectives

There are three phases to this project, supporting the overall aims and objectives.

- **Phase 1:** Literature review – identify existing evidence on flexible working practices in schools, internationally and across comparable sectors.
- **Phase 2:** Online survey of senior leaders and teachers – establish existing approaches, perceptions and experiences of flexible working in schools.
- **Phase 3:** Telephone interviews and pilots in schools – identify effective models of support for schools trialling flexible working practices.

Project progress

Two strands of the project have been completed: 1) a literature review published in January 2019,³ and 2) an online survey. Telephone interviews and a pilot with a small number of schools in England take place from January 2019 onwards. This report presents the headline findings of the online survey of senior leaders and teachers.

Sample of respondents

A detailed survey methodology can be found in Appendix 2. There were 2,896 respondents to the online survey; 55% were senior leaders, 15% were middle leaders and 30% were teachers.⁴ Sample demographics were representative of the profile of schools in England by phase, size and type, and broadly reflected the current teaching workforce in terms of gender: the majority (80%) identified as female, and 20% identified as male. In terms of current flexible working patterns, where they responded to the

² See this and other DfE flexible working pledges here: 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>; and DfE (2019), *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773930/Teacher_Retention_Strategy_Report.PDF.pdf.

³ CGR (2019), *Exploring Flexible Working Practice in Schools: Literature Review*, DfE, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773794/Exploring_flexible_working_practice_in_schools.pdf.

⁴ Note that middle leaders completed the ‘teacher’ route of the survey and will be included within the broad term of “teachers” throughout this report.

question, the majority of senior leaders (72% of 1,589) and teachers (52% of 1,305) reported that they did not work with flexible arrangements.⁵

Where they were in place, the large majority of flexible working arrangements were reported by teachers in primary schools; 96% of the 256 teachers in a job share arrangement reported that they worked in a primary school, and three-quarters of part-time teachers stated that they worked in primary schools (75% of 465).⁶

Key findings

Managing flexible working requests

Most senior leaders (83% of 1,589) stated that their school had a procedure in place for managing flexible working requests, and the majority had received requests for flexible working in the past five years (77% of 1,589). Where a flexible working procedure was not in place in a school, this was most commonly reported to be because senior leaders were unsure about what should be included in such a policy, or how to go about developing one (38% of 264).

Nearly all senior leaders (92% of 1,371) said that childcare was the main reason for staff requesting flexible working arrangements, with over half (57% of 1,371) mentioning work/life balance as a key driver for requesting flexible working. Just over a third of senior leaders (34% of 1,371) said that nearing retirement/wanting to work less hours per week for more years was a key reason for requesting flexible working.

Declining flexible working requests

More than one-quarter of senior leaders (29% of 1,589) said that flexible working requests had been declined in their schools. Where they had been declined, the most common reason given by senior leaders was not being able to organise work amongst existing staff/timetabling issues (69% of 453 senior leaders).

Both senior leaders and teachers most commonly reported that their own requests for flexible working had been declined due to perceptions that flexible working did not work in school environments. Teachers also noted that requests were declined due to perceptions of a potential detrimental effect on pupils.

⁵ Where the bases do not total 2,896 this is due to participants not responding to a question.

⁶ Note that this reflects School Workforce Census data that show that part-time teachers are more likely to be working in primary schools. (DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>)

Implementing flexible working in schools

The most common forms of flexible working implemented in schools were part-time hours, personal/family days and job shares (reported by 86%, 62% and 54% of senior leaders respectively). Where flexible working practices were not currently implemented, senior leaders most commonly stated that this was because no teaching staff had made a request (88% of 192).

Benefits of flexible working

Nearly three-quarters of senior leaders who had implemented flexible working in their school (74% of 1,314) felt that these arrangements had helped staff to manage their workload/work-life balance; 89% of 766 teachers working flexibly also agreed with this statement. The large majority of teachers working flexibly felt that doing so improved their well-being (85% of 766). Teachers working flexibly in special schools were significantly more likely than those in other settings to view flexible working as a way to access more professional development opportunities.

Challenges of flexible working

Just over one-quarter of senior leaders who reported challenges in implementing flexible working (26% of 929) said that job share arrangements had not worked well in their school; 15% highlighted part-time working as a problem. Where they felt flexible working had not worked, senior leaders' qualitative feedback noted challenges relating to factors such as ensuring continuity in the classroom, a negative impact of flexible working on staff workload and school budget, and the need to maintain clear communications (such as between job share partners). Over three-quarters of teachers working flexibly (77% of 730) reported that managing their workload and not working beyond contracted hours was a key challenge to flexible working in their schools.

Feeling unable to request flexible working

Less than one-quarter of teachers responding to the question (13% of 1,302) said that they had considered flexible working but not felt able to request it (the remainder did not feel unable to request it). Where they had felt unable to do so, this was most common among teachers in special schools. Most of the teachers who felt unable to request flexible working gave additional qualitative feedback that this was due to the culture of the school they worked in, and a lack of flexible working policies/options being in place.

Considering other forms of flexible working

Teachers were more likely than senior leaders to say that they would consider other forms of flexible working that were not currently open to them. Where they answered the

question, teachers most commonly reported that they would consider personal/family days, home/remote working, and flexi/lieu time (36%, 30% and 27% of 1,276 respectively).

Teachers in special schools were significantly less likely than those in primary and secondary settings to say they would consider working part-time. However, those in special schools were more likely to say that they would consider home/remote working, flexi or lieu time. Teachers in secondary schools were twice as likely as those in other settings to say that they would consider staggered hours.

Personal perceptions

At least one-third of senior leaders strongly agreed that their school was committed to flexible working and tried to accommodate requests, and that they would be more likely to remain in the profession long-term if they were able to work flexibly. However, one-third of senior leaders responding to the question (33% of 1,585) did *not* believe flexible working was compatible with their role.

Over half of teachers strongly agreed that flexible working was an effective way to create a better work-life balance. In comparison to senior leaders, teachers more commonly thought that flexible working was compatible with their role.

Family leave

When returning to work following maternity, paternity or adoption leave, employees have the right to request flexible working.⁷ Where they responded to the question, in the last five years, 28% of 1,302 teachers had taken maternity, paternity, adoption or shared parental leave. When comparing responses by gender, male teachers were less likely (compared to their female counterparts) to report being made aware of the right to request flexible working on return to work following parental leave (including paternity/adoption leave) – 23% of 48 male teachers compared to 59% of 312 female teachers.⁸

Supporting flexible working

When asked to identify the types of support they felt had been valuable in supporting flexible working in their schools, nearly two-thirds of senior leaders responding to the question (63% of 329) felt that joint Preparation, Planning and Assessment (PPA) time for job share partners was very valuable. Senior leaders were keen to access more

⁷ For guidance, see ACAS 'Code of practice on handling, in a reasonable manner, requests to work flexibly' and 'The right to request flexible working – an ACAS guide', accessible via: <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4859>.

⁸ This should be treated with caution due to the low base for male respondents.

information, advice, guidance or training on how flexible working could be implemented. This varied from information for teachers, to information and guidance for governors and leadership teams.

The detailed feedback provided on the types of support that senior leaders felt would be valuable will be used to inform phase three of this project involving telephone interviews and a flexible working pilot with a small number of schools.

1. Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned CooperGibson Research (CGR) to conduct an online survey to gather evidence on the attitudes and experiences of flexible working in schools, and how flexible roles can be effectively designed and implemented in the sector. This is part of a wider project focusing on flexible working in schools (see aims and objectives below), and helps fulfil a pledge made by DfE to ‘carry out research looking at changing recruitment practices in schools, to inform our guidance about how schools can introduce flexible working’.⁹ It also supports a commitment made by DfE in the 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy; to carry out research that can inform work to help support schools to implement flexible working.¹⁰

This interim report presents the findings of the online survey of senior leaders and teachers, and includes summary findings of the literature review. It explores the current practice, attitudes and perceptions relating to flexible working in schools, and provides a summary of the existing evidence base for flexible working in schools (Appendix 1).

1.1 Aims

This wider project has two overarching aims:

1. Fill gaps in evidence on flexible working practices in schools, including attitudes and perceptions towards flexible working among teachers and senior leaders, and to gather examples of good practice.
2. Build on existing practice and knowledge emerging from the research to pilot approaches to flexible working with a small number of schools.

1.2 Objectives

Objective one: Establish the existing evidence base of flexible working in schools (addressed via a literature review)¹¹

- Identify existing evidence on flexible working practices in schools, both in England and internationally where relevant.

⁹ See this and other DfE flexible working pledges here: 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>

¹⁰ DfE (2019), *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773930/Teacher_Retention_Strategy_Report.PDF.pdf.

¹¹ For the literature review, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-practices-in-schools-literature-review>.

- Highlight relevant evidence available from comparable sectors (such as further and higher education) nationally and internationally, including examples of good practice and their potential transferability to school environments.

Objective two: Explore current practice, attitudes and perceptions relating to flexible working in schools (addressed via an online survey of senior leaders and teachers, and telephone interviews)

- Establish existing approaches to flexible working and forms of flexible working used in schools.
- Explore senior leaders' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of flexible working practices, including the perceived challenges and advantages.
- Identify what does and does not work for schools and teachers when offering flexible working, including any challenges experienced, effective ways to overcome them, and examples of good practice and innovation.

Objective three: Pilot and support the implementation of flexible working in schools (addressed via a pilot with schools)

- Identify effective models for designing and implementing flexible working in different types of schools.
- Establish examples of perceived impacts of flexible working on schools and teachers.
- Identify any unintended consequences of flexible working for teachers and schools.
- Explore how support provided through the pilot and its impacts could be further developed.

1.3 Methodology

Two strands of the project have now been completed: 1) the literature review, published in January 2019, and 2) the online survey of senior leaders and teachers in England. Telephone interviews and a pilot with a small number of schools in England take place from January 2019 onwards.

1.3.1 Literature review

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

three international studies – Australia, Finland and Singapore. Summary findings have been included in the Appendices to this report.¹²

1.3.2 Survey of senior leaders and teachers

An online survey of senior leaders and teachers was carried out to gather feedback on flexible working in schools. A detailed outline of the approach to the survey, including recruitment of schools, response rates and data cleaning can be found in Appendix 2.

1.4 Sample of participants

There were 2,896 respondents to the online survey: over half (55%) were senior leaders, 15% were middle leaders and 30% were teachers. The survey respondents represented a broad range of schools by phase, size and type. Table 1 shows the profile of survey respondents and the types of school they represented, compared to the national profile of schools.

¹² For the full literature review, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-practices-in-schools-literature-review>.

Table 1: Survey respondents by job role, school phase, size and type.

	% of all respondents (Base: 2,896)	% of schools in England¹³
Job role		
Senior leader	55%	n/a
Middle leader ¹⁴	15%	n/a
Teacher	30%	n/a
School phase		
Primary/middle school	79%	79%
Secondary school	16%	16%
Special school	5%	5%
School size		
<200 pupils	26%	27%
201-400 pupils	38%	37%
401-1000	26%	28%
>1001	10%	8%
School type		
LA maintained (including voluntary aided / controlled, foundation schools)	61%	65%
Single academy	9%	35%
Part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)	29%	
Free school	1%	

The school sample responding to the survey was broadly representative of the national profile: 1,412 primary schools (84% of the school sample, compared to 79% nationally); 193 secondary schools (11% of the school sample, compared to 16% nationally), and 86 special schools (5% of the school sample, compared to 5 % nationally).

In terms of current flexible working patterns, the majority of senior leaders (72% of 1,589) and teachers (52% of 1,305) reported that they did not work with flexible arrangements. For further details on - and discussion of - the current flexible working arrangements of survey respondents, see section 4.1.

¹³ Not including pupil referral units, alternative provision academies or independent schools. See DfE(2018), 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2018':

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-and-pupil-numbers>

¹⁴ Those selecting 'middle leader' were routed to the 'teacher' questionnaire and therefore their responses are included in the 'teacher' data throughout the report.

Sample demographics

When asked to select the job title that best reflected their role, the majority (70% of 1,589) of senior leaders reported that they were a Headteacher/Principal or Head of School.¹⁵

In terms of their time in teaching, over half of survey respondents (59%) reported that they had been in the teaching profession for over 15 years, with 11% being early career teachers between NQT and five years in teaching.¹⁶ The majority had also been working in their current school for at least three years. Nearly half of respondents (47% of 2,887) had worked in their current school between three and ten years, with a further 35% over 10 years.¹⁷ Teachers in secondary schools represented the range of subjects taught, but were most commonly science or English teachers (see Appendix 3 for further details).

Broadly reflecting the school workforce in England, the majority of respondents (80%) identified as female, with 20% identifying as male.¹⁸ They represented a broad range of ages (see Appendix 3 for further details).

¹⁵ In addition: 11% were Vice Principal/Deputy Headteacher; 7% were Assistant Headteacher/Assistant Principal; 6% were Executive Headteacher/Executive Principal/CEO; and 5% selected 'Other'.

¹⁶ In addition: 12% reported they had been teaching for 6 – 9 years, and 19% had been teaching for 10 – 15 years.

¹⁷ In addition: 7% had been working in their school less than one year; 11% had been working in their current school between one and two years.

¹⁸ The latest published School Workforce Census established that 74% of the teaching workforce identified as female, and 26% identified as male: (DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>).

2. Managing flexible working requests in schools

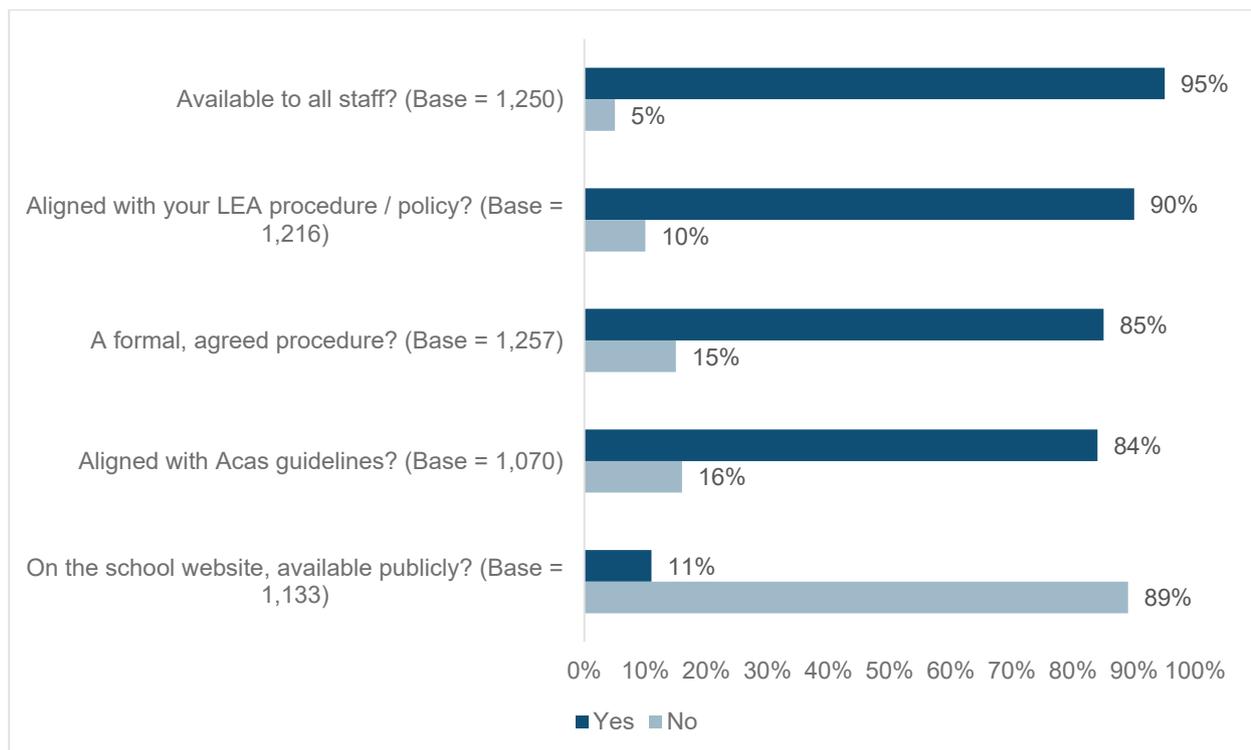
This section of the report summarises the procedures that senior leaders and teachers reported that their schools have in place for managing flexible working requests. This includes the reasons why requests for flexible working are made, and the reasons why such requests may be declined.

2.1 Procedures for requesting flexible working

The majority of senior leaders (83% of 1,589) stated that their school had a procedure in place for teachers to ask for flexible working, and to have the request considered.

Figure 1 provides more detail about the nature of these procedures. Where they provided a response to each option available in the survey, nearly all senior leaders stated that the school procedure was available to all staff and aligned with local authority policy and procedure. It was much less likely for senior leaders to report that the policy/procedure for flexible working was made available publicly on the school's website (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Is the procedure to request flexible working ...



Although there were few differences by school phase/type, senior leaders in secondary schools were least likely to state that their policies/procedures were aligned with those of the local authority.¹⁹

2.1.1 Reasons for not having a flexible working policy

The survey findings suggest that schools may benefit from more information and guidance related to the development of flexible working policies. Where senior leaders reported that their schools did not have a procedure in place for requesting flexible working (17% of 1,589), they most commonly said that this was because they were unsure what should be included in such a policy, or how to go about developing one (Table 2).

Table 2: Are there specific reasons why your school does not have a procedure for teachers and leaders to ask for flexible working and have this request considered?

Reason for not having a policy	% of all senior leaders (Base: 264)
Unsure what should be included in a flexible working policy/ procedure or how to go about developing one	38%
We prefer to have an informal system rather than a written policy/ procedure	35%
Don't think that flexible working will work in our school(s)	28%
It is not a statutory requirement	25%
Lack of time to produce and/or agree a policy/procedure	12%
There are too many policies/procedures already	10%
Flexible working is covered as part of a different policy – it is not standalone	8%
Policy/procedure not suggested by Governors when flexible working has been discussed with them	8%
Don't think it is appropriate for the school to suggest to staff that they can work flexibly – it is up to them to request it	1%
Governors did not approve a policy/procedure that was tabled	1%
Other	10%

Where they had selected 'other', 11 senior leaders said that the issue of flexible working had not come up in their school, so there had been no requirement for a policy – or they had been able to make arrangements with staff without the need for a formal policy. However, the literature review identified that the lack of a formal policy or written agreement can create challenges where arrangements need to be changed, or new senior leadership come into post and do not agree with the informal arrangements in place.

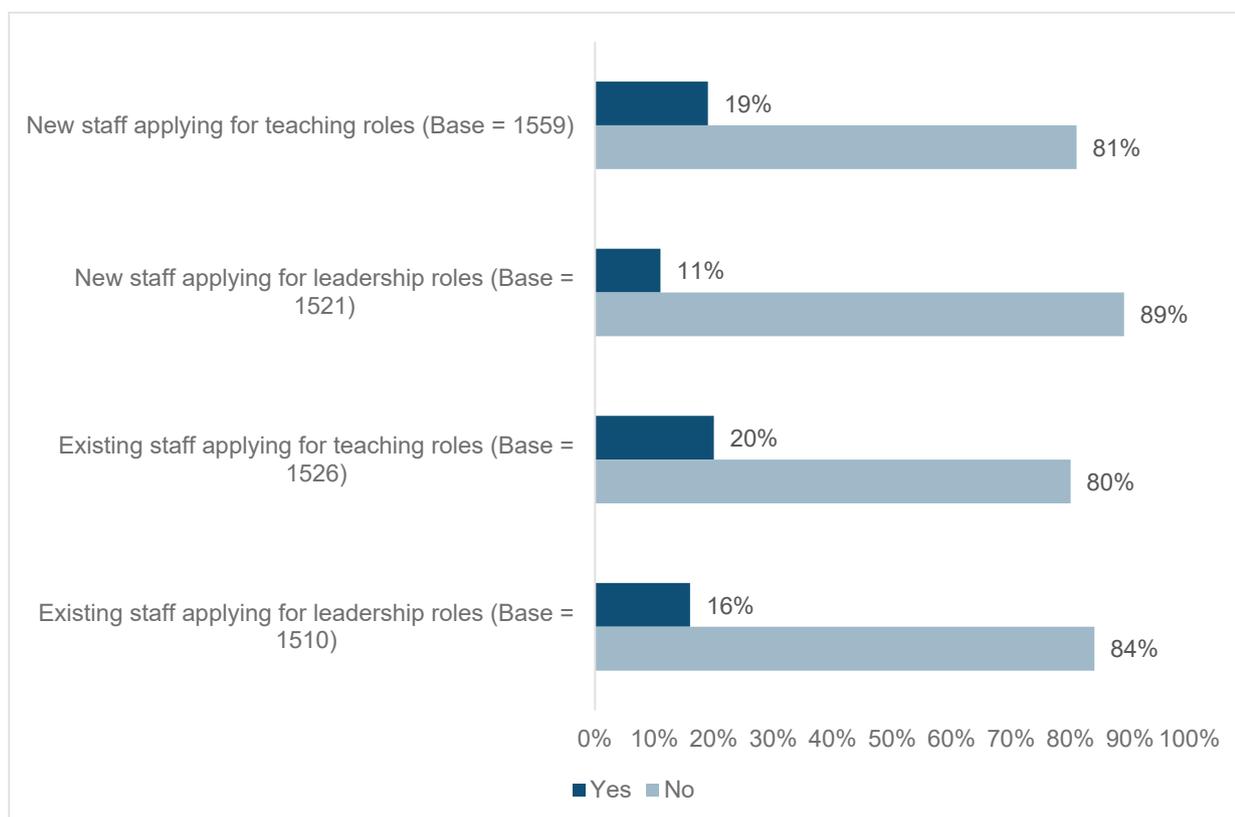
¹⁹ 65% of 156 senior leaders in secondary schools said that their policy was aligned to local authority procedures/policies, compared to 86% of 1088 senior leaders in primary schools and 81% of 68 senior leaders in special schools.

Five senior leaders said that flexible working would not be appropriate in their school due to budgetary constraints, staff shortages, the mindset of the school or the need for teaching staff to be on-site. Three senior leaders said they did not know why a procedure was not in place, and four said that a policy was either currently being drawn up, or would be developed in the future.

2.1.2 Prevalence of ‘flexible hiring’

‘Flexible hiring’ refers to flexible working options being made available as a standard part of all recruitment processes. The majority of senior leaders said that flexible hiring was not a standard part of their offer either for new staff, or when filling vacancies internally (see Figure 2). Where it did occur, flexible hiring was in place more commonly for teaching roles than leadership roles, both for new and existing staff – suggesting that flexible working was more likely to be considered for teachers than for senior leaders.

Figure 2: When advertising teaching and leadership vacancies (for new and existing staff), do you offer as standard the option to consider flexible working arrangements?



2.2 Flexible working requests

Most schools had received a small number of requests for flexible working over the last five years. When asked about the frequency that flexible working requests were made in schools, nearly one-third of senior leaders (32% of 1,589) reported that in the last five

years, they had received between three and five requests for flexible working from teachers and leaders. A further quarter of senior leaders (26%) had received between one and two requests for flexible working (Table 3).

Notably, Table 3 also reflects the size of secondary school staffing bodies, with senior leaders from secondary schools most commonly (in comparison to other school types) reporting a larger number of requests for flexible working; half of secondary senior leaders had received at least six requests for flexible working over the last five years.

Table 3: In the last five years, approximately how many requests for flexible working from teachers and leaders has your school received?²⁰

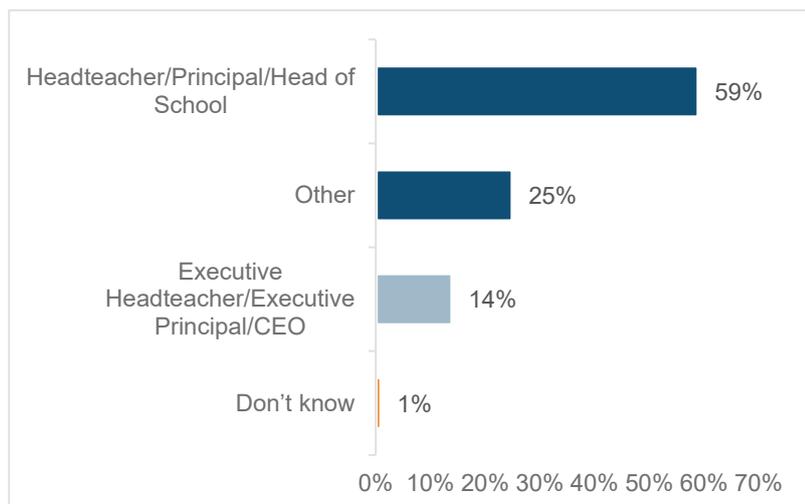
Number of requests for flexible working received in the last five years	% of all senior leaders (Base: 1,589)²¹	% of senior leaders in primary schools (Base: 1,329)	% of senior leaders in secondary schools (Base: 184)	% of senior leaders in special schools (Base: 76)
None	14%	15%	6%	11%
1-2	26%	30%	3%	17%
3-5	32%	32%	25%	37%
6-10	13%	11%	25%	20%
Over 10	6%	3%	25%	11%
Don't know	10%	10%	16%	5%

The majority of senior leaders (59%) stated that the headteacher/principal made the final decision on whether requests for flexible working were granted (Figure 3). Where one-quarter of senior leaders reported 'other', nearly all of them reported that governors/trustees were involved in making or ratifying the final decision. Furthermore, the involvement of governors was commonly reported to be delegated to governing body sub-committees such as those related to personnel/staffing, resources, or pay panels. A small number (eight senior leaders) said that the final decision regarding flexible working requests was made by academy directors/trust boards.

²⁰ Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question.

²¹ Figures do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Figure 3: Who makes the final decision on whether requests for flexible working are granted?
(Base: 1,589)



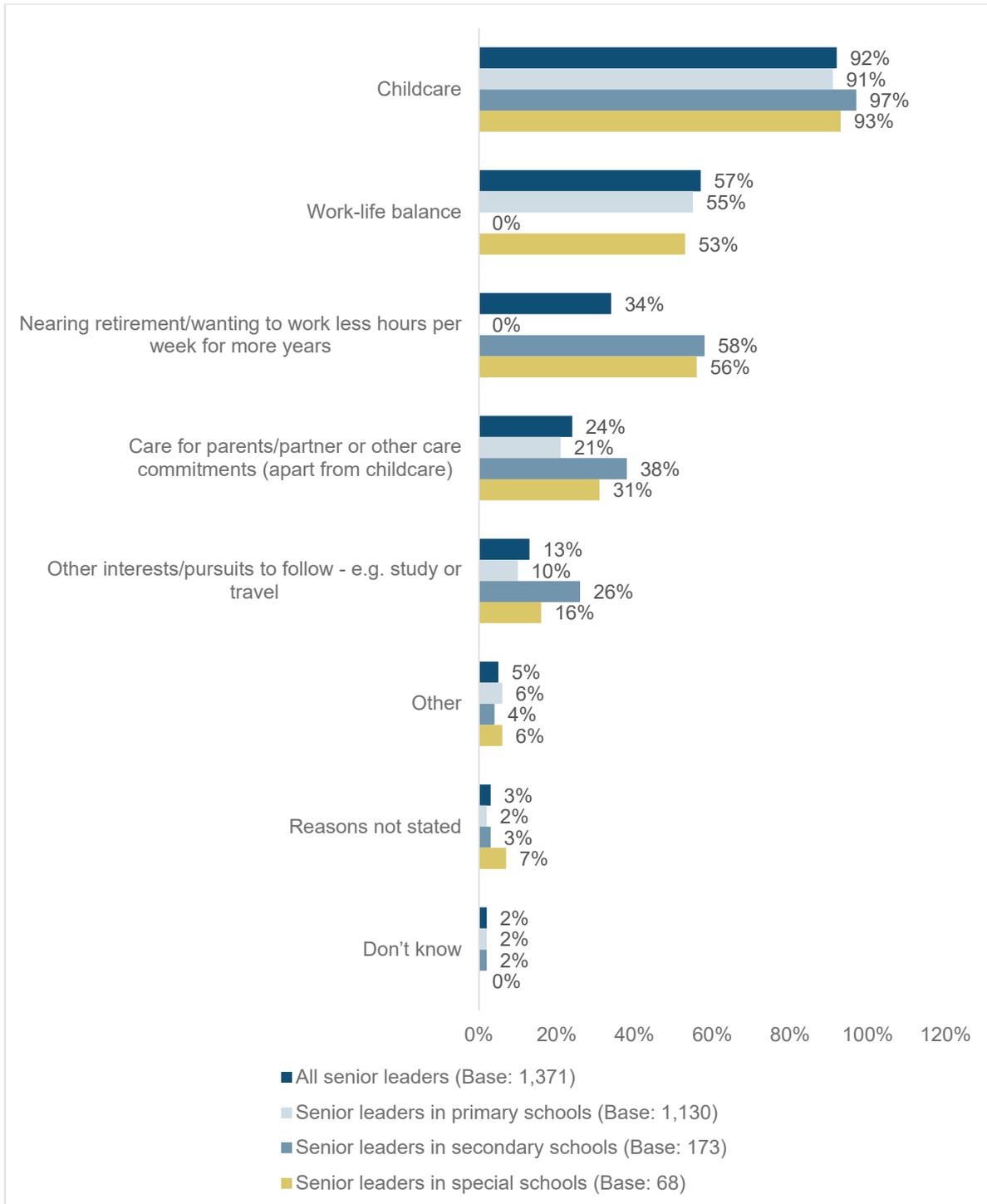
Figures do not equal 100% due to rounding; 4 respondents reported that the Vice/Assistant/Deputy Principal or Headteacher made the final decision, equating to less than 1%.

2.2.1 Reasons for requests for flexible working

Reflecting the findings of the literature review, nearly all senior leaders (92% of 1,371) said that childcare was the main reason for senior leaders and teachers requesting to work flexibly, with over half (57% of 1,371) also mentioning work/life balance as a key driver for flexible working (Figure 4).

Senior leaders in secondary schools were significantly more likely to report that work-life balance was the main reason for wanting to work flexibly (Figure 4). Senior leaders in primary schools were significantly less likely to report that nearing retirement was the main reason, compared to senior leaders in secondary and special schools.

Figure 4: What are the main reasons that teachers and leaders request to work flexibly?²²



Among the 5% of senior leaders who selected ‘other’ reasons for flexible working requests being made, nearly all mentioned health/medical issues; four mentioned easing the return to work following maternity leave, and three mentioned bereavement or a need

²² Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question.

for staff members to attend to personal/family circumstances other than care commitments.

2.3 Declining flexible working requests

More than one quarter of senior leaders (29% of 1,589) said that flexible working requests had been declined in their schools, while over half (56% of 1,589) said that flexible working requests had not been declined in their schools.²³

Where schools had declined flexible working requests, this was most commonly related to part-time working (68% of 453) (See Table 4). This is likely because part-time working is the most commonly requested form of flexible working (see section 3.1).

Table 4: Which forms of flexible working have been declined?

Form of flexible working declined	% of all senior leaders (Base: 453)
Part-time hours	68%
Job share	22%
Homeworking or remote working	8%
Staggered hours	7%
Split role	6%
Sabbatical	6%
Personal/family days	6%
Compressed hours	5%
Flexitime/lieu time	4%
Career break	3%
Phased retirement	2%
Annualised hours	2%
Split shifts	2%
Staggered weeks	1%
Other	3%
Don't know	1%

One respondent reported 'None', equating to less than 1%.

Where senior leaders stated that 'other' flexible working requests had been declined, they said that these were:

- Requests for specific days off as part of part-time working, or a specific block of hours as part of split shifts, where these requests could not be accommodated (reported by nine senior leaders).

²³ The remainder (16% of 1589) reported that this question was not applicable as no flexible working requests had been made.

- More than one request being submitted in a year (such as a request granted, and then a subsequent request being made to change the arrangements again) (reported by one senior leader).
- The number of hours requested being fewer than those stipulated within contractual agreements (reported by one senior leader).

2.3.2 Reasons for declining requests for flexible working

According to senior leaders, not being able to organise work amongst existing staff/timetabling issues (69% of 453) was the most common reason for declining flexible working (Table 5). This echoes the literature review, which identified that senior leaders perceived the logistical issues of timetabling to be challenging to overcome, suggesting that the attitudes of senior leadership teams towards flexible working can be crucial in their effectiveness (see Appendix 1).

In comparison to those in primary and secondary schools, senior leaders in special schools were significantly more likely to cite the need for consistency in the classroom as a key reason for declining requests for flexible working. The detrimental effect on pupils and the inability to recruit additional staff to replace hours lost were also key reasons for declining requests for flexible working amongst senior leaders in special schools.²⁴ In addition, the burden of additional costs created by flexible working was cited more commonly by senior leaders in primary and secondary schools compared to those in special schools.

²⁴ This finding should be treated with some caution due to the low base for special schools.

Table 5: What are the reasons for declining requests for flexible working?

Reasons for declining flexible working requests	% of all senior leaders (Base: 453)	% of senior leaders in primary schools (Base: 345)	% of senior leaders in secondary schools (Base: 78)	% of senior leaders in special schools (Base: 30)
Not able to organise work amongst existing staff / timetabling issues	69%	67%	78%	63%
Could be a detrimental effect on pupils (e.g. well-being and outcomes)	61%	59%	62%	80%
Wouldn't be able to recruit additional staff to replace hours lost through flexible working arrangements	33%	31%	36%	50%
The burden of additional costs that would result from flexible working	31%	32%	30%	13%
Could be a detrimental effect on teacher performance / quality of teaching	29%	30%	23%	27%
Our pupils have additional needs, and they need consistency in the team leading and managing their learning	17%	14%	8%	80%*
Would create too much additional workload for other colleagues to cover periods when the flexible worker is not on site	17%	17%	18%	17%
Flexible working doesn't work in school environments	8%	8%	8%	10%
Ongoing staff restructure process precluding any additional requests being considered for a temporary period	7%	8%	8%	3%
Lack of support from / concerns of parents	6%	6%	4%	7%
Lack of support from Governors	5%	6%	1%	7%
Would create too much additional workload for HR personnel to manage a greater number of staff (e.g. if job share/part-time)	2%	2%	1%	7%
Unclear about the legal requirements	1%	0%	3%	0%
Other	6%	6%	10%	0%
Don't know	2%	2%	1%	0%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

The 'other' reasons that senior leaders gave for declining requests were:

- Lack of school capacity for meeting flexible working requests (such as concerns that agreeing flexible working with a member of staff would 'set a precedent'/not wanting to offer the same to all staff in similar roles, or the requests themselves being too inflexible such as specific days off) – reported by nine senior leaders.
- Lack of school capacity due to restrictions regarding staff ratios in primary schools and the potential subsequent impact on Published Admission Numbers (PAN) if there were fewer staff on-site – reported by nine senior leaders.

- Reduced hours/flexible working perceived not to be compatible with a role (such as perceptions that management roles need to be undertaken full-time, or that teachers cannot work from home) – reported by seven senior leaders.
- Concerns related to performance management (such as deciding on accountability in terms of job-share arrangements) – reported by two senior leaders.
- Previous negative experiences of the impact on school of flexible working arrangements – reported by two senior leaders.
- A request not meeting requirements of school policy/procedures (such as prior to 26 weeks of employment) – reported by two senior leaders.

Issues reported by one senior leader each were the potential detrimental effect on staff development and not acquiring adequate experience if they are not on-site, and governors refusing a request, despite it being supported by the senior leadership team (SLT).

Reasons for declining requests by gender

When looking at the reasons that male and female senior leaders gave for declining requests for flexible working, both cited not being able to organise work amongst existing staff/timetabling issues as the most common reason for declining requests for flexible working (Table 6). Male senior leaders were significantly more likely to cite the potential detrimental effect on pupils and teacher performance as reasons for declining requests.

Table 6: What are the reasons for declining requests for flexible working? Senior leaders by gender.

Reasons for declining flexible working requests	% of all senior leaders (Base: 453)	% of male senior leaders (Base: 114)	% of female senior leaders (Base: 334)
Not able to organise work amongst existing staff / timetabling issues	69%	72%	68%
Could be a detrimental effect on pupils (e.g. well-being and outcomes)	61%	69%*	58%
Wouldn't be able to recruit additional staff to replace hours lost through flexible working arrangements	33%	35%	31%
The burden of additional costs that would result from flexible working	31%	37%	28%
Could be a detrimental effect on teacher performance / quality of teaching	29%	38%*	26%
Our pupils have additional needs, and they need consistency in the team leading and managing their learning	17%	18%	17%
Would create too much additional workload for other colleagues to cover periods when the flexible worker is not on site	17%	15%	18%
Flexible working doesn't work in school environments	8%	9%	8%
Ongoing staff restructure process precluding any additional requests being considered for a temporary period	7%	5%	8%
Lack of support from / concerns of parents	6%	5%	5%
Lack of support from Governors	5%	3%	5%
Would create too much additional workload for HR personnel to manage a greater number of staff (e.g. if job share/part-time)	2%	4%	2%
Unclear about the legal requirements	1%	3%	0%
Other	6%	6%	6%
Don't know	2%	1%	2%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

3. Implementing flexible working in schools

This section details the forms of flexible working that survey respondents reported had either been requested or implemented in their schools, and the perceived benefits and challenges of doing so.

3.1 Practices currently implemented

Senior leaders were asked to indicate which types of flexible working had been requested in their schools, and which had been implemented. For both, these were most commonly part-time hours, job-share and personal/family days (Tables 7 and 8).²⁵

Job shares were significantly more likely to have been requested and implemented in primary schools, compared to secondary or special schools. However, senior leaders in primary schools were significantly less likely than those in secondary and special schools to report that phased retirement had been requested or implemented as an option for flexible working.

Senior leaders in secondary schools were significantly more likely to report that flexitime, staggered hours, split role, compressed hours and annualised hours had been requested. Further to this, part-time hours, flexitime, staggered hours, compressed hours and annualised hours were significantly more likely to have been implemented in secondary schools.

²⁵ The School Workforce Census shows that the number of headteachers, senior leaders and teachers working part-time in England has increased since 2010; the latest published data show that 23% of teachers in England were working part-time (DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>). For background context, see the literature review published during phase one of this project: CGR (2019), *Flexible working practices in schools – Literature review*, DfE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-practices-in-schools-literature-review>.

Table 7: Types of flexible working that have been requested in schools.²⁶

Form of flexible working requested	% of ALL senior leaders (Base: 1,363)	% of senior leaders in primary schools (Base: 1,125)	% of senior leaders in secondary schools (Base: 170)	% of senior leaders in special schools (Base: 68)
Part-time hours	89%	88%	93%	93%
Personal / family days	62%	60%	72%	66%
Job share	56%	59%*	41%	41%
Flexitime / Lieu time	34%	31%	58%*	32%
Staggered hours	28%	24%	57%*	28%
Phased retirement	22%	17%*	49%	40%
Split role	21%	19%	34%*	19%
Homeworking or remote working	21%	21%	22%	25%
Sabbatical	13%	10%	28%	16%
Compressed hours	10%	8%	22%*	6%
Annualised hours	7%	5%	22%*	7%
Split shifts	5%	4%	5%	6%
Career break	5%	4%	12%	9%
Staggered weeks	3%	2%	8%	3%
Other	3%	3%	1%	4%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

Table 8: Types of flexible working that have been implemented in schools.²⁷

Form of flexible working implemented	% of ALL senior leaders (Base 1,363)	% of senior leaders in primary schools (Base: 1,125)	% of senior leaders in secondary schools (Base: 170)	% of senior leaders in special schools (Base: 68)
Part-time hours	86%	85%	94%*	85%
Personal / family days	62%	60%	75%	68%
Job share	54%	58%*	38%	32%
Flexitime / Lieu time	35%	32%	58%*	34%
Staggered hours	29%	25%	55%*	29%
Phased retirement	22%	17%*	48%	37%
Split role	20%	20%	30%	21%
Homeworking or remote working	22%	21%	22%	27%
Sabbatical	11%	9%	22%	15%
Compressed hours	9%	8%	19%*	7%
Annualised hours	7%	5%	24%*	7%
Split shifts	5%	4%	7%	4%
Career break	4%	3%	10%	7%
Staggered weeks	3%	2%	7%	6%
Other	2%	3%	1%	3%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

²⁶ Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question.

²⁷ Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question.

Some senior leaders added additional commentary (for example where arrangements were made on a temporary basis), or they provided examples of other types of flexible working that had been requested and/or implemented in their schools:

- Seven senior leaders reported that term-time leave requests had been granted to support staff with personal/family commitments such as caring for relatives, house moves, or to attend special occasions.
- Four senior leaders had agreed to flexibilities around PPA time specifically, such as enabling it to move so that it was not always at a set time each week, or allowing for it to be completed via home/remote working (such as SLT planning undertaken at a local hotel to aid working without interruption).
- Four senior leaders had accommodated requests related to maternity and paternity leave, for example adjusting role responsibilities to support a return to work, agreeing extended leave, or arrangements to support a phased return.
- Three senior leaders said that they had approached part-time working arrangements as a trial, rather than permanently (such as to determine whether this would support staff retention), or said they had implemented part-time working temporarily to support further education or ill health requests.
- Three reported that staff members who already worked flexibly had had their arrangements tailored further, such as part-time staff or those on split shifts changing the days/schedule they work. In relation to this, one senior leader said that they had agreed to a member of staff working fewer hours over more days, such as the equivalent of a three-day week over four days.
- Two senior leaders had agreed to study leave for relevant qualifications, such as the completion of a National Professional Qualification (NPQ) in Senior Leadership.
- Two senior leaders reported agreeing to flexible working arrangements to enable religious observance.

3.1.1 Reasons for not implementing flexible working

Where senior leaders said that flexible working practices were not currently used in their schools, this was mainly because no teaching staff had requested flexible working (88% of 192). However, reflecting the results of the literature review (see Appendix 1), at least one quarter of senior leaders reported that flexible working was not implemented in their

school due to a perceived negative impact on pupils, timetabling complexities and the potential cost to the school of doing so (Table 9).²⁸

Table 9: If no flexible working practices are currently used in your school, why is this?

Reason	% of all senior leaders (Base: 192)
None of our teaching staff have requested flexible working	88%
Could be a detrimental effect on pupils (e.g. well-being and outcomes)	28%
Not able to organise work amongst existing staff / timetabling issues	26%
The burden of additional costs that would result from flexible working	25%
Wouldn't be able to recruit additional staff to replace hours lost through flexible working arrangements	18%
Flexible working doesn't work in school environments	16%
Would create too much additional workload for other colleagues to cover periods when the flexible worker is not on site	16%
Our pupils have additional needs, and they need consistency in the team leading and managing their learning	15%
Could be a detrimental effect on teacher performance / quality of teaching	14%
Unclear about the legal requirements	14%
Lack of support from / concerns of parents	10%
Would create too much additional workload for human resources (HR) personnel to manage a greater number of staff (e.g if job share/part-time)	7%
Ongoing staff restructure process precluding any additional requests being considered for a temporary period	4%
Lack of support from Governors	1%
Other	3%
Don't know	3%

Where senior leaders indicated that there were 'other' reasons for not implementing flexible working in their schools, three provided additional details. These were (from one respondent each):

- In relation to a proposed job share arrangement, difficulties in being able to decide which member of staff would attend training, the potential cost of sending two members of staff for training, and the logistics of timetabling two PPA sessions.
- Safeguarding or pastoral support requirements meant that pupils needed the 'continuity and consistency' of a 'regular staffing pattern', which flexible working practices were not perceived to promote.
- The school had already established a manageable and agreed ratio of full-time and part-time staff in consultation with staff, governors and unions – meaning no additional flexible working practices were implemented.

²⁸ Note that meaningful analysis by phase was not possible for this question due to low bases.

3.2 Benefits

In terms of the benefits of flexible working practices to schools directly, nearly three-quarters of senior leaders (74% of 1,314) said that implementing flexible working arrangements had helped staff to manage their workload/work-life balance, reflecting the most common reasons for requesting flexible working initially (Table 10). When looking by gender, male and female senior leaders gave broadly similar responses.²⁹

Other common benefits identified by senior leaders were that flexible working improved staff wellbeing (67% of 1,314) and helped to retain staff who would otherwise leave the role (57% of 1,314). These findings support those identified during the literature review, including previous research by CooperGibson Research into teacher workload and retention.³⁰

Senior leaders in special schools were significantly less likely to report that there had been a benefit in retaining staff who would otherwise have left the role as a result of flexible working practice. By contrast, senior leaders in secondary schools were significantly more likely to have cited the benefits of flexible working practices in retaining experienced staff who may have retired, and in providing a wider pool of potential employees, compared to primary and special school senior leaders (Table 10).

Providing pupils with the opportunity to learn from more teachers was significantly less likely to have been identified as a benefit of flexible working practices by senior leaders in secondary schools, which may reflect the typically larger size of the teaching workforce in these schools compared to primary and special settings.

²⁹ For example, 74% of 319 male senior leaders reported that flexible working helped staff to manage their workload/work-life balance, compared to 74% of 982 female senior leaders; and in terms of improving staff wellbeing, this was identified as a benefit of 66% of 319 male senior leaders compared to 67% of 982 female senior leaders.

³⁰ For example: CGR (2018), *Exploring teacher workload: qualitative research*, DfE; CGR (2018), *Factors affecting teacher retention: qualitative investigation*, DfE.

Table 10: Has your school benefitted from any of the following as a result of flexible working practices?

Benefit	% of all senior leaders (Base: 1,314)	% of senior leaders in primary schools (Base: 1,086)	% of senior leaders in secondary schools (Base: 169)	% of senior leaders in special schools (Base: 59)
Helps staff to manage their workload / work-life balance	74%	73%	80%	68%
Improved staff well-being	67%	67%	66%	64%
Retains staff who would otherwise leave the role (excluding retirement)	58%	57%	60%	44%*
Staff return to work after maternity leave / return more quickly	51%	50%	55%	46%
Retains more experienced staff who would otherwise retire early	37%	32%	66%*	48%
Reduced ill health absence	22%	21%	31%	20%
Pupils can learn from more teachers (e.g. two teachers in job share)	21%	24%	5%*	15%
A more diverse range of skills and experience in the workforce	18%	18%	18%	14%
Chance to bring in new staff who otherwise would not have been recruited	18%	18%	21%	12%
Aids succession planning	17%	16%	20%	27%
Additional development opportunities for existing staff (e.g. part-time job share in leadership role)	17%	17%	18%	19%
Greater equality of opportunity for staff (e.g. gender equality, reasonable adjustment for disability)	15%	13%	26%	20%
Covering the curriculum is easier with a larger/more varied workforce	13%	13%	14%	10%
Wider pool of potential employees/easier recruitment	11%	10%	15%*	5%
Other	1%	1%	1%	3%
Don't know	7%	6%	5%	7%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

Where senior leaders noted that there were 'other' benefits to their schools as a result of flexible working, the following details were provided:

- Improved morale among the staff team, as a result of staff feeling supported and valued by the school (reported by three senior leaders).
- Financial benefits, including the ability to create a cost-effective staffing structure and having more options for providing staff cover internally rather than paying for external agency/supply teachers (reported by two senior leaders).
- More flexibility in terms of timetabling, such as having the ability to create more classes across the school, and options for developing the expertise of existing staff (reported by two senior leaders).

'[A] reception teacher reduced to four days per week. On the fifth day our Nursery teacher who is [Early Years Foundation Stage] Leader teaches Reception class whilst another teacher teaches Nursery. This enables the EYFS lead to have better insight and overview across both Nursery and Reception (such as assessment) and ensures greater continuity and consistency between Nursery and Reception classes'. (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

One senior leader noted that offering flexible working provided their school an '*opportunity to provide excellent role models*' in staff, and a positive impression of the school environment, as the institution was seen across the school community to be supporting individuals to balance personal/family needs and employment.

'The greatest benefit is the integrity of our school as an organisation that values what every individual brings to our professional learning community. Promoting flexible working arrangements reflects a respect for the workforce and the strength of a genuine school culture'. (*Senior leader, special school LA maintained*)

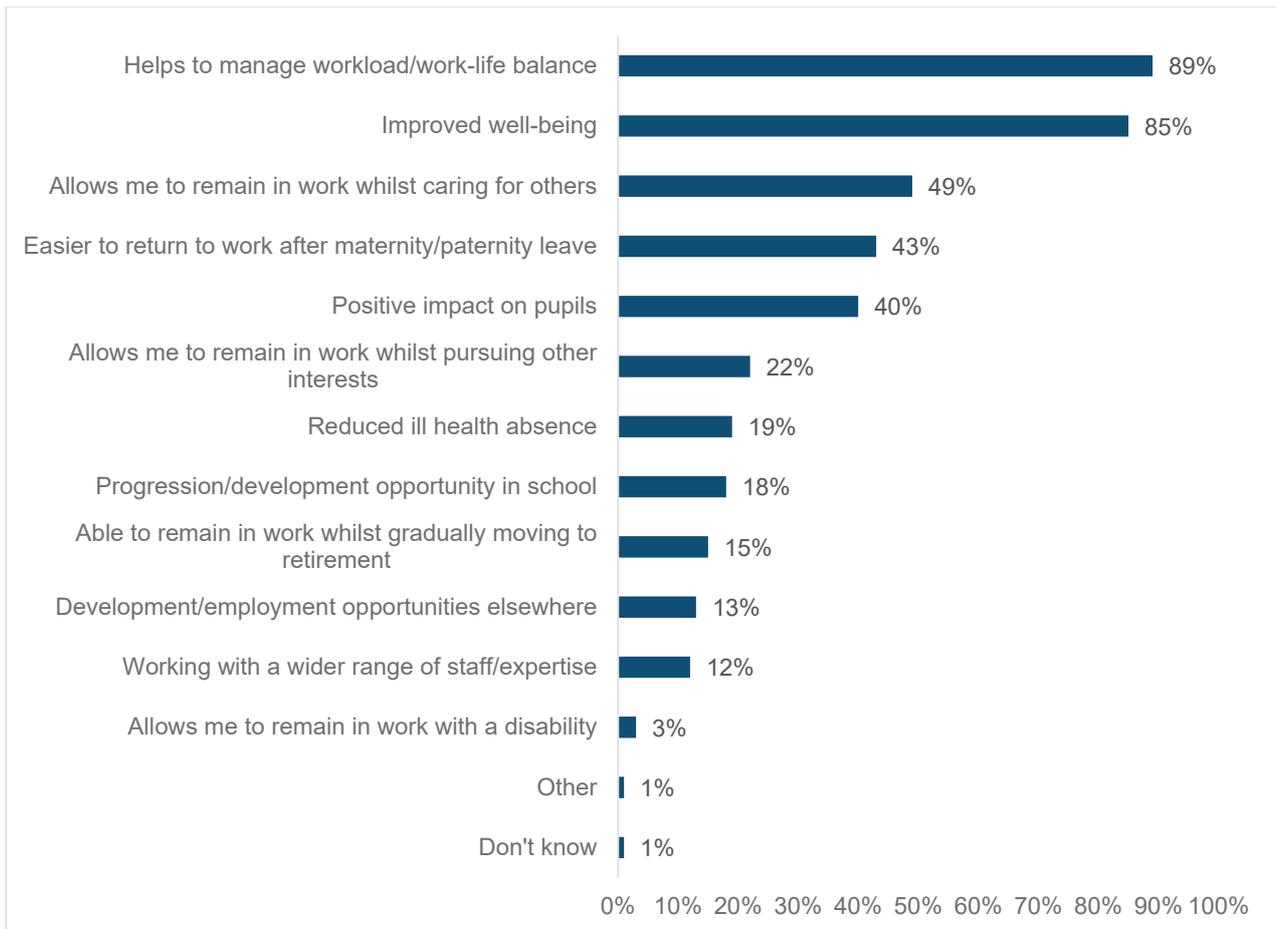
3.2.1 Benefits to teachers of flexible working

In addition to the benefits for schools, teachers were asked about the personal benefits of working flexibly; echoing the benefits reported by senior leaders to schools more widely (see section 3.2), 89% of 766 teachers reported that flexible working helped them to manage their workload/work-life balance.

The majority of teachers also felt that flexible working opportunities improved their well-being (85% of 766), and just under half (49%) said that it helped them to remain in work whilst maintaining caring responsibilities (Figure 5).³¹

³¹ Of the four teachers who provided additional commentary as to why they selected 'other', three noted that flexible working enabled them to attend to personal/family matters. One noted that flexible working reduced the cost of childcare, and one felt that it allowed them to work more effectively across the school.

Figure 5: For you personally, what are the benefits of working flexibly? (Base: 766)



By gender, there were few differences in the benefits identified; however, male teachers working flexibly were particularly likely to note that flexible working enabled them to remain in work whilst pursuing other interests (56% of 43 teachers compared to 20% of 717 female teachers).³²

Teachers in special schools cited a range of benefits of flexible working but were significantly more likely (compared to teachers in primary and secondary schools) to cite progress/development opportunities either in school/elsewhere provided by flexible working, and the ability to work with a wider range of staff/expertise. Being able to remain in work whilst gradually moving into retirement was also more important to teachers in special schools, compared to teachers in primary and secondary schools.³³

Teachers in secondary schools were most likely (compared to those in primary or special schools) to say that working flexibly enabled them to remain in work whilst caring for others; those in primary schools were most likely (compared to those in secondary or special schools) to report that flexible working had enabled an easier return to work after

³² This finding should be treated with caution due to the low base for male teachers.

³³ This finding should be treated with some caution due to the low base for special schools.

maternity/paternity leave (Table 11). The latter reflected the benefits identified by senior leaders of implementing flexible working in their schools (see section 3.2).

Table 11: For you personally, what are the benefits of working flexibly?

Benefit	% of teachers in primary schools (Base: 586)	% of teachers in secondary schools (Base: 137)	% of teachers in special schools (Base: 43)
Improved well-being	85%	84%	91%
Helps to manage workload / work-life balance	89%	91%	84%
Allows me to remain in work whilst caring for others	48%	56%	40%
Easier to return to work after maternity or paternity leave	44%	42%	28%
Positive impact on pupils	40%	42%	44%
Allows me to remain in work whilst pursuing other interests	22%	26%	16%
Reduced ill health absence	17%	22%	23%
Progression / development opportunity in school (e.g. part-time leadership role on job share)	16%	19%	35%*
Being able to remain in work whilst gradually moving to retirement	13%	18%	26%
Working with a wider range of staff / expertise	12%	6%	23%*
Development / employment opportunities elsewhere (e.g. training, study, other part-time employment)	12%	12%	33%*
Allows me to remain in work with a disability	3%	4%	7%
Other	1%	1%	0%
Don't know	1%	2%	0%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

3.3 Challenges

Senior leaders were asked if there were any forms of flexible working that they had tried to implement in school that had not worked well. Most commonly, they reported that no flexible working practices had not worked well (43% of 929). However, just over one-quarter of senior leaders responding to the question (26% of 929) said that job share arrangements had not worked well (Table 12).³⁴ In addition, senior leaders in special schools were most likely to have tried part-time working and found it had not worked well (compared to those in other settings).³⁵

³⁴ The literature review carried out during the first phase of this project highlighted that effective job shares required clear, regular and consistent communications between partners and that handover time should be used efficiently so that both partners were aware of any issues as they arose.

³⁵ 40% of 52 senior leaders in special schools, compared to 14% of 764 senior leaders in primary schools and 15% of 113 senior leaders in secondary schools. This finding should be treated with caution due to the low base for special schools.

Table 12: Are there any forms of flexible working that you have tried in the school but did not work well?

Form of flexible working that did not work well	% of all senior leaders (Base: 929)
None	43%
Job share	26%
Part-time hours	15%
Split role	9%
Staggered hours	4%
Homeworking or remote working	4%
Flexitime / Lieu time	4%
Personal / family days	3%
Compressed hours	2%
Phased retirement	2%
Split shifts	1%
Staggered weeks	1%
Annualised hours	1%
Sabbatical	1%
Career break	1%
Other	1%
Don't know	12%

Where they selected 'other' and provided additional commentary, two senior leaders highlighted that part-time leadership roles specifically had not worked well (this included a teacher having a part-time leadership aspect as part of their role). Another felt that the number of part-time requests from staff members had been too high to manage, rather than implementing part-time working itself.

'For all of the above (part-time hours, job shares, split roles), there are two main difficulties that we find: the cost implications of having part-time teachers (increased national insurance costs [plus] PPA cover [plus] cross-over time between job-share staff), and consistency of teaching/timetabling /teamwork/parental contact'. (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

Senior leaders were asked for further qualitative feedback on why they felt that flexible working had not worked well in their school. Eight broad responses were given (ordered by prevalence):

- 1. Continuity in the classroom:** In their open responses, senior leaders specifically described how younger pupils and those with additional needs required a consistent teacher in the classroom. They felt that this could also impact on a range of issues such as continuity of teaching style and planning, and potential negative impact on pupil progress and behaviour management. Detrimental effects on pupil learning were particularly noted among senior leaders as a result

of job shares or split role teaching. In some cases, this was identified as particularly difficult for children with additional needs or in primary settings.

‘Job share [did not work well:] the children made less progress [and] behaviour was not as consistent’. (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

- 2. Resources:** Senior leaders mentioned a negative impact of flexible working on staff workload/time. Examples were given of the additional hours required to enable communication between job share partners, or full-time staff being required to use time to pass on information to those working part-time.

‘[Flexible working does not work due to] the burden of work on other staff when training or information needs to be cascaded outside of core time due to staff only working designated days’. (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

A negative impact of flexible working on school budget was also noted. This included the costs of part-time staff attending training (such as the cost of staff cover, or organising additional training to fit part-time staff hours). In addition, costs to SLT in terms of capacity were mentioned, plus additional human resources (HR) aspects of recruiting and employing more staff to cover teaching roles.

- 3. Communication:** Communication was key to the perceived success of flexible working practices among senior leaders. In most cases this referred to a lack of handover or insufficient communication between job shares. They also perceived that staggered hours could affect the teacher’s ability to communicate effectively with parents.
- 4. Working relationships:** Senior leaders felt that a barrier to effective job shares was the different working practices of the staff involved. Where teaching approaches were similar it was perceived that the job share could be successful, however, in many cases, approaches had differed leading to inconsistency and confusing pupils. On a more personal level, they reported that the personalities of job share partners needed to match.
- 5. Attendance at key meetings and training:** A concern of several senior leaders regarding part-time teachers was their ability to attend staff meetings or key training events.
- 6. Perceived incompatibility with the role:** Some perceived that flexible working was generally difficult due to the nature of teaching. They noted that when pupils were on-site, staff needed to be present, so certain types of flexible working such as staggered/compressed hours were hard to accommodate.

- 7. Attitude of parents:** Several senior leaders mentioned that parents did not like dealing with more than one teacher. Job shares particularly were felt to be 'extremely unpopular with parents.'

'Parents did not like two teachers in a class over a week and reported that communications and standards dropped'. (*Senior leader, special school LA maintained*)

- 8. Perceived inequality in workload:** Senior leaders cited an unequal workload, or the perception of inequality in the designation of responsibilities, as a reason that flexible working practices had failed. In some cases, for example, this led to one job share partner blaming the other. Related to this, several mentioned difficulties when there was a lack of clarity between job share staff about their roles and responsibilities (and therefore a potential lack of accountability).

3.3.1 Practical challenges

Senior leaders reported a range of practical challenges in implementing flexible working, most commonly managing/arranging staff meetings (75% of 1,315) and managing communications/keeping staff up-to-date (73%) – see Table 13.

Being able to design a suitable timetable was significantly more of an issue for secondary schools in implementing flexible working, than primary and special schools. Primary schools were significantly more likely to have faced negative reactions from parents and special schools were significantly more likely to have faced challenges in managing the workload of employees taking flexible working options.

Table 13: Has your school experienced any of the following practical challenges in implementing flexible working?³⁶

Practical challenge experienced	% of all senior leaders (Base: 1,315)	% of senior leaders in primary schools (Base: 1,079)	% of senior leaders in secondary schools (Base: 170)	% of senior leaders in special schools (Base: 66)
Managing / arranging staff meetings	75%	76%	70%	64%
Managing communications / keeping staff up-to-date	73%	76%	57%	67%
Additional costs / resource	56%	58%	44%	50%
Managing overlapping requests (e.g. staff wanting same days off)	54%	51%	69%	59%
Setting agreements around expectations of workload and attendance at meetings / training	53%	53%	55%	36%
Designing a suitable timetable	50%	45%	84%*	50%
Managing / covering the workload of employees taking flexible options	45%	44%	43%	58%*
Negative reactions from parents (e.g. if students have too many different teachers per class / subject)	41%	43%*	31%	24%
Negative reactions from pupils	17%	15%	23%	38%*
Other	1%	1%	0%	2%
Don't know	5%	5%	4%	11%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

Among the senior leaders who reported 'other' challenges to implementing flexible working, these were broadly similar to the reasons given for flexible working not working well (section 3.3). These were:

- Determining performance management and accountability in job share arrangements.
- Receiving negative reactions from other members of staff.
- Ensuring training and development is accessed.
- Creating consistency for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Negative reactions from other stakeholders such as school governors.
- Recruitment challenges (perceived lack of high-quality candidates for part-time positions).

³⁶ Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question.

3.3.2 Challenges for teachers

Supporting the findings of the literature review and the responses from senior leaders above, over three-quarters of teachers (77% of 730) reported that managing their workload and not working beyond contracted hours was a key challenge to flexible working in school (Table 14). This is despite the large majority of teachers who worked flexibly reporting that it helped them support their work/life balance (see section 3.2.1); supporting previous research that although flexible working helps, a range of factors can impact on workload management.³⁷

Reflecting the individual needs of pupils in special schools, managing the concerns of parents and pupils and the negative impact of flexible working on pupils were identified as significantly more of a challenge by teachers in these schools, compared to those in primary and secondary schools.³⁸

Table 14: For you personally, what are the key challenges to flexible working in school?

Challenge to flexible working	% of all teachers (Base: 730)	% of teachers in primary schools (Base: 556)	% of teachers in secondary schools (Base: 134)	% of teachers in special schools (Base: 40)
Managing workload and not working beyond contracted hours	77%	78%	69%	78%
Keeping up-to-date / managing communications with colleagues	66%	69%	59%	60%
Attending staff meetings or training / agreeing attendance at meetings / training	56%	56%	55%	55%
Loss of TLR payment and / or reduced responsibilities	27%	26%	34%	20%
Managing concerns of parents	26%	26%	19%	43%*
Negative perceptions of other colleagues	22%	22%	22%	23%
Negative impact on pupils	20%	19%	17%	35%*
Managing concerns of pupils	19%	17%	19%	35%*
Lack of support from SLT	10%	9%	15%	10%
Other	4%	4%	2%	3%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

Where teachers selected 'other', they generally provided additional detail in relation to the options they had selected (such as examples of how/where their workload was affected or the perceived impact on pupils of flexible working). In addition, four teachers highlighted personal financial considerations (such as impact of flexible working arrangements on their income). Two teachers reported that the broader staffing considerations of the school were a challenge to accessing flexible working (such as

³⁷ See, for example: CGR (2018), *Factors affecting teacher retention: qualitative investigation*, DfE.

³⁸ This finding should be treated with caution due to the low base for special schools.

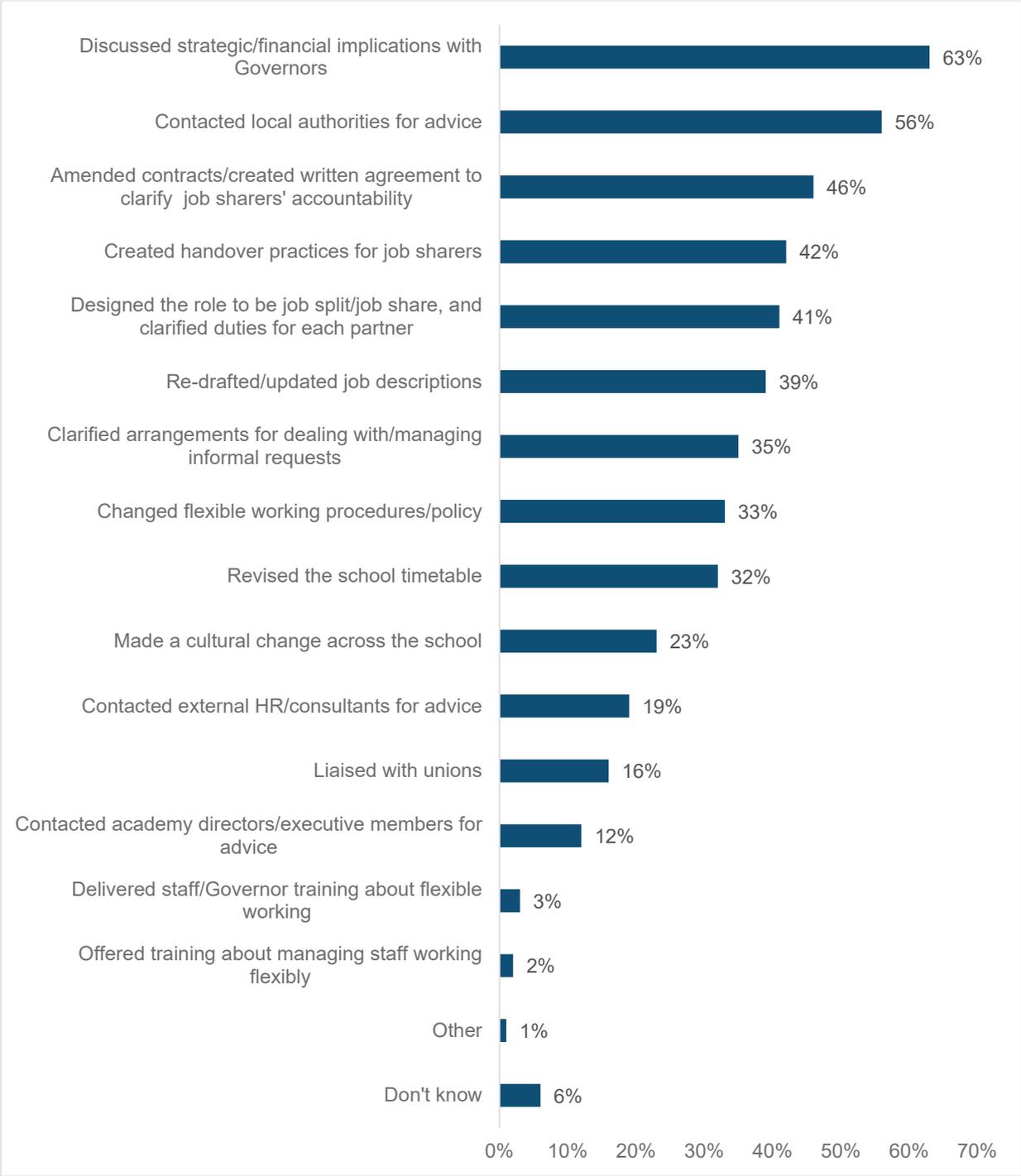
impact on the workload on full-time colleagues of part-time teachers); and budgetary constraints meaning personal days were only granted when staff are able to cover internally.

Other challenges reported by one teacher each were: the potential negative impact on professional development/CPD opportunities; and the negative perceptions of governors towards flexible working (and subsequent refusals to grant requests).

3.4 Approaches to support flexible working

Senior leaders reported a variety of activities that had been undertaken in their schools in order to enable them to offer flexible working practices. The most common of these, undertaken by nearly two-thirds of senior leaders (63% of 1,353) was discussing the strategic and/or financial implications of offering flexible working practices in their school with Governors (Figure 6). In addition, over half (56% of 1,353) had contacted local authorities for advice, and nearly half (46% of 1,353) had amended contracts or written agreements to clarify the responsibilities and accountability of each partner within a job share.

Figure 6: To enable the school to offer flexible working practices, the school has ... (Base: 1,353)



Where senior leaders reported that they had undertaken 'other' activities, they said that they had:

- Considered each request for flexible working on an individual basis with the member of staff, or with governors (reported by three senior leaders).

- Discussed options with staff and parents to increase levels of understanding of flexible working, employee rights and the potential benefits of these arrangements across the school community (reported by two senior leaders).
- Used performance management processes to handle requests (reported by two senior leaders), although no detail was provided as to how this was implemented.

In addition, senior leaders had changed contracts for staff returning from maternity leave (such as to part-time), reviewed policies and potential impact on timetabling (without making changes to them), and enabled flexibility within part-time contracts to enable teachers to 'swap' hours, or undertake PPA time remotely (all reported by one senior leader each).

[The school has] recognised that [to support recruitment] you have to be as flexible as possible'. (*Senior leader, secondary school LA maintained*)

3.4.1 Mechanisms for supporting flexible working

During the online survey, senior leaders were presented with a range of examples of the types of practices or activities that they may have implemented within their schools in order to support flexible working arrangements (Table 15). If they had implemented any of the examples given, they were asked to rate each activity in terms of its value to the school in helping to support flexible working. Overall, where these practices were used to support flexible working, the majority found them valuable.

Notably, the practices identified as being particularly valuable related to supporting clear and consistent communications (one of the common challenges identified by senior leaders when implementing flexible working) – by ensuring job share partners met regularly, and arrangements for keeping in touch/attendance at meetings were formalised. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of senior leaders (63% of 329) felt that joint PPA time for job share partners was a very valuable practice when supporting flexible working (Table 15).

Table 15: If your school implements any of the following practices to support flexible workers, how valuable do you think they are in helping to make flexible working practicable in a school setting? (Base: 329)

Mechanism to support flexible working	1 (very valuable)	2	3	4	5 (not valuable at all)	Don't know
Joint PPA time for job share partners	63%	15%	8%	1%	2%	12%
Extended PPA time for job share partners	26%	19%	20%	7%	6%	22%
Formal arrangements for keeping in touch/informing flexible workers of key updates or news	41%	30%	16%	3%	2%	10%
Formal agreements for flexible workers' attendance at meetings and other non-teaching events	46%	32%	11%	2%	1%	7%
Use of technology/software to support remote working	29%	24%	21%	5%	5%	16%

When asked whether there were any other practices implemented in their schools to support flexible working, senior leaders most commonly mentioned the importance of attending staff meetings. Therefore, solutions offered for enabling all staff to attend meetings varied from arranging that all staff are present on one day a week, to alternating the day of the week that meetings were held, so that all staff were able to attend a meeting every fortnight. Twenty-three senior leaders stated that their part-time teachers were either paid additional hours for PPA time/attending meetings, or they accrued time off in-lieu.

Twenty-seven senior leaders had implemented overlapping timetables for job share partners, to enable handover between members of staff. However, this came at a cost, such as two members of staff on three-day contracts to cover the five-day week.

‘Where we have a job share the two teachers do three days a week each so they overlap and can team teach together in the morning and take PPA together in the afternoon. This is expensive but works for the teachers, their performance and most importantly for the children - we have seen an improvement in performance’. (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

Communication was referred to by 22 senior leaders. Methods to facilitate communication included handover books, minutes from staff meetings being emailed to all staff, weekly updates from SLT or staff noticeboards.

‘[We implement] a varied and reliable communication system to ensure part-time workers have access to the same information as full-time workers, using email, notices, paper copies of information and talking to people’.
(*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

Connected to this, 13 senior leaders mentioned introducing technological solutions to facilitate flexible working, such as online school calendars, access to a shared staff drive and electronic applications (“apps”) to enable remote working and marking. In eight cases, senior leaders mentioned that staff were given the opportunity to do their PPA at home.

Eighteen respondents to the senior leader questionnaire stated that the school’s culture was what enabled flexibility, based on ‘*an ethos of open communication, supportive community, [and] working in teams.*’ (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*).

3.4.2 Support requested

In an open, qualitative question, senior leaders were asked to describe any help that they would find valuable in enabling their school to introduce more flexible working options. Over 200 of the 564 leaders responding to the question mentioned funding. Where more detail was given, this was predominantly to finance PPA or handover time between teachers on a job share.

Over 200 were also keen to access more information, advice and guidance, or training, on how flexible working could be implemented. This varied from information for teachers, to information and guidance for governors and leadership teams.

‘[The school would appreciate] training and guidance re PPA, timetabling and expectations for attendance at staff training and CPD’. (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

A range of other ideas for support were provided by smaller numbers of senior leaders. Thirty-three thought that case studies or examples of best practice from schools that had implemented flexible working effectively would be useful. They felt that such examples needed to be specific to certain types of schools, for example case studies or examples of practise implemented in a small school setting.³⁹

Twenty-six senior leaders would appreciate support with teacher recruitment, particularly in identifying those who wanted to work part-time.

³⁹ For examples of flexible working case studies previously published by DfE, see: DfE, *Flexible Working in Schools: guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*, 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/593990/DFE_Flex_Working_Guidance_2017_FINAL.pdf.

'In order to enable flexible working for teachers we have to be able to recruit. Recruiting is becoming impossible for full-time posts and then if we factor in someone who works 0.8 and we then have to try and find a 0.2, we are often unable to find this'. (*Senior leader, secondary school LA maintained*)

Twenty-two senior leaders felt that information on policies and/or the legalities of flexible working would be helpful. This was particularly related to increasing senior leader understanding of how they should deal with flexible working requests, including the reasons that can be given for declining a request.

Fourteen senior leaders either thought that awareness of flexible working practices needed to be increased, or that a cultural shift was needed to enable flexible working to be more acceptable within school settings. This related to teachers being made more aware of the options open to them, as well as the expectations and shared accountability of part-time work.

Nine senior leaders felt that improved technology would facilitate flexible working, such as better virtual private network (VPN) facilities, shared online calendars, timetabling software, and ICT provision to enable working from home.

4. Personal experiences of flexible working in schools

This section explores the personal experiences and perceptions of senior leaders and teachers in relation to flexible working arrangements in schools. This includes the forms of flexible working that they might consider in the future, the reasons that teachers have not made flexible working requests, and their experiences of parental leave.

4.1 Flexible working arrangements

As noted in section 1.4, the majority of senior leaders responding to the survey (72% of 1,589) said that they did not currently work flexibly. Flexible working was more common among teachers, although over half of this cohort still reported that they did not work flexibly (52% of 1,305).

The most common forms of flexible working differed between the two groups of respondents (see Tables 16 and 17). Over one-third of teachers (36% of 1,305) said that they were working part-time, with 20% part of job share arrangements. This is in line with literature review findings, that the concept of flexible working in schools is currently synonymous with part-time and, to a lesser extent, job share arrangements (see Appendix 1). Primary teachers were significantly more likely to report that they worked part-time, compared to teachers in secondary and special schools.

However, this was not the case for senior leaders, where those responding to the online survey most commonly reported having formal home/remote working arrangements (12% of 1,589), personal/family days (12% of 1,589), with a low proportion working part-time (10% of 1,589). Primary senior leaders were significantly less likely to have formal home/remote working arrangements in place.

Table 16: Do you currently work flexibly (senior leaders)?⁴⁰

Form of flexible working	ALL senior leaders (Base: 1, 589)	% of senior leaders in primary schools (Base: 1,329)	% of senior leaders in secondary schools (Base: 184)	% of senior leaders in special schools (Base: 76)
Personal/family days	12%	13%	8%	11%
Home or remote working (regularly/formally agreed)	12%	13%	5%*	16%
Part-time hours	10%	11%	8%	4%
Job share	6%	6%	3%	0%
Flexitime/lieu time	4%	4%	3%	5%
Staggered hours	1%	1%	3%	1%
Phased retirement	1%	1%	3%	1%
Split role	2%	2%	2%	1%
Annualised hours worked flexibly	1%	1%	2%	1%
Split shifts	0%	0%	1%	0%
Staggered weeks	0%	0%	1%	0%
Compressed hours	1%	1%	1%	1%
Sabbatical	0%	0%	1%	0%
Career break	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	1%	2%	1%
None (I do not work with flexible arrangements)	72%	71%	78%	76%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

Table 17: Do you currently work flexibly (teachers)?⁴¹

Form of flexible working	ALL teachers (Base: 1,305)	% of teachers in primary schools (Base: 946)	% of teachers in secondary schools (Base: 282)	% of teachers in special schools (Base: 77)
Part-time hours	36%	37%	33%	30%
Job share	20%	26%*	1%	9%
Personal/family days	6%	7%	6%	5%
Flexitime/lieu time	3%	3%	3%	4%
Split role	3%	4%	1%	1%
Home or remote working (regularly/formally agreed)	3%	3%	1%	5%
Phased retirement	1%	0%	1%	3%
Other	1%	1%	2%	0%
None (I do not work with flexible arrangements)	52%	50%	59%	61%

⁴⁰ Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question. Options selected by 1% of senior leaders or less (across all school types) are not included in the table. These were: split shifts, staggered weeks, compressed hours, sabbatical and career break.

⁴¹ Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question. Options selected by 1% of teachers or less (across all school types) are not included in the table. These were: staggered hours, annualised hours worked flexibly, split shifts, staggered weeks, compressed hours, sabbatical and career break.

Where they stated 'other', most respondents provided some detail regarding their arrangements such as part-time hours (such as the number of days per week they worked) or agreed homeworking arrangements (such as for senior leaders to focus on strategic planning). Other respondents reported that they had agreed a less formal arrangement where they could leave early on specified days to collect their own children from school.

Reflecting the gender differences for flexible working identified during the literature review, female senior leaders were significantly more likely to report that they currently worked flexibly, compared to male senior leaders (33% of 1,181 compared to 16% of 389 respectively). Among teachers, the large majority of flexible working arrangements were reported by teachers in primary schools: 96% of the 256 teachers in a job share arrangement reported that they worked in a primary school. Three-quarters of part-time teachers worked in primary schools (75% of 465).⁴²

4.1.1 Flexible working in previous roles

When considering previous teaching roles, a higher proportion of senior leaders had previously worked flexibly than did so currently: 19% of 1,589 senior leaders said that they had worked part-time hours in a previous role, and 17% had worked in a job share arrangement (Table 18). This may be expected given the previous finding that many felt flexible working was not compatible with senior leader roles. By contrast, more teachers reported working flexibly currently than they did previously (with 71% of 1,305 stating that they had not worked flexibly in a previous teaching role).

⁴² Note that this reflects School Workforce Census data, which shows that part-time teachers are more likely to be working in primary schools. (DfE (2018), 'School Workforce in England: November 2017', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>)

Table 18: Have you previously worked flexibly in a teaching role?⁴³

Flexible working arrangement in a previous role	% of all senior leaders (Base: 1,589)	% of all teachers (Base: 1,305)
None	68%	71%
Part-time hours	19%	21%
Job share	17%	15%
Split role	3%	2%
Split shifts	0%	0%
Staggered hours	1%	0%
Staggered weeks	0%	0%
Compressed hours	0%	0%
Homeworking or remote working	4%	2%
Phased retirement	0%	0%
Annualised hours	0%	0%
Sabbatical	1%	1%
Career break	2%	1%
Flexitime / Lieu time	2%	1%
Personal / family days	7%	3%
Other	0%	1%
Don't know	0%	1%

Where they had previously worked in an 'other' form of flexible working, senior leaders noted that they had experienced a phased return from maternity leave, had worked in a specialist capacity across different schools, or were senior leaders but members of a school business team rather than having flexible working as part of previous *teaching* roles.

Where teachers selected 'other', they most commonly noted that they had worked as supply teachers, or had split their time between school teaching and other employment and/or further study.

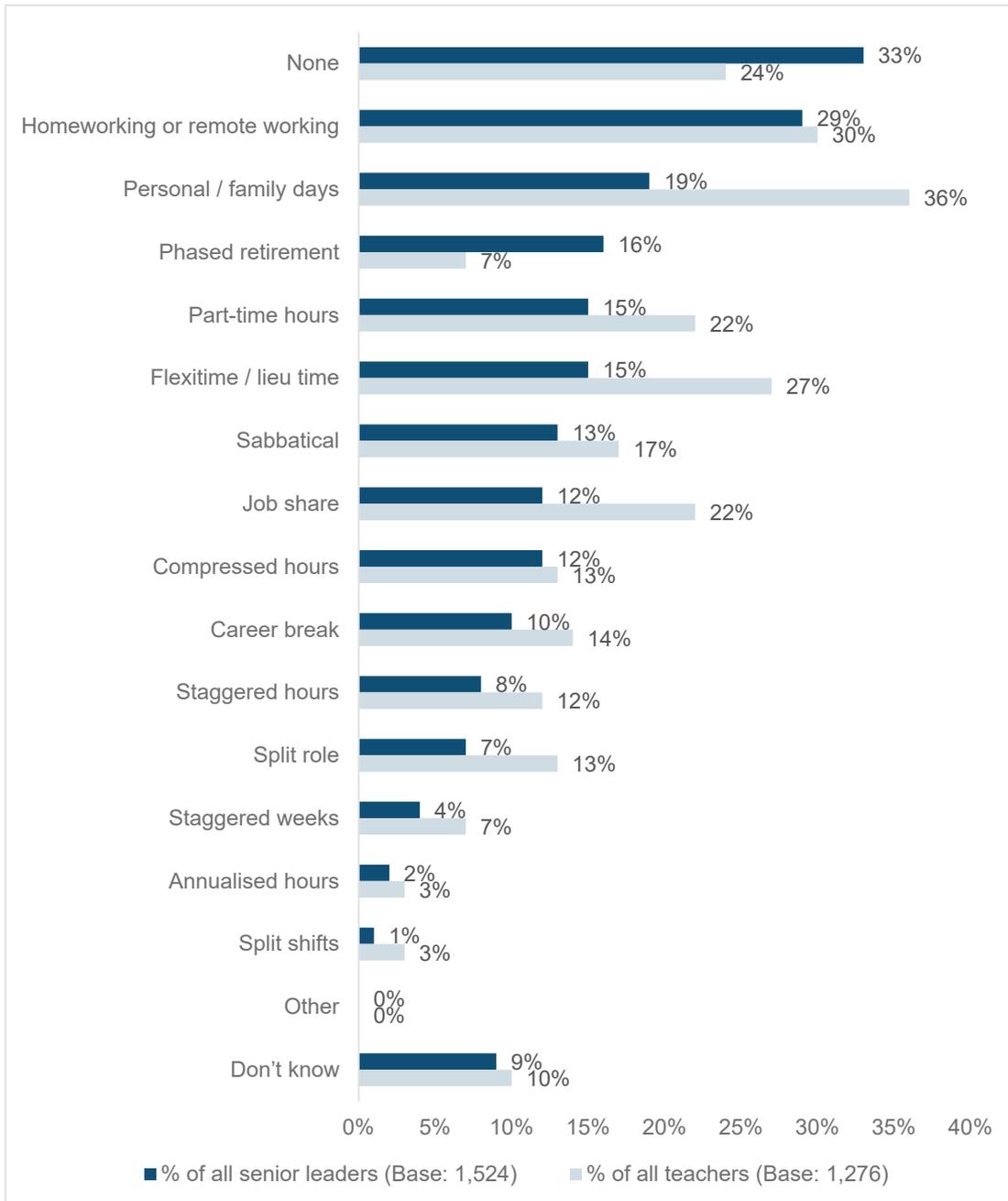
4.1.2 Considering other flexible working arrangements

Teachers were more likely than senior leaders to say that they would consider other forms of flexible working that were not currently open to them (Figure 7). Again, this may reflect the finding that many senior leaders did not feel flexible working was compatible with their roles. One third of senior leaders reported that there were no forms of flexible working they would consider (33% of 1,524), although over one-quarter said that they

⁴³ Some responses equated to less than 1% due to rounding, these were: compressed hours (six senior leaders); phased retirement (two senior leaders); annualised hours (two senior leaders and three teachers); staggered hours (four teachers); other (four senior leaders); don't know (two senior leaders).

would consider home/remote working (29% of 1,524). In comparison, and reflecting the current flexible working practices implemented in schools responding to the survey (see section 3.1), teachers most commonly said that they would consider personal/family days, home/remote working, and flexi/lieu time (36%, 30% and 27% of 1,276 respectively).

Figure 7: Would you consider other forms of flexible working that are not currently open to you?



Teachers in special schools were significantly less likely than those in primary and secondary settings to say they would consider working part-time (see Table 19). However, those in special schools were significantly more likely than those in other settings to say that they would consider home/remote working.

Teachers in secondary schools were significantly more likely as those in other settings to say that they would consider staggered hours (see Table 19), which may be more possible to envisage for secondary teachers covering a range of year groups, rather than those teaching the same cohort for a full day (such as those, for example, in primary settings).

Primary school teachers were less sure about considering other forms of flexible working. They were significantly more likely than teachers in other settings to report that they wouldn't consider any other forms of flexible working (27% of 925), and were significantly less likely to report that they would consider compressed hours, a sabbatical, or flexitime/lieu time.

Table 19: Would you consider other forms of flexible working that are not currently open to you?⁴⁴

Forms of flexible working	% of teachers in primary schools (Base: 925)	% of teachers in secondary schools (Base: 276)	% of teachers in special schools (Base: 75)
Personal / family days	34%	35%	53%
Homeworking or remote working	28%	34%	51%*
None	27%*	16%	15%
Flexitime / Lieu time	23%*	34%	45%
Part-time hours	22%	26%	12%*
Job share	22%	22%	16%
Sabbatical	14%*	23%	25%
Split role	13%	16%	12%
Career break	13%	18%	19%
Compressed hours	12%*	16%	23%
Staggered hours	10%	21%*	9%
Staggered weeks	7%	8%	11%
Phased retirement	6%	9%	9%
Split shifts	3%	3%	4%
Annualised hours	2%	3%	8%
Other	0%	0%	1%
Don't know	11%	8%	8%

*denotes that the figures are significantly different from other sub-groups at the 95% confidence level

Of those who reported 'other' considerations, four respondents (across senior leaders and teachers) reported that flexible working created too many challenges to make it possible to consider, or they felt that the options available were not applicable to their contracted hours/role.

⁴⁴ Note that the difference in bases by school phase is due to proportionate sampling and questionnaire routing. As a result of the latter, survey respondents did not always answer every question.

‘How can I compress my hours when my contract states I have to do the number of hours necessary for the job? I already work at least 50 hours per week’. (*Senior leader, primary school LA maintained*)

4.1.3 Reasons teachers did not request flexible working

Just over one-eighth of teachers (13% of 1,302) said they had considered flexible working but not felt able to request it (the remainder did not feel unable to request it). Teachers based in special schools were more likely to report that they had not felt able to request flexible working (compared to those in primary and secondary settings).⁴⁵

- The large majority of those who had felt unable to request flexible working said this was due to the perceived culture of the school and a lack of flexible working policies/options in place (reported by 93 teachers). These teachers often commented that the attitude from the SLT was that all teachers would work full-time as ‘that’s how schools work’, and that senior leaders had not wanted to set a precedent for other staff to follow. Many teachers commented that they had experienced colleagues being refused flexible working requests, or they knew that all other requests for flexible working had been refused, which had subsequently led them to not make their own. Some teachers were concerned about negative reactions from colleagues if they requested flexible working, because the school did not openly accept flexible practices and their commitment may be questioned as a result.
- Eighteen teachers reported that they were aware of constraints on school resources, including budgets and staffing, and the limitations in terms of cover and timetabling options if staff requested flexible working. This meant they did not feel able to make the request.
- The following reasons were also given by eight teachers each:
 - The perception that flexible working would not be considered for their role/responsibility (such as Head of Department), or that they would be asked to give up any additional responsibility in return.
 - The personal financial implications of any move to flexible working.
 - Concerns that requesting flexible working might jeopardise their job or career progression.
 - Potential challenges in managing working hours, which may result in working at home more, or concerns that workload could not be managed in the time available.

⁴⁵ 21% of 77 teachers in special schools felt unable to request flexible working, compared to 11% of 945 in primary schools and 18% of 280 in secondary schools.

- Capacity issues in terms of the potential pressures placed on colleagues (such as covering time when individuals are not on-site), or lack of capacity for the school to manage more flexible working arrangements than those already in place.
- Four teachers reported that they did not know flexible working was possible.
- Three teachers believed that there would be a negative response to their request if it was not made for childcare/family reasons.

4.2 Personal experience of flexible working being declined

In terms of their personal experience, 94% of senior leaders, and 92% of teachers had *not* had their own requests for flexible working declined. As with schools more generally, where requests had been declined, the majority of respondents from both groups said that they had requested part-time hours (see Table 20). Where senior leaders had had a request refused, 61% (of 88) reported that this was when they were a senior leader, rather than when they held a teaching role.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The remainder (39%) reported the request was declined when they were a teacher, including middle leadership roles. In addition, two senior leaders who had requested 'other' forms of flexible working offered more detail – one provided information regarding the request for a personal/family day, and one reported that they had requested a phased return to work, which included homeworking. The teachers giving 'other' commentary generally gave details of the part-time working requests that they had made (such as reduction from three to two days per week), one teacher reported that they had requested time each week for religious observance.

Table 20: What type(s) of flexible working did you request?

Form of flexible working	% of all senior leaders (Base: 88)	% of all teachers (Base: 109)
Part-time hours	71%	72%
Job share	17%	29%
Personal / family days	13%	6%
Homeworking or remote working	10%	6%
Compressed hours	9%	2%
Sabbatical	3%	1%
Split role	1%	2%
Staggered hours	1%	0%
Annualised hours	1%	0%
Career break	1%	1%
Split shifts	0%	0%
Staggered weeks	0%	0%
Phased retirement	0%	0%
Flexitime / Lieu time	0%	4%
None	0%	2%
Other	2%	6%
Don't know	0%	0%

4.2.1 Reasons personal requests for flexible working were declined

The reasons why personal requests for flexible working had been declined among senior leaders and teachers differed according to their respective roles. However, one of the main reasons for both groups was the perception that flexible working does not work in school environments.

Notably, although a small proportion of senior leaders (8% of 453) said that their school had declined requests from staff due to perceptions of flexible working not being appropriate in school environments (see section 2.3.2), nearly half of those that had experienced their own request being declined gave this reason (43% of 88). In addition, nearly one-third of senior leaders (30% of 88) cited a lack of support from governors for flexible working when they made their personal request (compared to 5% giving this as a reason for requests being declined in their own schools).

In comparison, the main reasons for teachers' requests being declined were perceptions of a potential detrimental effect on pupils, or (similarly to senior leaders) the perception that flexible working does not work in school environments (39% and 36% of 96 respectively – see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Why was your request(s) refused?



Senior leaders providing 'other' reasons for having had their flexible working requests declined mentioned two issues: perceptions that flexible working was not appropriate for a senior leadership role specifically; or that their headteacher at the time did not support flexible working and felt it would 'set a precedent for other staff'.

Three teachers noted that they had not received a clear reason why their request was declined; two said that the request was also declined due a perception that flexible working was not suitable for their role specifically (such as Head of Department).

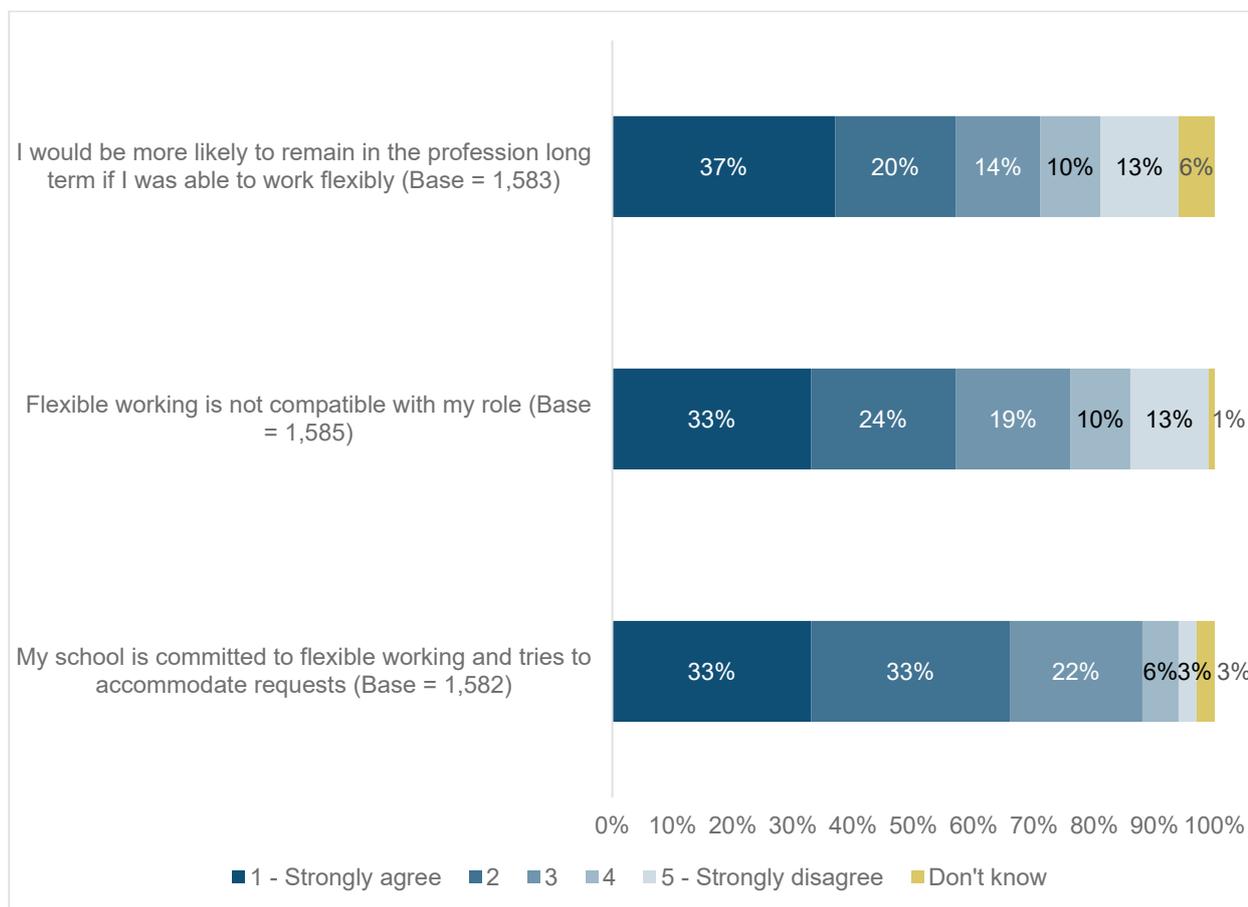
In some cases, teachers provided additional detail relating to the reasons listed in Figure 8. In particular they said that if requests were made 'late' in the academic year⁴⁷ they would be refused due to a lack of time to recruit additional members of staff, such as to cover hours/job share arrangements.

4.3 Personal perceptions of flexible working

As Figure 9 shows, at least one-third of senior leaders strongly agreed that:

- Their school was committed to flexible working and tried to accommodate requests.
- They would be more likely to remain in the profession long-term if they were able to work flexibly.
- Flexible working was not compatible with their role.

Figure 9: To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements?

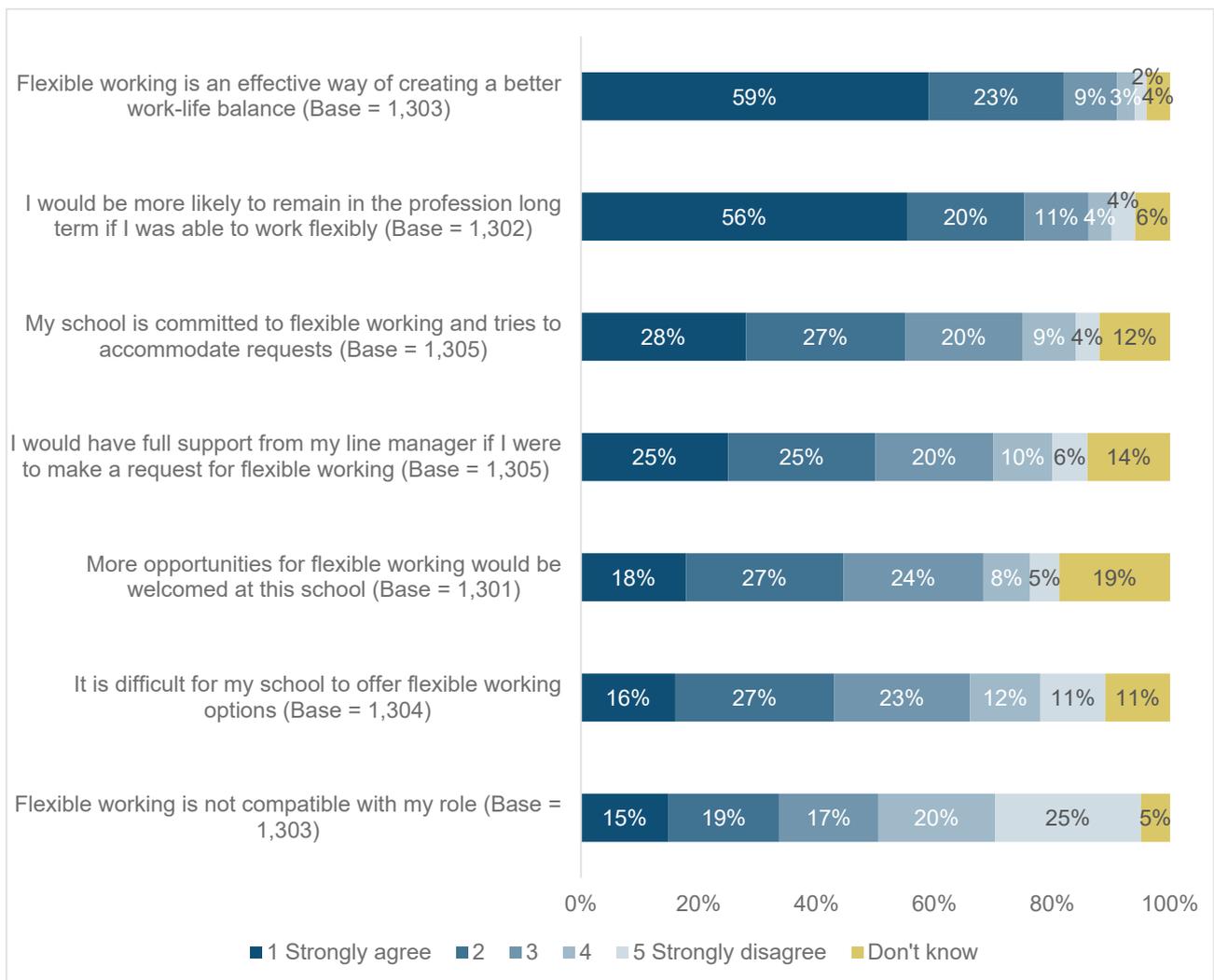


⁴⁷ It was not specified what was considered to be 'late'.

Teachers were more varied in their responses (Figure 10), although in summary they tended to suggest that although there was unmet demand among teachers for flexible working, broader cultural barriers related to working practices in schools were creating challenges in their implementation.

- Over half of teachers strongly agreed that flexible working was an effective way to create a better work-life balance, and that they would be more likely to remain in the profession long-term if they were able to work flexibly.
- However, only one quarter of teachers strongly agreed that they would have full support from their line manager if they were to make a request for flexible working, and just over one quarter strongly agreed that their school was committed to flexible working and tried to accommodate requests.
- One quarter of teachers strongly disagreed that flexible working was not compatible with their role.

Figure 10: To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements?

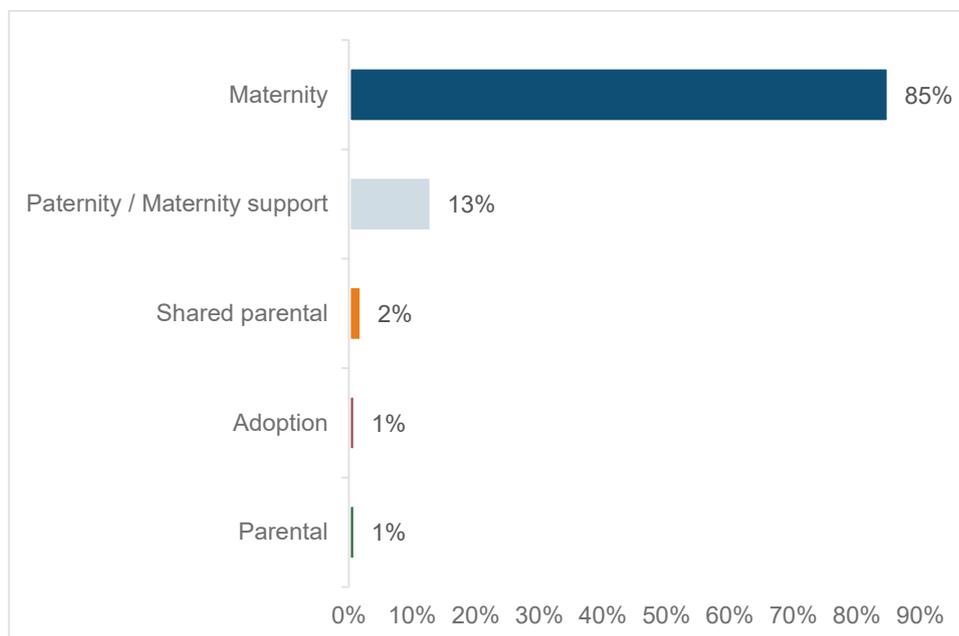


4.4 Experiences of family leave

When returning to work following maternity, paternity or adoption leave, most UK employees have the right to request flexible working.⁴⁸ The survey therefore gathered feedback from teachers about their experiences in relation to this issue, and any issues in relation to accessing flexible working and the types of information they required to make an informed decision.

In the last five years, 28% of 1,302 teacher respondents had taken maternity, paternity, adoption or shared parental leave; the remaining 72% had not done so. Of the 361 who indicated the type of leave they had taken in the past five years, the majority (85% of 361) had taken maternity leave (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: What type of leave did you take? (Base = 361)



- More than two-thirds of teachers said that when they first informed school about their upcoming leave, they were not offered information about flexible working options (68% of 392 teachers).
- The large majority of teachers (83% of 362) agreed that they felt able to openly discuss how they would ideally like to take their leave.
- Just over half of teachers (55% of 358) said that they were made aware of the right to request flexible working on their return to work.

⁴⁸ For guidance, see ACAS 'Code of practice on handling, in a reasonable manner, requests to work flexibly' and 'The right to request flexible working – an ACAS guide', accessible via: <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4859>.

- More than two-thirds of teachers (67% of 361) reported that financial constraints had affected the flexible working options they were able to consider. This reflects a wider concern that has been expressed by a minority of respondents about the financial difficulties of some forms of flexible working.
- The majority of teachers (84% of 357) indicated that their school was able to agree the hours/days they wanted to work when they returned.

When comparing responses by gender, there were few differences in the proportions of teachers giving each response to the options above, except where 23% of 48 male teachers reported that they were made aware of the right to request flexible working on return to work following parental leave (compared to 59% of 312 female teachers).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ This finding should be treated with caution due to the low number of male teachers in the base size.

5. Summary and next steps

The online survey helped to fulfil the second objective of the flexible working in schools research project: to establish existing approaches to flexible working in school contexts, and to explore senior leaders' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of flexible working (including the perceived benefits and challenges).

Overall, the online survey supported the findings of the literature review undertaken during the first phase of this project. Some evidence was established to help fill the gaps in information identified during the literature review.

Gap in evidence	Summary findings from online survey
<p>Focused research on flexible working in schools is limited to small samples or geographically limited case studies.</p>	<p>Respondents to the online survey represented a broad range of schools located across all nine English regions. The demographic breakdown of survey respondents was representative of schools by phase, size and type, and reflected the current teaching workforce in terms of gender distribution.</p>
<p>Within current literature, 'flexible working' in schools tend to be synonymous with part-time arrangements. There is little sense that full-time workers may also work flexibly, for example through annualised/flexi hours.</p>	<p>A range of flexible working arrangements are being requested and implemented in schools. This survey supported the literature findings that some forms of flexible working were more commonly requested and implemented in schools than others (part-time hours, job share arrangements and flexitime/time in lieu). In addition, however, staggered hours were found to be requested/implemented in more than one quarter of the schools represented by senior leaders, and senior leaders requested more information and guidance on how the range of flexible working practices could be implemented.</p>
<p>Consideration of opportunities such as compressed/staggered hours, phased retirement and home/remote working is limited within existing literature.</p>	<p>Further to the above, senior leaders and teachers provided commentary and examples of the different types of flexible working practice taking place in schools – this included term time leave, but also remote/home working (particularly to aid senior leader planning time or flexibilities with PPA time for teachers). When asked about other forms of flexible working that they would consider but were not currently available to them, senior leaders were particularly interested in home/remote working,</p>

	<p>personal/family days, part-time hours and job share/compressed hours. Teachers reported similar findings – although those in secondary schools were particularly interested in staggered hours.</p>
<p>Little published research focuses on the direct experiences of schools in encouraging, enabling and managing flexible working opportunities, or the experiences of teachers in accessing flexible working.</p>	<p>This survey has focused solely on gathering more information on flexible working in schools and the practical approaches, benefits, and challenges that are experienced by senior leaders and teachers as a result. The Executive Summary to this report provides the key headline findings from their feedback.</p> <p>More information and support in establishing and supporting effective flexible working processes would likely be beneficial for both senior leaders and teachers. The majority of senior leaders had received flexible working requests in the last five years, and did have policies and procedures in place to deal with them. However, where flexible working procedures were not currently in place, the most common reason was not being sure how to develop a policy/manage a request appropriately. Furthermore, although the majority of teachers agreed that flexible working was an effective way to create a better work/life balance, the survey found that only one quarter felt they would currently have full support from their line manager if they made a request.</p>
<p>Much existing research focuses on the experiences of female employees, despite evidence indicating that male workers are increasingly looking for flexible working opportunities.</p>	<p>Perceptions by gender appeared to be broadly similar (note that there was a low proportion of male respondents to the survey). However, male teachers were less likely (compared to their female counterparts) to report being made aware of the right to request flexible working on return to work following parental leave (including paternity/adoption leave). Female senior leaders were more likely to be working with flexible arrangements. Male senior leaders were significantly more likely to cite the potential detrimental effect on pupils and teacher performance as reasons for declining requests for flexible working.</p>

5.1 Next steps: interviews and flexible working pilot

To inform planning for the telephone interviews and pilot with schools from January 2019 onwards, senior leaders were asked if they had any specific flexible working options that they would want to explore as part of that work. Their responses are summarised in the bullet points below:

- A need to develop experience and knowledge of flexible working more generally, and its impact on work/life balance. This included reviewing/evaluating current offers, gathering ideas of what else could work, learning how to know that requests were viable and how to manage related issues such as timetabling (requested by 27 senior leaders).
- Information and guidance on flexi-time/lieu time, including delayed starts to the day following parents' evenings and school productions, or a wider range of teaching hours and differing start times, such as to suit those with social, emotional and mental health issues (requested by 22 senior leaders).
- Information and guidance on job shares, including managing budgetary concerns and managing joint PPA time (requested by 20 senior leaders).
- Information and guidance on home/remote working, often combining this with PPA time (requested by 20 senior leaders).
- Information and guidance on compressed hours, including for senior leaders (requested by 19 senior leaders).
- Flexible options for senior leaders specifically, including co-headship and how to manage communications, effective leadership and succession planning (requested by 17 senior leaders).
- Managing family days - particularly with staff wellbeing in mind (requested by 12 senior leaders).
- Managing part-time working, including expectations such as attendance of part-time staff at meetings and offering reduced hours over more days, such as 0.8 contract over five days (requested by 12 senior leaders).
- Exploring phased/flexible retirement options (requested by eight senior leaders).
- Making arrangements for sabbaticals and career breaks (requested by six senior leaders).
- Making arrangements for split shifts/staggered hours (requested by six senior leaders), annualised hours (requested by three senior leaders), split roles/split site working (requested by two senior leaders).
- Enabling term-time leave (such as for holidays, requested by two senior leaders).

- Managing flexible working in primary settings specifically (requested by two senior leaders).

When asked if there were issues that they felt their school needed to overcome in order to offer flexible working options, senior leaders noted:

- **Staffing and capacity issues:** where details were provided these tended to refer to capacity within the school to provide cover, the potential cost of sourcing cover, how to ensure consistency (special needs, classes and leadership), or how options could work within existing contracts, small schools having less capacity or not being able to offer time off-site even for PPA due to ratios required, ensuring key roles were covered such as first aiders on site (reported by 43 senior leaders).
- **Financial considerations:** how to manage these to ensure quality of provision; budget constraints, and impact of flexible working arrangement on future budgets, pension considerations and staffing costs (reported by 28 senior leaders).
- **Changing school culture/perceptions:** ensuring appropriate communications are in place for all stakeholders, including to alleviate concerns among staff and parents, changing attitudes of governors, and showing it is possible for senior leaders to work remotely (reported by 20 senior leaders).
- **Timetabling and curriculum considerations:** learning how timetables are maintained to ensure curriculum coverage, support in curriculum design, ensuring adequate support for small group interventions (reported by ten senior leaders).
- **Increasing knowledge/understanding generally:** accessing advice and training to implement flexible working effectively, managing 'inflexibility' within part-time contracts (such as requests for specific days off), how to implement flexibility within a working day/week (reported by ten senior leaders).
- **Managing impact:** on teacher workload/wider school including support staff wellbeing (reported by seven senior leaders).
- **Recruitment:** ensuring appropriate quality of candidates for filling hours required/gaps in teaching time left by flexible working patterns (reported by six senior leaders).
- **Strategic support:** strategic planning or time required to create policies and protocols, support in formalising arrangements and setting up appropriate systems, dealing with unions and negotiating contracts (reported by five senior leaders).
- **Performance management:** ensuring accountability and division of responsibilities, particularly in relation to job share and part-time teachers (reported by four senior leaders).

Appendix 1: Literature review summary

Below is a summary of CGR's literature review findings in relation to perceptions and approaches to flexible working.⁵⁰

Perceptions of flexible working

- 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, and where resentment occurs among full-time counterparts.
- Reasons for requesting flexible working appear to change for different age groups, with those aged 35-45 and over 55 (such as phased retirement) citing care/family responsibilities, 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 practises.
- 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.

Common approaches to flexible working

Common features where flexible working practices have been reported to work well:

⁵⁰ For the full literature review and bibliography, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-practices-in-schools-literature-review>.

- 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 is crucial to the success of flexible working.
- Leadership teams trusting their staff to manage their time at school effectively, and teachers being given autonomy and control over their working day (such as 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/recruitment materials.
- 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.

Appendix 2: Survey methodology

Sample selection

Education establishment details were downloaded from the Get Information About Schools (GIAS) site and contact details were provided by DfE via secure data transfer using password protection. There were 30,000 education establishments in the initial sample.

All non-relevant establishments were removed from the sample, including nursery provision and children's centres, post-16 education and sixth forms, Pupil Referral Units secure units and schools denoted as "16 plus" in the *phase* variable. At this stage, 391 academies were removed where the *phase* field was stated as "not applicable".⁵¹ Following these stages, the final sample for recruitment was 20,591. The schools in this sample were then separated by their phase: special (676), primary (16,775) and secondary (3,140) to allow proportionate sample selection to take place.

The schools in each of these samples were randomly allocated to sample groups one, two and three dependent on the number of schools in each phase (for example, categorised into tritiles or quartiles). The aim was to begin contacting schools in sample one, only using schools in further sample groups if necessary to achieve the agreed target numbers of survey completions. Only schools in samples one and two were contacted by the research team.

Recruitment of schools

Pilot

A pilot phase of recruitment involved 40 schools being contacted by email when the survey went live (3rd October 2018). Email invitations were sent to ten special schools, ten secondary and 20 primary schools with a project brief attached to provide further detail about the project. The invitation requested that one senior leader and one teacher responded to the survey from each school.⁵² These emails were followed up with telephone calls by the research team to ensure that the email had been received and forwarded to the relevant member of staff. Twenty responses were received as part of this pilot phase.

⁵¹ These were later added back into the sample to boost academy numbers.

⁵² Whilst one survey link was used, the survey routed senior leaders and middle leaders/teachers to distinct questions relevant to their roles.

Main survey

Two samples were used for the survey dissemination. Throughout the process, amendments were made to the survey email invitation and recruitment strategy to maximise response rates.

Sample 1: Based on learning from the pilot phase, a more concise email invitation was issued for the main fieldwork phase, with a tighter deadline for responses. Emails were initially sent to a further 400 schools (100 special schools, 100 secondary schools and 200 primary schools). The remainder of sample one schools were contacted over subsequent weeks, with schools (when not on half-term) contacted each week.

Sample 2: After the half-term, emails were additionally distributed to schools in the second sample to maximise response within the survey window. The email invitation was altered slightly to allow for more than one teacher to respond and to include the contact details for DfE and CGR project leads for schools if they wished to verify that the survey was authentic.⁵³ In response to comments from schools, the project brief was also amended to include the logos for DfE and for CGR.

Targeted recruitment

The target was to achieve a representative sample of 1,060 responses from senior leaders and 1,060 respondents from teachers across phase and type of school (see Table 21). Other characteristics were also monitored for broad representation, such as regional coverage, size of school, individuals' length of service and specialist subject.

Table 21: Survey sample frame and targets

	Maintained sample target	Academies/free schools sample target	Total sample target
Primary	609	230	839
Secondary	48	124	172
Special	35	14	49
Total	692	368	1060

When nearing the targets for survey completion, the recruitment process took a more focused approach to boost response and representation of specific sample characteristics (for example, ensuring regional spread).

⁵³ Contact details for the research team and the DfE Contract Manager were also included in the project brief from the outset.

Response rates

Table 22 provides details, according to school phase, of the number of schools contacted, number of completions and the number of schools declining to participate in the survey. Of all the schools contacted, only 28 schools declined to participate. The reason given in most cases was that staff were too busy; in the remainder, schools requested to be removed from the survey sample.

In several cases, there was more than one respondent per school. Targets for completion were surpassed, particularly for the senior leader sample. However, recruitment continued to boost representation from a wide range of schools. Using school unique reference numbers (URNs), the sample was monitored to identify the number of distinct schools responding.

Table 22: Survey response rates

	Primary	Secondary	Special schools	Total
Number of schools contacted	10,763	1,612	633	13,008
Number of schools that declined	16	10	2	-
Number of schools represented in the survey	1412	193	86	1691
Response rate (based on number of schools)	13%	12%	14%	13%
Number of individual respondents	2277	466	153	2896
Response rate (based on number of individual respondents)	21%	29%	24%	22%

The number of senior leaders responding from any one school ranged from one to four. The number of teachers responding from any one school ranged from one to 25; the majority of schools represented had one teacher respond (one school had 23 and one school had 25). As those schools with higher numbers of teachers responding were from the secondary sector (and therefore were larger schools and representing a range of subjects), it was appropriate to include them in the analysis.

Data cleaning

Before analysis commenced, the survey data were cleaned, removing respondents who did not agree to take part in the survey and share their information with CGR (23 respondents). A further 20 respondents were excluded from the data because they were routed out of the survey due to their job role not being designated as senior leader, middle leader or teacher.

Those routed out of the survey represented the following roles:

- Four School Business Managers.
- Three Head of Human Resources / Human Resource Manager.
- Five Higher Learning Teaching Assistants.
- One Instructor, with teacher responsibilities.
- One Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO).
- One Student Teacher.
- Three support staff.
- Two Teaching Assistants.

Four responses were re-coded where a senior leader had selected 'other' to describe their job title:

- Acting Deputy and SENCO was recoded to Deputy Head.
- Acting Deputy Head was recoded to Deputy Head.
- Acting Headteacher was recoded to Headteacher.
- Associate Headteacher/Head of Faculty was recoded to Headteacher.

Appendix 3: Additional data tables

Table 23: Survey respondents by geographical region.

Region	% of all respondents (Base: 2,916)
East of England	10%
East Midlands	10%
West Midlands	11%
North East	6%
North West	13%
South East	18%
South West	11%
London	10%
Yorkshire and Humberside	11%

Table 24: What is the main subject that you teach?⁵⁴

Subject area	% of all teachers (Base: 279)
Arts subjects (including Drama, Music, Media Studies)	8%
Design and Technology (including Food Technology, Resistant Materials)	6%
Information and Communication Technology / Computer Science	2%
Science (including Biology, Chemistry, Physics)	17%
English (including English language and English Literature)	17%
Modern Foreign Languages	8%
Humanities subjects (including Geography and History)	12%
Mathematics (including Statistics)	14%
Social Sciences (including Psychology, Health and Social Care, Sociology)	4%
Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) / Relationships and Sex Education	0%
Physical Education / Sports	7%
Commercial and Business Studies / Education / Management / Business Studies / Economics	2%
Religious Education	4%
Other	2%

Where they had selected 'other', respondents stated that they were SEN/Mental Health Lead (two teachers), or that they taught Hairdressing (one teacher), Horticulture (one teacher), or provided learning support/catch-up provision (two teachers).

⁵⁴ Note that one teacher said that they taught PSHE, representing less than 1% due to rounding.

Table 25: Age of survey respondents.

Age of survey respondents	% of all respondents (Base: 2877)
Under 25	2%
25 to 29	8%
30 to 34	12%
35 to 39	14%
40 to 44	17%
45 to 49	18%
50 to 54	16%
55 to 59	10%
60 or older	3%
Prefer not to say	1%



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