

STRB CONFIRMS INERTIA ON PROGRESS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND **BULLETIN**

NASUWT recognises the vital role that flexible working has to play in helping schools and colleges recruit, retain and motivate teachers. There is a significant body of evidence that shows the benefits of flexible working, such as increased productivity, a more motivated workforce, greater employee engagement and greater diversity amongst the workforce.

However, the progress on flexible working in schools in England has been slow, something that has been confirmed in the recent publication of the [School Teachers' Review Body's \(STRB's\) 35th Report](#).

Indeed, the Report '*encourages rapid action*' in this area in helping to improve the attractiveness of teaching as a profession of choice, as well as retaining teachers at different stages of their career, where current inflexibility creates a reason to leave the profession.

Disappointingly, the Report goes on to confirm that there is a mixed picture in the way that flexible working has been adopted across schools in England, with many schools being hesitant to provide a substantive offer to staff, or being hesitant to implement flexible working.

Even more damning is the assertion in the Report that, '*Where there is such inertia, it risks being to the detriment of individual teachers, schools and to teacher supply more widely.*'

Quite rightly, the Report goes on to assert that '*teaching can and needs to do more*', particularly given that the evidence demonstrates that access to flexible working is a prominent factor in teachers' decisions to stay or leave.

The Report recognises a range of benefits both to individuals' wellbeing and to the wider teaching profession in making flexible working more accessible in schools, including:

- improved equality, diversity and inclusivity by enabling a wider range of people to work;
- improved equality of access to promotion and development opportunities for aspiring school leaders;
- broadening options for prospective or existing teachers considering their future career, including those with caring responsibilities, on maternity breaks, or those coming towards the end of their careers;
- increasing teachers' wellbeing, attendance and motivation whilst reducing burnout, in turn providing for a higher quality of teaching; and
- improved value for money – investment in flexible working can be repaid quickly through savings in costs relating to sickness and staff turnover.

The Report reinforces the importance of a proactive and supportive approach to flexible working, coupled with a cultural ethos, as being crucial to effective flexible working.

In addition, there is the critical role played by the school leader – with a recognition of the need for school leaders to '*consider a step change in the flexible working offer made to staff*'.

As a consequence, the STRB recommends a number of approaches to flexible working, many of which NASUWT would endorse, such as:

- action to progress practice on flexible working in schools, including intervention on the part of the Department for Education (DfE) to move the issue forwards;
- mandating all schools to develop, publish and implement their own flexible working policy;
- ensuring there is a senior staff member and governor available to monitor and report back to the wider staff and responsible body, on an annual basis, on the implementation and impact of the policy; and
- more proactively promoting flexible retirement as part of schools' flexible working policies.

NASUWT welcomes the publication of the STRB's 35th Report and the recommendations contained within it, and hopes that the recommendations are accepted in full and acted upon by the Government in order to address the current culture in schools, which sees teachers routinely being denied access to flexible working.

In the meantime, the Union maintains that you should ensure that schools/colleges are cognisant of the recommendations of the Report and the positive benefits this could bring in regards to flexible working.

The Union has produced extensive advice and guidance to ensure that members who are considering making a flexible working request are aware of their rights and entitlements and supported during this time. They can be found at [Flexible Working \(Great Britain\)](#) and [Flexible Working \(Northern Ireland\)](#).