

# Flexible working survey

**NASUWT**  
The Teachers' Union



Survey 2023

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Dedicated and committed teachers play a vital and fundamental role in the education of children and young people throughout all four nations of the UK.

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly had a significant impact on the world of work, including shifting attitudes and approaches to flexible working, including greater recognition of the need for flexibility in order to balance work and other personal commitments.

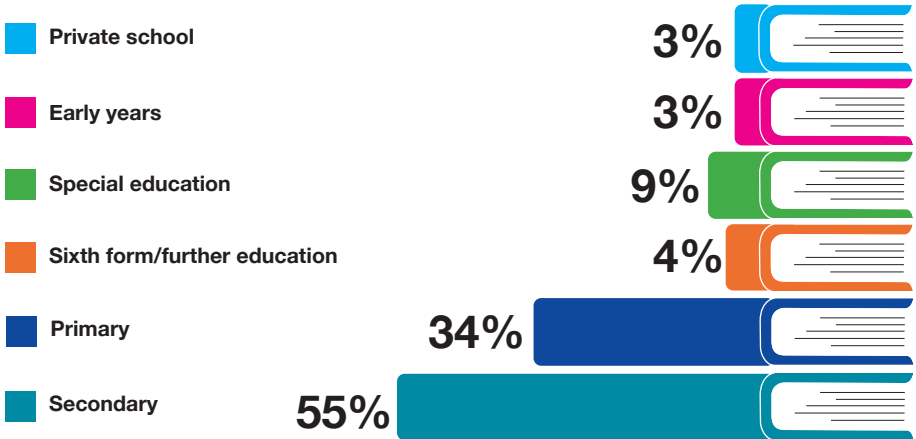
Despite the obvious benefits, the uptake of flexible working in education remains low, with significant barriers resulting in many employers refusing requests for flexible working made by teachers.

NASUWT's Flexible Working and Teachers Survey ran until September 2023. This report provides the main findings from the survey of flexible working for teachers.

# THE SURVEY

Well over half of teachers (56%) who responded to the survey stated that they were classroom teachers. A third (33%) stated that they were middle managers or held a head of year/Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) holder position. One in 20 (5%) stated that they were a member of the senior leadership team, and 2% stated that they were a headteacher.

## Where teachers who requested flexible working undertook their work



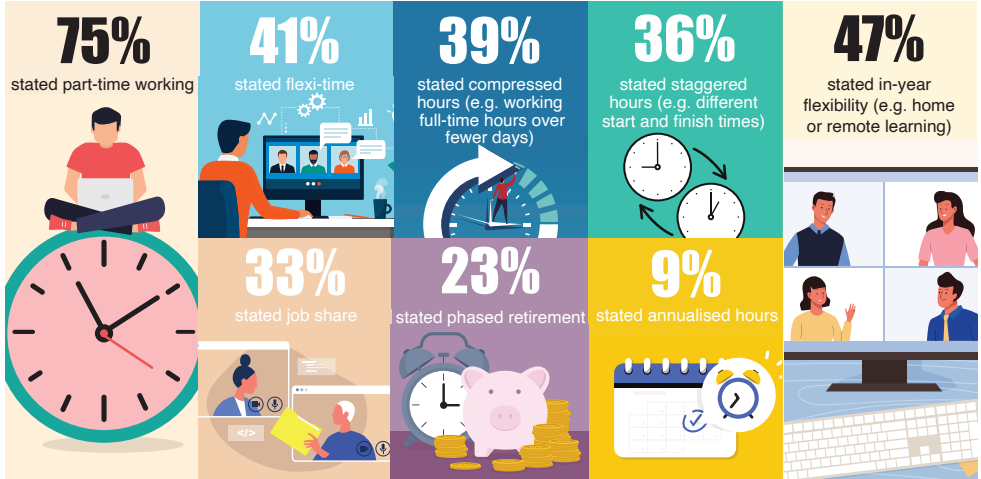
Of those teachers who responded, well over half (55%) reported that they worked in a secondary school, compared to just over a third (34%) who reported working in a primary school. Just under one in ten (9%) reported working in special education, and just under one in 20 (4%) reported working in a sixth form college or further education college. Three per cent reported working in other settings, such as a private school or nursery.

## Types of flexible working

Teachers were asked about whether they would like to have the opportunity to work more flexibly and the type of flexible working that would suit them best.

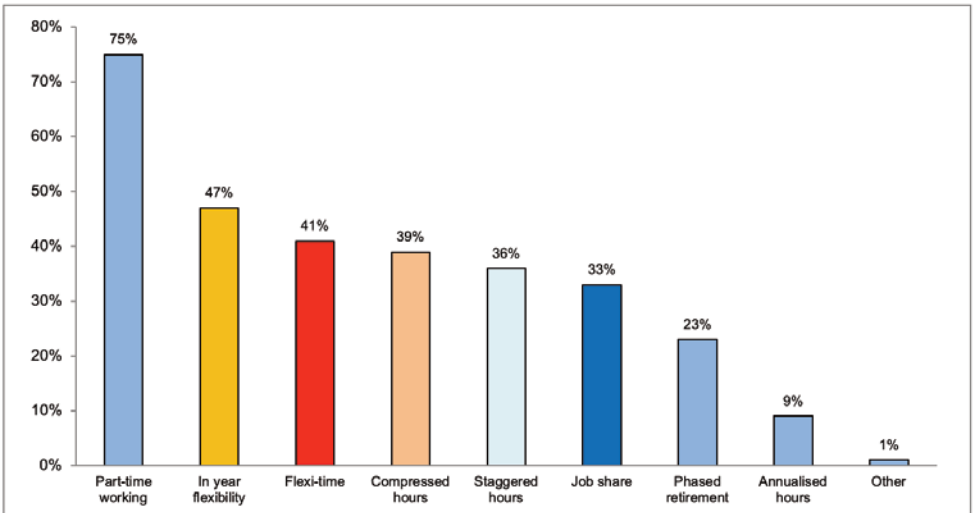
Well over nine out of ten teachers (93%) who responded to the survey stated that they would like to have the opportunity to work more flexibly.

When asked what type of flexible working would suit them best, those who responded indicated the following:



**93% reported that they would like to have the opportunity to work more flexibly.**

**Type of flexible working that best suited respondents**



## **Flexible working policies/procedures in schools and colleges**

Teachers were asked about the policies and procedures in place in their school/college in regards to flexible working.

Just under three-quarters of teachers (72%) reported that their school/college had not made them aware of their rights in regard to flexible working, and 7% stated that they didn't know. However, just over a fifth (21%) of teachers stated that their school/college had made them aware of their rights in regard to flexible working.

When asked if their school/college has a policy in regard to flexible working, just under a third of teachers (32%) reported that their employer/school did not have a flexible working policy, and just over two-fifths (42%) stated that they didn't know. In comparison, just over a quarter (26%) stated that their school/college has a policy.

**32% reported that their school/college did not have a flexible working policy.**

Just under three-fifths of teachers (59%) who responded stated that their school/college's flexible working policy did not allow them to make an informal request for flexible working, whereas just over two-fifths of teachers (41%) reported that their school/college's flexible working policy did allow for an informal request for flexible working.

Despite it being part of the Acas flexible working Code of Practice, only 31% of teachers stated that their school/college policy permitted them to appeal against their employers' decision to refuse their request for flexible working. Just over one in ten (13%) reported that the flexible working policy did not include a right to appeal, and well over half of teachers (56%) reported that they didn't know.

**Only 31% reported that their school/college policy permitted an appeal against the decision to refuse a request for flexible working.**

## The experiences of teachers making requests for flexible working in schools and colleges

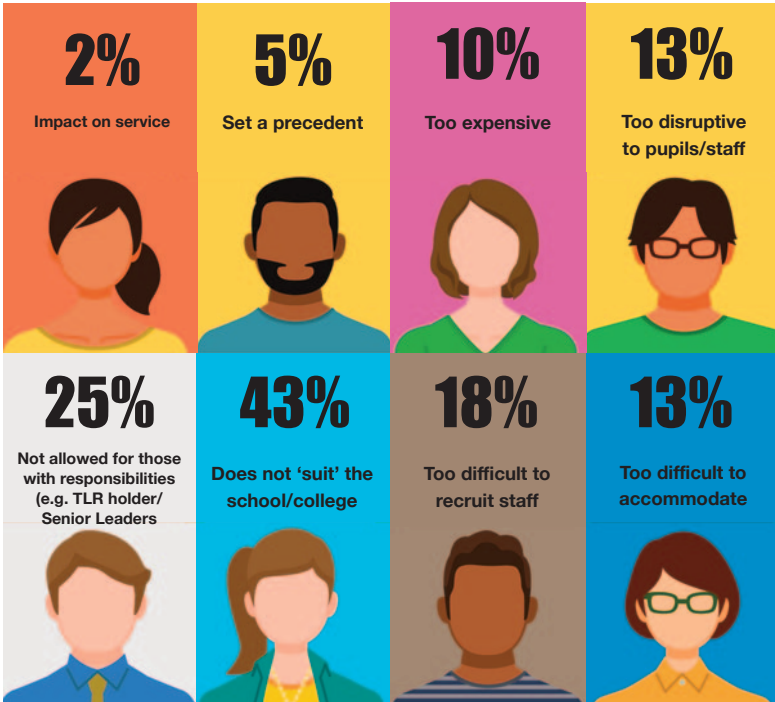
Teachers were asked about their experiences when making either an informal or formal request for flexible working.

Of those teachers who had made an informal request for flexible working, just under three-fifths (58%) stated that their informal request had been unsuccessful.

Over two-thirds of teachers (68%) reported that they had made a formal request for flexible working. Of those, just under two-fifths (38%) stated that their formal request for flexible working had not been successful.

**‘My employer said that it would not suit the school.’**  
**‘Employer will not allow staff with a responsibility to work part time.’**  
**‘Head does not want job shares and repeatedly rejected them.’**  
**Staff leave and they employ new staff.’**

### Reason given to teachers by employers for refusing a request for flexible working



In regards to appealing the decision of the school/college to refuse a formal request for flexible, in excess of nine out of ten teachers (93%) stated that did not appeal against the decision of their school/college when they refused a request for flexible working.

Of those who did appeal, only 5% of respondents reported that their appeal had been successful.

**93% stated that they did not appeal against the decision of their school/college to refuse a request for flexible working.**

**‘I didn’t see the point of appealing. It would only be a tick-box exercise.’  
‘School refused 0.8 FTE over four days. I was told before the appeal that my appeal wouldn’t work. It didn’t.’**

### **Unfair treatment, promotion and flexible working requests**

Teachers were asked if they had experienced unfair treatment at work with regards to making a request for flexible working, including whether they had been overlooked for promotion.

When asked, just under half of respondents (49%) believed that that they had experienced unfair treatment at work in regards to their request for flexible working.

**‘The head no longer communicates with me.’  
‘Own classroom given to full-time colleague, leaving me completely mobile.’  
‘Constantly passed over for CPD and training, and expected to work on days when not contracted.’**

**‘I was requested to drop my TLR.’  
‘Worst possible hours offered, insistence on attending all INSET days, all staff meetings and doing all directed time, despite being 0.45 FTE.’**

Over two-fifths of respondents (42%) stated that they felt they had been overlooked for promotion as a result of making a request for flexible working.

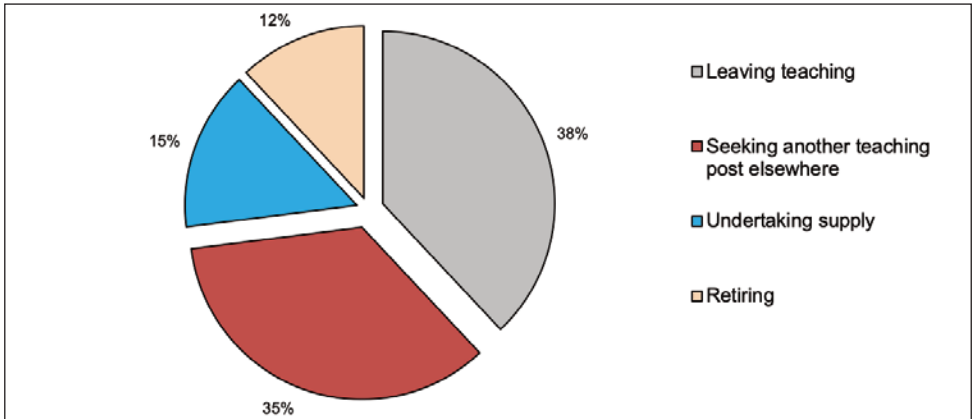
As a consequence, over a third of teachers (36%) stated that they had been forced to consider alternative employment due to the refusal of the school/college to consider their request for flexible working.



**36% stated that they had been forced to consider alternative employment due to their employer's refusal to consider a request for flexible working.**

Just over three quarters of teachers (76%) stated that they would have liked to have taken more time off for maternity/paternity/adoption leave.

### **Alternative employment considerations for teachers whose flexible request was denied**



**'Currently in the process of applying for jobs out with teaching. I can no longer sustain this way of working and the treatment is horrendous.'**  
**'I will be leaving teaching this year because of the lack of flexibility.'**  
**'I have handed in my notice and have begun supply work.'**

### **Training for those dealing with requests for flexible working in schools/colleges**

Teachers were asked about training for those who are involved in dealing with flexible working requests.

Just under three-fifths of respondents (59%) reported that they did not feel that those dealing with flexible working requests are effectively trained to deal with such requests. This compares to 17% who stated that those dealing with flexible working were trained to deal effectively with such requests.

When asked if there should be a programme of mandatory training for managers dealing with flexible working requests, well over nine out of ten of respondents (93%) stated there should be.

## Attitudes towards flexible working

Teachers were asked if they thought that their school/college has a positive attitude towards flexible working.

Just under three-quarters of respondents (73%) stated that they did not believe that their school/college encouraged flexible jobs and considered options for flexible working positively, whereas just over a quarter (27%) stated that their school/college encouraged flexible jobs and considered options for flexible working positively.

Over three-fifths (63%) stated that their school/college did not have a positive attitude towards flexible working, whereas just 17% of teachers reported that their school/college did, and one fifth (20%) stated that they didn't know.

**79% of respondents stated that flexible working should be a day-one right for all workers.**

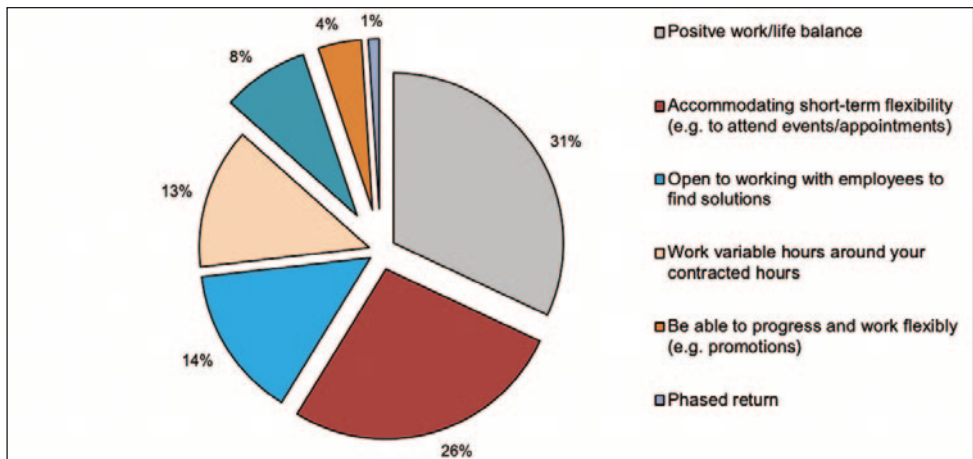
**'My manager actively encourages and demands staff work as many hours as possible, and in no way promotes flexible working conditions.'**

## Advertising jobs on a flexible working basis

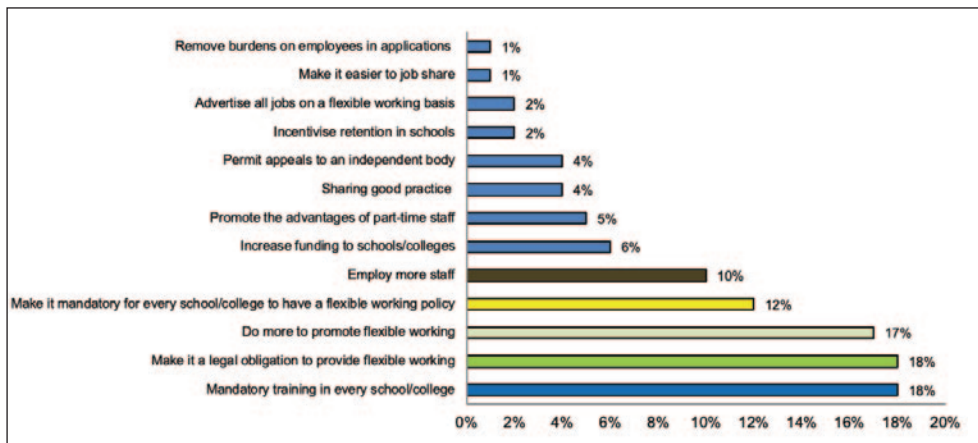
Teachers were asked if they thought that all jobs should be advertised on a flexible working basis.

Just under three-fifths of respondents (58%) stated that all jobs should be advertised on a flexible working basis, compared to 16% who said no, and just over a quarter (26%) who stated that they didn't know.

## What a flexible workplace means to teachers



## What the Government should do to promote more flexible working in schools/colleges



## CONCLUSION

The Flexible Working and Teachers Survey reveals that the experiences of teachers when requesting flexible working shows that there are still significant challenges in schools/colleges when it comes to fully embracing the positive benefits of flexible working in their culture and practice.

The Flexible Working and Teachers Survey suggests that the attitude and approach towards flexible working by schools/colleges is still a genuine cause for concern, with many teachers being denied the opportunity to access flexible working and achieve a more satisfactory work/life balance.

It is deeply worrying that the survey demonstrates that, despite the obvious benefits, the uptake of flexible working in education remains low, with many schools/colleges rejecting requests for spurious and unsubstantiated reasons.

The evidence suggests that too many schools/colleges are denying teachers the right to flexible working, specifically part-time working and job share, often without the right of appeal.

Given the tendency for requests for flexible working to disproportionately come from female teachers, this represents a key factor in the gender pay gap in teaching, as many women teachers are forced to resign from substantive contracts of employment and consider employment elsewhere, including working as supply teachers, who are often subject to the vagaries of intermittent, insecure and precarious employment.

Where flexible working requests are accepted, those teachers report suffering unfair treatment, including career setbacks, particularly those teachers in leadership positions, or those with additional responsibilities.

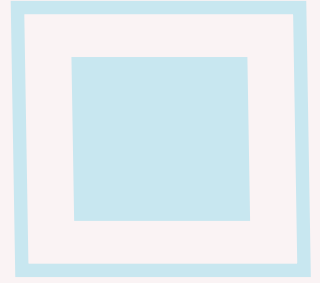
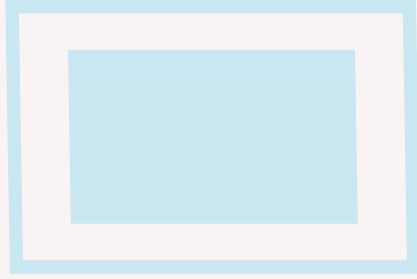
The evidence suggests that flexible working is still inaccessible to many teachers, due to a range of factors, including employer discretion over whether a request is accepted or rejected, or simply a lack of awareness of flexible working in the workplace.

In this context, the results from the survey indicate that there is a pressing need for action on the part of the Government and schools/colleges to address the concerns of hard-working and dedicated teachers, so that they are given the freedom and flexibility to achieve a better work/life balance.

Given this, the Union continues to campaign for better access to flexible working for teachers, including producing comprehensive advice and guidance to assist members, NASUWT Representatives and school/college leaders when addressing issues in regards to flexible working.



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