



The National Association of  
School-Based Teacher Trainers

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## **NASBTT flexible working survey published, as Executive Director calls for “bigger conversation” to address recruitment crisis**

The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) is calling for a “more holistic discussion on flexible working” as its latest survey shows that 89% of ITT providers think that greater opportunities for flexible working would attract more applicants to the sector.

Last week the Department for Education announced [Flexible Working Ambassador Multi-Academy Trusts and Schools \(FWAMS\)](#) to support school leaders in implementing and embedding flexible working in their schools. Interested schools and trusts can also seek free access live webinars, workshops, on-demand training and resources via a [dedicated website](#) set up to “increase awareness of the benefits of flexible working and the full range of flexible working practices available, which can include part-time working, job sharing, home or remote working, phased retirement and personal/family day”.

In research undertaken by NASBTT in May and June 2023, 53.5% of ITT providers said they do not currently offer flexible working opportunities for trainees. However, as part of their strategic planning, 46.5% of providers are considering flexible working opportunities to applicants.

When asked if potential applications discuss the importance of working flexibly as something that is important to them, only a third said ‘yes’. But 75 out of 84 respondents think that greater opportunities for flexible working would attract more applicants. Providers also reported that only half of schools in wider ITT partnerships currently offer flexible working for their staff.

The most common examples given of flexible working being offered or considered by ITT providers are online or blended delivery of core training, including asynchronous options; time built into courses for study/admin and/or wellbeing; and part-time or flexible courses. For schools in their wider ITT partnership, PPA at home (31 responses) was by far the highest example given by ITT providers of flexible working offered.

“This survey is very much a starting point for a discussion that we want to have, and we were keen to understand flexible working in ITT including who, if anyone, is trialing new initiatives,” said Emma Hollis, Executive Director of NASBTT. “What we have learned is not surprising – there is not much radical innovation currently evident in schools – offering PPA at home, for example, is a great start but that may not be enough to attract a wider pool of applicants. Although many schools and providers are exploring part-time options, this can be problematic in the long-term for underfunded schools already struggling with limited budgets as part-time staff are more expensive (as the total on-costs are higher).

“The whole issue of flexible working in schools, including discussion in some quarters around a four-day working week, has obviously risen to the fore again given the ongoing teacher recruitment and retention crisis. In a sector struggling to recruit enough teachers at present, more flexible approaches to working may help make the profession more attractive to potential

teachers. Now whether flexible working is a more significant barrier to recruitment than say, workload and issues around behaviour management, should be understood – but it is time for a more holistic discussion on more flexible approaches.”

Emma emphasised that a “bigger conversation” was urgently needed on how flexible working may help make the profession more attractive given how much teaching appears to be behind other professions.

“Work needs to be done to assess teacher attitudes on issues such as working from home and compressed hours,” she explained. “A photograph taken of a classroom in Victorian times would not look substantively different to one in a modern school. Where other professions have changed dramatically, our approach to schooling has varied very little. Why is this? Why does the school year begin to coincide with Harvest? Why are schools closed for extended periods during the year? Could they be open more? Should children be taught based on need, not age groups? What is the role of AI in facilitating change? Then we can build flexibility in, and maybe then give teachers the opportunity to work different hours.

“A more flexible approach may also benefit parents and children. For example, if it was agreed that children would take an agreed amount of time off throughout the year, but that this time could be taken flexibly according to the family’s needs, we would not have a situation where holiday prices go up drastically during the summer break. But who is exploring all these possibilities? This goes beyond ITT, and NASBTT as one voice.”

The NASBTT survey data does not point to any firm conclusions on whether there are greater barriers to flexible working in primary or secondary teacher training, but Emma reflected that “logically it may be harder for primary to offer flexible working as teachers have one class all day rather than a timetable around their subject”.

“For secondary schools there is an interesting discussion to be had about whether a more mature approach to ‘flipped learning’ could support flexible working,” she said. “With that approach, do teachers need to be in the school building all the time? Can they engage in discussion in class without being physically present? Is anyone actually looking at what we have learned over the past three years to make teaching a more attractive profession to teachers, but also more attractive to children and young people who may be more responsive to and more engaged in different approaches of teaching and learning beyond what we see as the norm?”

Emma added: “Providers, even those who are keen to innovate, are often constrained by the realities of our schooling systems. Arguably, offering flexible training opportunities for trainees, which cannot then be translated into their working lives could be seen as setting new entrants up for false hope. If they are seeking flexibility in training, it is likely that they would want that flexibility more than one or two years. For flexibility to truly work to attract new applicants, there needs to be a join-up between what is possible both for training and for your ongoing career. And for flexibilities to be truly attractive and workable, some radical rethinking and innovation is needed around the very purpose and structure of our education systems. From our perspective, we need to start with some ‘what if?’ questions, however to be effective this must go way beyond ITT – we need a much broader conversation.”

**-ENDS-**

NASBTT is a registered charity committed to promoting high-quality schools-led programmes of training, education and professional development of teachers. NASBTT represents the interests of schools-led teacher training provision in relation to the development and implementation of national policy developments. Our members include SCITTs, School Direct Lead Schools, Teaching School Hubs, Higher Education Institutions as well as a range of other organisations involved in the education and professional development of teachers. We have more than 225 members representing in excess of 10,000 individual trainees.

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**Media Contact:**

Phil Smith

NASBTT PR consultant

Telephone: 01778 218180 / 07866 436159

Email: [phil@philsmithcommunications.co.uk](mailto:phil@philsmithcommunications.co.uk)