

## Headteacher Work-Life Balance Questionnaire for Chairs of Governors

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Firstly, I would like to thank all the Chairs who took the time to respond to the questionnaire, write accompanying letters, send emails or ring to discuss the issue. Over 60% of governing bodies responded (a *very good* result for a questionnaire) and so we now have some information and strategies to share with Norfolk governors and heads.

'Workforce Remodelling – a Guide for Governors IV' (June 2005) pages 4/5 gives particular advice on the governing body's responsibility for the head's work-life balance which, together with the bank of successful strategies already adopted by governing bodies and heads in Norfolk, hopefully will provide food for thought and a starting point for further discussion.

'A good work/life balance is central to teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction and pupil learning' quotes one secondary head, but a 'one size fits all' approach is inappropriate.

### What is work-life balance?

'Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, school (sic) and society.'

The Work Foundation

It's a whole school issue with governors and head sharing the responsibility for the school's workforce. The head has responsibility for ensuring that teachers have a 'satisfactory balance between the time required to discharge their professional duties . . . and the time to pursue their personal interests outside work'. (School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document Para.54.3) There is a similar requirement on governing bodies to safeguard the work-life balance of the headteachers.

The School Teachers' Review Board 2005 workload survey reported that primary heads work on average 52.9 hours a week, a significant **decrease** since 2000 (58.9 hrs), whilst secondary heads work 62.6 hours per week on average, a significant **increase** since 2004 (60.8 hrs) despite reducing their teaching commitments by almost 40%.

In my own survey into the working hours of small school teaching heads in May '05 the average was approximately 53 hours.

### Survey results

61% of governing bodies have discussed headteacher working hours and work-life balance whilst 39% have not. Only 11% have either discussed or agreed what 'reasonable' working hours might be. This isn't surprising as

currently there isn't any guidance on the matter, although it is expected before Christmas. That said, most thought that between 45-50 working hours per week was reasonable. (The Working Time Regulations 1999 sets a limit of 48 hours per week on average BUT a worker can chose to work more.)

Several Chairs were concerned that their head was going to have to teach more this year to cover for teachers' 10% PPA time, while others would like to reduce their head's class-teaching commitment to allow them more leadership and management time IF finances permitted.

Only 14% of all heads has a Performance Management Target related to well-being compared to 40-50% of heads nationally.

<b>Type of school</b>				
<b>Heads with target</b>	<b>Nurs/First/Inf.</b>	<b>Prim./Middle</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>
Yes	16%	11%	27%	0%
No	78%	84%	73%	100%

50% of governing bodies would welcome further training on work-life balance issues and the Governor Support Service will be arranging this later in the year.

Chairs and heads were invited to share their current strategies to reduce the latter's working hours and improve their work-life balance.

### **Strategies Governing Bodies recommend:**

#### **Relationships**

- have realistic expectations of, and foster a close & supportive relationship with, the head
- Chair & head meet regularly and discuss workload etc.
- Chair & Head work together to prioritise DfES, & local initiatives and agree to only work on those which will help their school. This avoids feelings of guilt.
- encourage head to adopt flexible working arrangements e.g. work at home on both projects & paperwork, take time off in lieu of evening meets & holiday work, after a late evening meeting come into school later the next day if possible & discourage routine working at home in the evenings & weekends
- ask head for dates of important family events prior to drawing up governors' calendar
- grant leave of absence for personal reasons
- encourage distributed leadership and delegation in school
- encourage head to set good example by leaving school early (occasionally). 1 school ensures all staff are off site by 4 p.m. each Friday
- share attendance at local meetings with senior staff & report back to head
- encourage head to take part in professional development opportunities for 'refreshment'
- ensure head has an adequate office in which to work effectively

## **Staffing**

- use Workforce Remodelling to work towards the most effective & efficient staffing structure i.e. right people doing right job. Consider appointing a School Bursar/School Manager, P.A., Asst. Head or increasing secretarial staff. Ensure adequate secretarial & clerical support to allow delegation of routine admin tasks. Is Senior Management Team sufficient to support school's leadership & management responsibilities? (see National Standards for Heads)
- monitor frequency of head's teaching to cover for staff sickness & review sickness insurance plan if appropriate
- set a realistic ceiling on head's teaching commitment to ensure sufficient time for headship duties &, in small schools with a class-teaching head, use supply staff if necessary to ensure head has sufficient time.

## **Governing Body business**

- review working arrangements, committee structures & frequency/timings of meetings. Hold the termly full meeting of the governing body (max. 2 hrs) either after school e.g. 3.30–5.30 p.m. or early evening 6-8 p.m. if it suits all parties. Arrange committee meetings either within the school day or all on the same day.
- ask for one *succinct* head's report each term &, if you meet more frequently, agree that a verbal update will suffice.
- make clear that there is no expectation that the head attends every meeting, but rather encourages other senior staff to attend committee/PTA meetings
- when preparing or revising policies spread the load across a greater number of people to reduce workload e.g. subject leaders & key governors, key staff with a governor committee etc.
- ensure head isn't doing jobs for which the governors are responsible e.g. setting agendas & producing minutes, some aspects of Health & Safety & Premises management.

## **Other ways to support**

- have staff well-being as a regular agenda item, appoint a well-being governor to research the subject, include work-life balance in the school's Performance Management policy
- over 360 schools are now part of the county's Well-Being Programme so if your school isn't, ask for details on 01603 222326 (it's free & requires no extra work!)
- if key staff e.g. caretaker/cleaner are off sick, particularly in small schools, temporary staff can be hard to find so emergency help with urgent cleaning is always much appreciated.

## **How heads are helping themselves to achieve an adequate work-life balance**

### **Personal strategies**

- acknowledge its importance for all staff & lead by example e.g. 1 school promotes a 'Family comes First' culture in school

- maintain a positive & realistic approach to headship e.g. I can't do everything so effective prioritisation, delegation & time management are crucial, consider taking a course to further develop these skills
- spend some time reviewing how you carry out your role & responsibilities. Self-reflection can lead to important life-changing decisions.
- plan home & school priorities across the term to avoid very heavy weeks so that effort is spread more evenly & is sustainable
- ensure family & 'me' time is pencilled into diary
- consider regular breaks & holidays away from routine for refreshment
- hone IT skills to take advantage of new technology
- take a break for lunch each day even if only for a short while
- meet regularly with a headteacher colleague over lunch for a chat, to share strategies and 'offload'
- pursue both career and personal goals for greater job & own satisfaction

### **Management**

- plan a regular school 'low key' week so all staff benefit e.g. no meetings or after school activities
- practise distributed leadership to both empower colleagues & provide opportunities for their professional development
- use remodelling to build a strong & supportive staff team & delegate
- review office systems to find more effective ways of doing things
- delegate all routine tasks to admin staff to free up leadership & management time
- work at home to increase efficiency and/or put a 'Do not disturb' sign on your door
- ring fence dedicated headship time for 'important not urgent' jobs in diary each week
- adopt a paperless office and/or touch each piece only once
- reduce number of after school meetings attended or share with senior staff & governors
- refine school curriculum planning so all staff benefit from a reduction in workload

I would be very interested to hear from you about any developments or ideas on promoting staff work-life balance which I could then share via the Well-Being website on Esinet.

email: [julia.hurlbut@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:julia.hurlbut@norfolk.gov.uk)

### **Working with Governors**

- work together to review current practices & look for opportunities both to streamline and increase efficiency
- investigate Investors in People Work-Life Balance standards
- ensure governors receive necessary reports & paperwork by agreed deadlines so meetings can run smoothly
- use governors' strengths and interests to the maximum

### **Useful websites and sources of support**

Governors Support Service, Professional Development Centre, Woodside Road, Norwich Tel. 01603 433276

Workforce Remodelling-a guide for Governors IV 6/05 – can download from:

[www.remodelling.org](http://www.remodelling.org) & search for worklife balance in case studies

[www.norfolkgovernors.org.uk](http://www.norfolkgovernors.org.uk)

[www.governornet.co.uk](http://www.governornet.co.uk) advice

[www.ngc.org.uk](http://www.ngc.org.uk) National Governors' Council

[www.nasg.org.uk](http://www.nasg.org.uk) National Association of School Governors

[www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk) info

### **Worklife balance information**

[www.investorsinpeople.co.uk](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk) for Worklife Balance module info

<http://www.worklifebalance.centre.org.uk/> download free guide

[www.24-7survey.co.uk](http://www.24-7survey.co.uk) free download

[www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance](http://www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance)

[www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk](http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk)

### **Research**

[www.theworkfoundation.com](http://www.theworkfoundation.com)

[www.workliferesearch.org](http://www.workliferesearch.org)