

## The marooned profession

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As we head towards the summer holidays - and potentially a period of extended disruption in schools - it is worth asking how long teaching as a profession can afford to remain marooned.

During the 'Covid lockdowns' what teachers missed most about their job was in-person contact with students and colleagues, professional debate and development, the intellectual stimulus of classrooms and the pleasure of being with pupils in extra-curricular activities.

All that remains steadfastly true. At the same time, teaching is the last remaining profession which demands employees' presence in the workplace five days a week. This is unsustainable.

In the NHS, nurses and doctors have largely flexible shifts; 90% of GPs are now recorded as working part-time. Architects, lawyers and accountants enjoy blended home/office arrangements. Flight crews, IT contractors and the Civil Service work flexibly - try the DfE on a Friday!

Kellogg's UK has offered 'summer Fridays' for 20 years. Lloyds Banking Group recently announced to staff that they will have to spend at least two days a week (!) in the office from September with 'card swipe data' used to monitor their return: 'We want flexible working to be fair, inclusive and productive for all'.

Charities and publishers I work with have all moved to giving employees options on their attendance in the office. At a stroke, 'at work' has taken on a range of different interpretations. The Covid era has transformed working and leisure patterns globally; unquestionably, AI is set to disrupt further.

Blink - and the extraordinary has become the commonplace.

Most universities globally are now organised around a 75/25 split between in-person teaching and virtual. A number of Further Education colleges in the UK have announced that from this September students will be taught four days a week in college, and one day will be on-line. There are obvious environmental gains.

What of schools? Take Sharjah, one of the northern United Arab Emirates: the four-day school week for pupils and teachers was introduced last academic year and is the new normal.

A number of multi-academy trusts have introduced two week half-terms, and the offer of sabbaticals across the profession is more common than hitherto. Part-time contracts nationally in special, primary and secondary are significantly on the increase. Yet this is tinkering with the status quo.

We shall see, quite rapidly, the emergence of the four-day *teacher* week. Creative timetabling will mean teachers are in school on four days, with a fifth day taken off-site: for preparation, marking, professional development and private appointments. One can confidently predict the positive impact on quality in classrooms, and on recruitment and retention.

The Labour Party in power has pledged to expand *all* children's cultural capital. How better to do this than invest the £1.6 billion (to be raised by scrapping private schools' charitable status) in high quality tutors to lead rich extra-curricular opportunities in the arts and sport? Four days of timetabled curriculum, one day in pursuit of wider enrichment - exactly the independent school diet.

As a society we are probably not ready for the four-day *pupil* week - but pause.

It is likely that senior secondary students with a reformed examination system will not be in school over five days. For example, UWC Atlantic College's new IB assessment system includes 300 hours of project based learning in and for the community - with no expectation that this takes place in classrooms.

Ongoing teacher shortages and pay limitations, shifting attitudes to schooling by pupils and families, combined with a changed-for-ever social contract, will lead inexorably to system leaders reorganising the school week and terms. A tipping point will arrive sooner than the profession anticipates.

As ever, practice will shape policy. Government will play catch-up. And 'school holidays' will never be the same again.

Roy Blatchford's latest book is [\*The A - Z of Great Classrooms\*](#), published by John Catt.