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talk2learn highlights

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

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In case you missed it...

Recent highlights from NCSL in Dialogue, talk2learn's
online community for national education debate

Also available as a podcast

Work-life balance - time for fresh thinking?

Could school leaders strike a better work-life balance if they treated the job as an integrated part of their everyday lives rather than as a completely separate entity?

A talk2learn discussion debated the pros and cons of coping with the pressures of leadership by thinking of work and life as 'a coherent whole', an idea first raised by headteacher Susan Tranter in an article for the College's Ldr magazine.

A few contributors agreed with Tranter. One described a strategy of doing 11 hours' work over a weekend which paved the way for a 'low key' week of leaving school at a reasonable hour with no work to take home.

"Being a teacher is all about being organised and if that means having to work some weekends then for me and my family that's OK."

But most felt that the division between work and home needed to be reinforced rather than dismantled.

Antony Corbett, a deputy headteacher of a junior school in Leicester, said that the view of teaching as a vocation encouraged people to feel it had to take precedence in their lives.

"I have a profession and an important part of that profession is time off. I am not married to the job. I am married to my wife and we have kids; this is the most important thing in my life."

Angela Barry, a headteacher for 10 years, now in a federation in south-east London, was worried about the example current heads are setting for their successors.

"I absolutely love my job but it doesn't take over my life."

My biggest worry is that so many of my young staff do not follow my lead and spend so much time on their preparation and assessment. Unless experienced leaders continue to show the way with work-life balance then, in coming years, we will have an unprecedented recruitment crisis."

Many school leaders simply had to do their best to manage, said Tony



Jones, a junior school headteacher in Brighton – "and for many of those colleagues, 'managing' really does mean walking away from undone work at the end of the day. Doing that, in itself, conveys a strong message about balance."

In some cases, the work-life balance challenge is producing solutions which have an impact beyond easing the pressure on an individual. One school leader said the pressures of balancing a career with caring for her disabled son at home had forced her to re-think her approach to her work.

"Having finite amounts of time to mark and prepare led to me being quite creative. Lots of marking by necessity became peer and self-assessed and the students quickly came to realise that this was a better way to work."

Finally, Alan Hall, a former secondary headteacher, recalled a wry anecdote from an international leaders' seminar.

"One of the Scandinavian headteachers said, 'Back home, we leave school about 4:30 and if it's summer we go sailing and if it's winter we go skiing. Does this mean that our pupils are somehow less educated' because we don't work the hundreds of hours that you appear to do?"

"The English headteachers didn't really have an answer to that."

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities