

A grayscale photograph of a male worker in a factory setting, focused on assembling a bicycle wheel. He is wearing a light-colored polo shirt and dark overalls. The background shows a blurred industrial environment with various machinery and equipment. On the left side of the image, there is a decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in shades of green, cyan, and yellow, arranged in a stepped, arrow-like pattern pointing towards the right.

**FLEX**  
FOR **LIFE**  
In Focus

# Flex on the Frontline

Increasing flexibility and  
new ways of working for  
frontline workers

flexibilityworks >

# Why creating more frontline flex matters

Expectations are changing about how our job should fit in with the rest of our life.

The pandemic has pushed personal wellbeing to the fore, and seven in ten Scottish workers want more flexibility in how much, when and where they work.

This applies just as much to frontline and non-office workers. But, of course, the reality is that people in frontline roles usually can't work from home, or flex their hours very easily.

Our research with 200 Scottish employers showed that in organisations where people couldn't work flexibly, 58% of this was down to the fact staff worked in frontline or public

-facing roles. Given that half of Scottish workers are in frontline jobs, we'd like to gently but firmly challenge that...

The aim of this short 'in focus' report is to equip you with our latest research findings on how Scottish frontline workers are currently working, and what they would like – and think might be possible – in the future. As well as the latest information on what some employers of frontline workers are doing right now, and planning for the future.

We'll also share sensible, practical tips on how you can help frontline workers manage work

and home responsibilities more easily with our handy 'how to' guide. Often, these changes can seem very small. But they can make a huge difference to how much control someone has over their work, and its impact on their family and life in general.

So often, flexible working is only associated with office workers, or people in knowledge-based roles. But it **is** possible to create more work-life harmony and wellbeing for frontline workers, that helps them feel happier, more engaged and productive. And this clearly has business benefits too.

Our primary *Flex for Life 2022* report covered all aspects of flexible working in Scotland. This shorter 'in focus' report looks in detail at flexible working in frontline roles. Our findings are based on survey data from:

» 1,021 Scottish workers, of whom 546 work in frontline roles

» 201 Scottish business leaders, including 163 who employ frontline workers

All surveys were carried out online by global research firm Panelbase between 20/1/22 and 1/2/22.

# About flexibilityworks

## Purpose

Enriching people's lives by transforming the way we work

## Vision

Creating a working culture that truly values work-life harmony, enabling all people and businesses to thrive

## Mission

To accelerate the adoption of flexible and new ways of working in Scotland, by sharing advice, insight and best practice, which improves business success, employee engagement and wellbeing

## What we do

Experts in Scotland, supporting businesses to implement flexible or new ways of working.



### A Community for Change

Connecting you to a collaborative community of specialists and champions, all committed to improving the way we work



### Training & Consultancy

Providing consultancy and training to ensure a successful roll-out across your business



### Research & Insight

Providing the latest insight, and research, keeping you current and saving you time



### Thought-leadership & Expertise

Sharing our expertise and knowledge through webinars, roundtables, case studies and in the media

flexibilityworks

for people. for business. for life.

# What frontline workers told us about flexible working

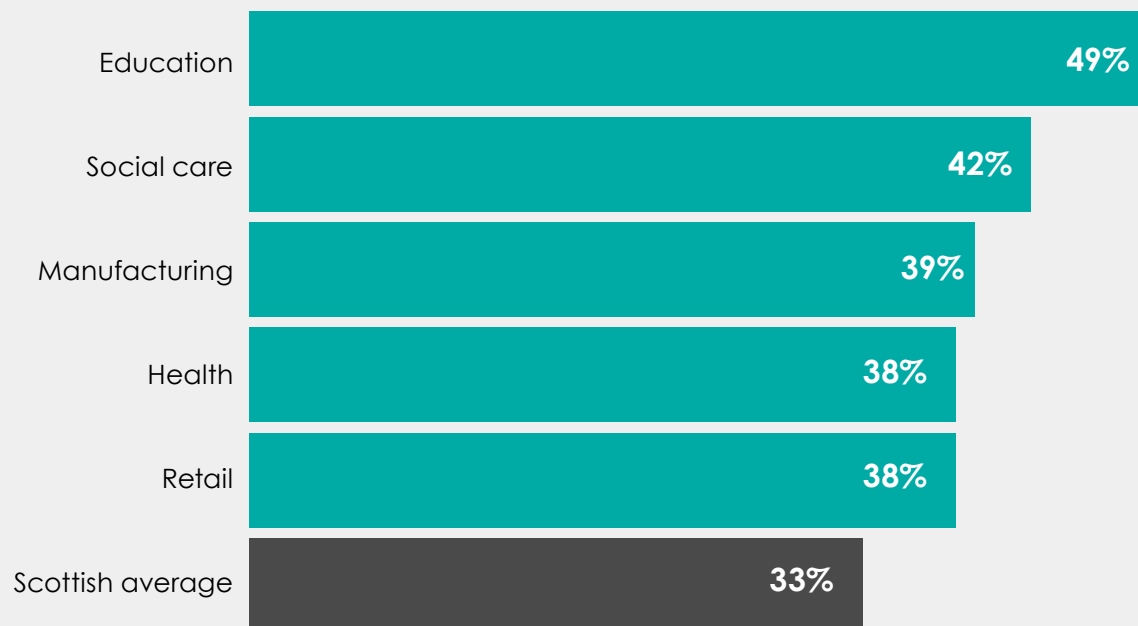
# 53%

**of frontline workers said they've had access to some form of flexible working in the last six months.**

This is lower than the average for all Scottish workers (60%) but shows that many frontline employers are already exploring flexibility and new ways of working for staff.

Access varied across frontline sectors. Retail, construction and health offered the most flexible working, while education and social care offered the least.

## % of workers with NO access to flex



## Retaining good workers

**Community Integrated Care (CIC) is looking at new shift patterns for care workers that might involve monthly or fortnightly hours in different patterns.**

Holly Mackay, HR Business Partner for CIC said: “Retaining good employees in social care is hard, and we’re expecting it to get even harder as more industries begin opening up again after Covid and people have more choice over jobs. The pay in our sector is sadly not very competitive, so we need to give them other reasons to stay with us.

“We’ve just completed a big survey of our staff so we can hear their opinions on more flexible ways of working. It’s confirmed what we thought, that most of our colleagues think extra flexibility would be valuable and beneficial to them.”

## Why people want more flex

The reasons why frontline workers would like more flexibility at work mirror those for all Scottish workers. Achieving a better work-life balance is top of the list, followed by caring for children, and benefitting wellbeing.

## Importance of flex for frontline job seekers

35% of Scottish frontline workers are currently thinking of changing jobs and almost two thirds (64%) of these workers say flexible working is a priority when deciding whether to apply for, or accept a new role, compared with 53% who say salary. Given that many frontline sectors have skill shortages and employers are struggling to find quality candidates in a very competitive jobs market, these figures show how offering more flexibility could set you apart and attract the people you really need.

## Opportunities for more flexibility?

We know it's harder to see how flex works for some frontline roles. But managers don't need to have all the answers. Talk to your teams because they're likely to have some good, practical ideas themselves. We find workers are very sensible with suggestions and mindful of what they and their team need to deliver.

We found nearly a third (29%) of frontline workers without flex felt they could do some parts of their job from home or another location. While two in five (43%) felt they could do some parts of their job at different hours to normal.

When we asked frontline workers what sort of flexibility they'd like more of, the most popular options focused on flexible hours. A third (33%) would like a shorter working week on the same pay, more than a quarter (27%) wanted compressed hours, and a quarter (24%) wanted flexitime. The same portion wanted more hybrid and home working.

Figures for office workers are almost identical, showing how similar demand for flexibility is, regardless of whether roles are desk-bound or frontline and public facing.

We know many frontline employers are already thinking more creatively about how they can increase flexibility and new ways of working. For example, offering new shifts and staggered shift patterns. Or offering small amounts of paid leave that workers can use in hour-chunks to cover appointments and situations at home without wasting annual leave, or calling in sick.

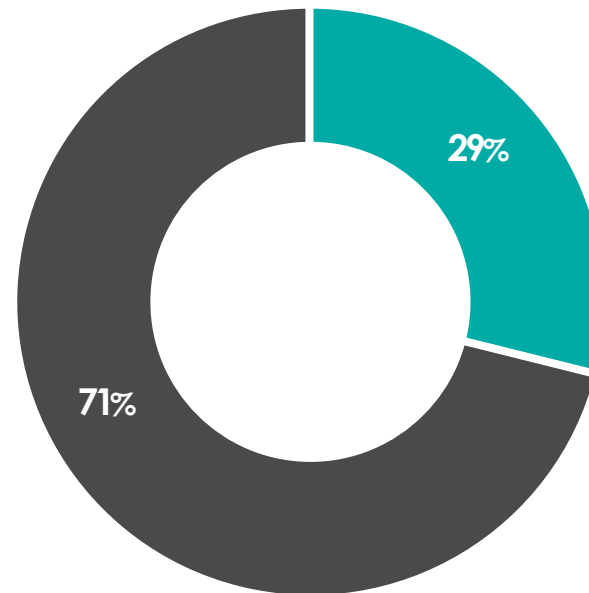
It's well worth exploring what your own teams would like, and what they think is possible.

# 29%

**Nearly a third of frontline workers without flex felt they could do some parts of their job from home or another location**

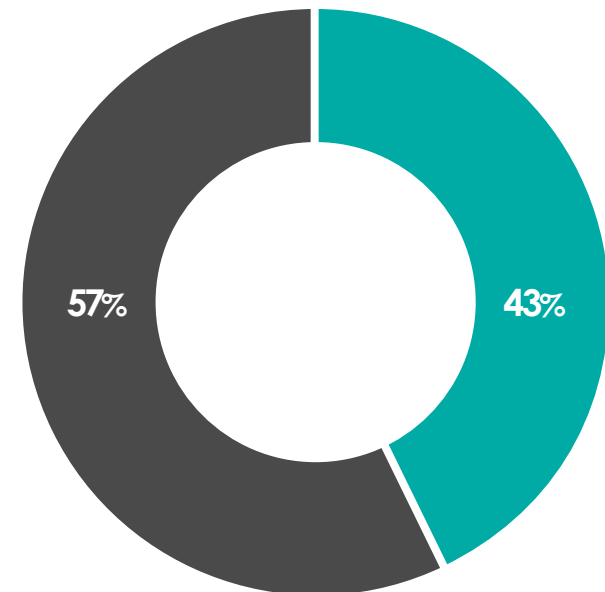
## Frontline workers without flex who think flex is possible

■ Yes ■ No



**Do you think it could be possible that some parts of your job can be done from home or another location other than your usual workplace?**

**Do you think it could be possible that some parts of your job can be done at different times other than your current usual working patterns?**



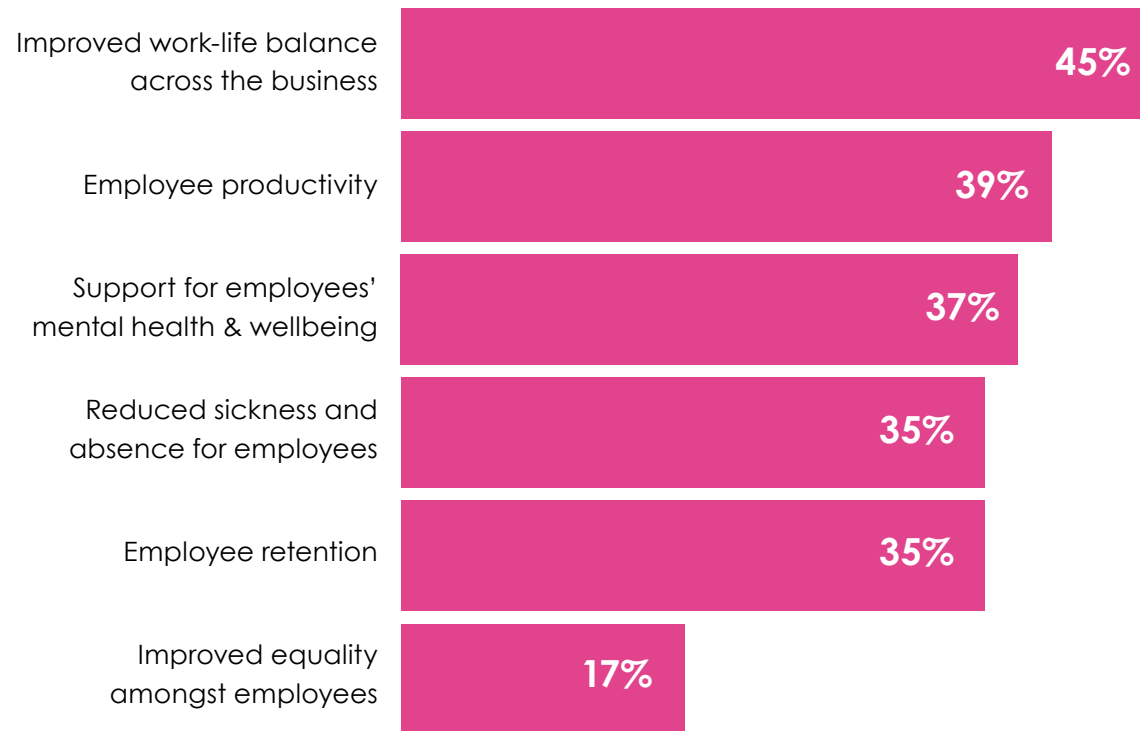
# What **frontline employers** told us about flexible working?

**Our research shows many frontline employers experienced positive impacts from increasing flexible working during Covid restrictions.**

Nearly half reported better work-life balance across the business, while four in ten said productivity was better. More than a third said health and wellbeing was better, and that sickness absence was reduced.

The main challenges were around bringing teams together virtually (13%), and some confusion about where people were working (10%). Once again figures were remarkably similar across frontline and non-frontline employers.

## Business benefits of flex identified by frontline employers



## What types of flex will frontline employers offer more of?

Frontline employers expect to offer more flexibility on time as well as location, which is good news for frontline workers, who we've seen mainly wanted more flexibility around their working hours and some more home working.

Employers are also thinking more creatively, with 48% saying it was likely they would give staff extra time off, such as a day off a month for wellbeing.

While 45% of frontline employers said it was likely they would bring in extra staff to create bigger teams to create greater capacity and shift cover.

But responses were low on some 'easier' wins around preparing and sharing rotas and swapping shifts, suggesting they've been overlooked. Just 4% of frontline employers thought they would introduce self-rostering, only 7% planned to give

more notice of shifts and only 8% were going to improve how workers swapped shifts.

We know staff rota systems don't grab the headlines, like hybrid working or four-day weeks. But – unlike hybrid and four-day weeks – almost every employer can make improvements here that make a big difference for workers.

## What types of flex have already increased?

Scottish employers with frontline workers told us they'd already increased a range of flexible working opportunities since the start of the pandemic.

**33%**

have offered  
more  
home working

**23%**

have offered  
more full-time  
home working

**23%**

have offered  
more flexitime

**18%**

have offered  
more part-time  
hours

**8%**

have offered  
the chance to swap  
shifts more often



# What's stopping employers doing more?

Implementing flexible working fairly when staff carry out very different roles is the main barrier for frontline employers (experienced by 31%), according to our research. This was higher than the average for all Scottish employers (28%).

Our own experience of speaking to workers in all sorts of roles suggests people don't mind colleagues working differently to them, so long as they feel the process itself is fair and consistent and that each role has the flexibility that's possible. For example, a plumber doesn't mind if a call-handler works from home so long as the plumber has some choice about their own start and finish time.

Other barriers included challenges in recovering from the pandemic (26%), lack of resource (19%) and no clear vision for flexible working (17%). We can't take away pandemic pressures. But we do highly recommend including flexible working your business strategy and objectives, which can help boost resource to implement flex successfully and prevent confusion.

**31%**

**Implementing flexible working fairly when staff carry out very different roles is the main barrier for frontline employers**

**26%**

**say pandemic recovery is a barrier**



# How to create better work-life harmony in frontline roles

We've shown you how much flexibility is wanted and sought after by frontline workers. But you don't have to dive straight in to a four-day working week (unless you want to) to make work and life flow more easily. Here are our top tips for better work-life harmony in frontline roles:

## 1 Advanced notice for shifts

If you can plan ahead and give people more notice of their shifts, including specifics about location if this varies, it gives them more control over the rest of their life. They can book medical appointments, arrange childcare, or just know when they can go for swim or take the dog for a walk. Research by the Living Wage Foundation with 4,000 people found that of the 59% whose jobs involved variable hours or shift work, 62% said they were given less than a week's notice of their schedule.

**"We recognise the importance of giving people the certainty and flexibility they need to plan their lives when it comes to variable shift patterns, and that as much advance planning as possible is vital for success. We're currently working to support our leaders in creating rotas that not only reflect the needs of the people we support, but also give our colleagues the notice they need to achieve a healthy and positive work-life balance – enabling everyone in our charity to live the best life possible."**



Holly Mackay, Head of Employee Relations, Community Integrated Care

## 2 Reliable, predictable shift patterns

If you can create a regular shift pattern, this also helps people have more control over work and life outside because they can anticipate shifts, and plan accordingly. Reducing last-minute changes wherever possible is beneficial too.

**"It's quite stressful (organising childcare) but I like to be organised, and have it all set out, and I'm lucky because there's consistency with my shifts."**



Mother working part-time in education

### 3 Know your team

Understanding someone's personal circumstances can help you create a shift pattern that works. Maybe someone prefers to start and finish earlier so they can collect their children from school, while someone else prefers to work evenings and weekends. Of course, you might not be able to accommodate everyone's preferences all the time. But knowing what employees prefer means you should be able to design rotas that keep people happier in general, and need fewer swaps.

Construction firm **Skanska UK** found workers preferred starting and finishing earlier but this wasn't possible for everyone at the same time because of the nature of the site. However, staggered start and finish times were introduced so teams could take turns at earlier, or later shifts.

### 4 Direct rota input by employees

Have you ever tried letting your team put together their own rota? You might need to intervene if there are gaps. But you can be sure staff are getting more of the shifts they want if they've chosen them directly. Or, you could seek input by asking whether there are any particular dates people would like off, or specific hours for.

**Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS** introduced self-rostering two years ago. Since self-rostering started, their absenteeism has radically reduced and people are happier and healthier. They have less need to use bank staff, so costs are reduced too.

### 5 Easy shift swaps

Make it simple for people to change shifts with a colleague if they need to. There are good apps that can help teams communicate clearly, view rotas and swap shifts quickly, as well as email and group messaging.

**"We aim for self-managed rotas so our Personal Development Workers are directly involved in creating their own rota around the needs of the person they work for. But if something comes up, such as a poorly child, or an opportunity to go to an event and they need to swap a shift, they know they are empowered to contact colleagues in their own team to do this. We have various groups on Whatsapp, Yammer and Teams they can use to do this. And we just ask that they involve the person they are supporting, as it is that person they work for and so is respectful, and means they're not surprised if someone unexpected arrives."**



Ian Williams, Project Development Lead at care provider C-Change

## 6 Small adjustments

Allowing staff to make small, guilt-free adjustments when the unexpected happens – a broken boiler, poorly child or elderly relative who needs support, for example. This makes a huge difference to how stressed people feel, if it's ok to make small changes to their working pattern to deal with something important happening at home.

**“As part of our approach to flexible working, we’ve introduced paid flexible leave so that employees can enjoy a better work-life balance. This means they can take up to three hours at a time from their workday to tend to the commitments that matter to them – such as a medical or personal appointment, school pick-up or family meal. With 85% of these requests being consistently approved by management, it shows that our employees are really benefiting from this.**



Lynne McBurney, Group Head of People, Arnold Clark

## 7 Flexible hours and shifts

Home working usually a no-go for frontline workers. But can your team work more flexible hours? Would part-time hours work for some people in some roles? This can instantly open up roles to more people, especially parents, carers and people with disabilities who can't work full time. It can also save the company money by only paying salaries for the time you really need. Would two people job-sharing be able to deliver the same outcomes for customers? Or compressed hours (doing fewer, longer days)? Would a twilight shift suit some people better, or fewer, longer shifts? Think about what sort of flexibility could work for your teams.

Some employers worry the floodgates will open if they start offering more flexibility. But most people only want relatively small amounts of flex – only about one in every eight workers would like part-time hours.

**Being more creative with shift patterns has benefited Enterprise Rent a Car. They’ve introduced more split-shift options and job-shares, and some branches have deliberately extended their hours to enable more shift working, creating a win-win for employees and customers.**

## 8 Small amounts of home working

Maybe some parts of roles could be done at home. Whether it's admin tasks, some staff meetings or training. Even just a small amount of home working, where possible, can make a difference to someone's busy week.

**“I’m only in the office once or twice a week. The rest of the time I’m out in the community or working from home... Now I can sit down [at the beginning of the week] and go ‘I’m going to do all my visits on these days, use that day for [helping my] mum, that day for paperwork at home’. I’m a lot more in control.”**



Local council family support worker

## 9 Talk about existing flexible working options and wellbeing benefits

Many companies have brilliant support and benefits that some employees have no idea exist. It's an easy win to shout about what you already have. Make sure your staff take their leave entitlement, and understand what's available to support parents and carers. Remind them there's an employee network that might be helpful, that there are mental health first aiders they can talk to, or simply flag lunchtime activity classes if you have them. Make sure your people know all the support they can tap in to.

**“Offering great benefits is one thing, making them accessible and understandable to employees is integral. Employees have different needs at different times, and it is our job to make sure that our employees know the support that is available to them through flexible policies, mental health support, finance education and physical wellbeing.”**



**Maria Rooney, HR director at The Glenmorangie Company**

## 10 Remove unnecessary travel

Some frontline workers, such as social care workers, have to travel to their employer's office first, and then go out on their shift. You can save valuable time for your team, and deliver more for customers, if you brief teams remotely at the start of shifts and let them head directly to their first client.

**“Since changing the working pattern to hybrid working within the quantity surveying team, it has reduced commuting time by two hours in some cases as colleagues can travel directly to sites rather than coming to an office first. Due to the trust placed in the team whilst home working, many feel their productivity has increased as a result.”**



**Chris Ryan, Commercial Manager, City Building**

## 11 Train great line managers

Managers who can communicate effectively and empathetically with their teams will get the best from them. This includes ensuring colleagues who aren't always sat at computers have the information they need and the ability to share their opinion freely, as well as understanding changes in people's circumstances and being open to sensitive discussions, such as people having too much work.

**“We already have a positive culture where people know they can ask for small ad-hoc changes, or swap their working days. And it is important that teams, not just managers, decide the expectations around connection and communication. During the pandemic we did some extra training with line managers and held several coffee break conversations so they could discuss any issues they were having. Having good managers means we get the best from our teams, so we're always looking at how we can support them.”**



**Carrie Nisbet, Head of HR, Children 1st**

If you're still not sure, why not join one of our webinars, or read through some of our blogs and stories about what other employers are trying?

Or just give us a ring, or drop us an email, and we'll see what we can do to help.

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