



FLEX
FOR LIFE
2023

#FlexForLife

flexibilityworks >

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Introduction

Introduction

Where are we now?

What next for flex?

Focus points for 2023

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Big stats, big picture

Welcome to our third annual Flex for Life report, the most comprehensive analysis of flexible working in Scotland right now.

If you're in a hurry, here are our headline stats:

- The growth in flexible working as a result of the pandemic has stabilised. We found 61% of Scottish adults are working flexibly, up just 1% on last year. Pre-pandemic, 46% of Scottish workers said they worked flexibly.
- Desire for flexible working remains high but stable too. One in five (21%) Scottish workers don't work flexibly but would like to, which together with the 61% who work flexibly means 82% of Scottish workers have or want flexible working. This compares with 84% last year, and 73% pre-pandemic.
- In the year Government social distancing and 'work from home' guidance ended, eight in ten (79%) Scottish workers **with flexible working** have been able to maintain or even increase their flexibility. But one in five (21%) of **all** Scottish workers say they now have less flex than a year ago.
- And while 61% of all Scottish workers have flex, more than a third (36%) still don't have any flexibility at all.
- Looking ahead to the next 12 months, most Scottish employers (70%) expect to maintain or further increase flexible working opportunities but nearly one in five (18%) expect to reduce flexible working in their organisation.



What's the story behind the numbers?

Broadly our research shows the extra flexible working gained by Scottish workers during the pandemic has 'stuck' for the majority. While some people did lose some flexibility in the last year, this didn't affect the overall number of flexible workers, suggesting many retained some - but not all - the flex they had during Covid restrictions. The fact most employers have kept up additional flexibility, or even increased it, shows they are finding business benefits too.

However, there are still significant numbers of Scottish workers who don't have any flexibility. Salary remains the biggest differentiator in terms of whether someone works flexibly or not. Those on the lowest salaries have the least flexibility. And the gap between the number of flexible workers on the highest and lowest salaries has widened since last year.

Our report covers what types of flexible working people use, why they want it, and the benefits and challenges employers have reported. But this year we've also included data on the impact a lack of flexible working can have on people's lives, such as on mental health, and whether or not people can work at all.

Together with our salary data, and research with unemployed people looking for work, we're up-front in showing how vital flexible working is to enable people to enter work, stay in work and progress at work, and that we need more flexible opportunities throughout the working life cycle and in lower paid roles especially. This would help create fairer work that could transform the lives of individuals and their families including helping some escape poverty. But it would also help employers battling skills shortages to retain good staff and boost our wider economy.

Frontline workers deserve a specific mention too. While they still have less flexible working than office workers, more of them work flexibly than last year, and employers seem more likely to be exploring flex for them. We know creating flexibility for frontline workers isn't easy, so we're encouraged to see more employers starting to think about all kinds of flexible working and for all kinds of workers, not just hybrid working for desk workers. This is an area where we expect to see gradual, positive change.

Overall our research shows that increases in flexible working because of the pandemic look secure. Flexible working hasn't dwindled now employers don't 'have' to allow home working and ensure social distancing. But flexible working is far from 'won and done' either.

We found a consistent gap between what employers *think* they are doing and offering and what workers *believe* is offered, which needs better communication to bridge the gap and improve employee satisfaction. There are still teething issues around hybrid working, especially when it comes to retaining culture and connection at work and training line managers. Too many employers still don't talk about flexible working in recruitment, or think about it when designing or updating job roles, and as we've mentioned there are still groups of workers, such as those in low paid and frontline roles, who continue to miss out. Flexible working must remain a strategic priority for the benefit of workers, employers and our economy at large. We must keep learning from each other.



About our data

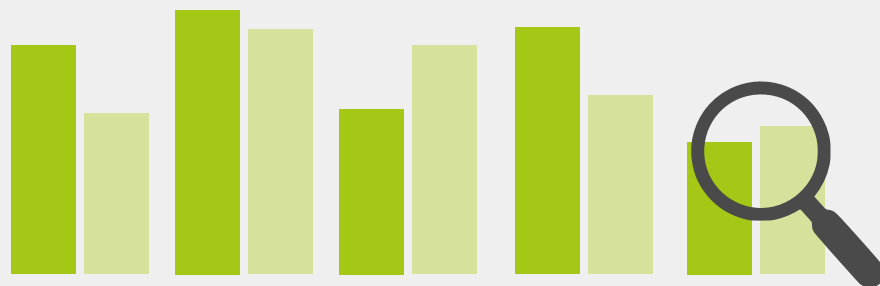
All figures, unless stated otherwise, were commissioned by Flexibility Works in the form of online surveys carried out by global research firm Panelbase between **3/1/23 and 25/1/23**.

» **1011 Scottish workers** were surveyed, of whom 622 were 'frontline/on-site/customer-facing' workers, and 389 were not frontline workers. Our figures are representative across age, gender, industries, income, and those with children including single parent households.

» **216 unemployed Scottish adults** who are looking for work were surveyed.

» **248 Scottish employers** were surveyed, including CEOs, directors, owners and founders, senior HR professionals and senior managers. A total of 199 had 'frontline/on-site/customer-facing' workers and 49 did not. The industries and sectors our employers came from closely matched our employee survey.

We're happy to discuss our data and if you need more information, such as sample sizes for specific questions, please contact us via hello@flexibilityworks.org



How to use our report

Our *Flex for Life 2023* report has a lot more data than in previous years. This is great for analysis but means our report is also more dense. We've broken the data down into smaller, specific topics so you can dip in and out as you need to. We've also created a short video summary highlighting key findings that you can find on our website.

Parts 1 and 2 present data on what's happened in Scotland over the last 12 months and is likely to happen in the next 12 months. This includes what types of flexibility workers use and would like more of, what employers have offered more of and how worker and employer perspectives can differ.

You might want to read the introduction and skip straight to Part 3, which covers key focus points, or challenges, for Scottish employers in 2023 as well as practical recommendations to help address them (including some quick wins).

We hope this report will be a useful reference point throughout the year for employers, policymakers and anyone else curious about how ways of working are evolving after the pandemic.

Happy reading. And please do get in touch if you have any questions.

About Flexibility Works

Flexibility Works is a boutique consultancy and training organisation that provides practical tools, support and resources to help employers create a successful flexible working culture.

Founded by Scotland's leading flexible working experts Lisa Gallagher and Nikki Slowey, Flexibility Works is proudly a social business with a purpose to enrich people's lives by transforming the way we work.

We've seen first-hand that it's possible to run a productive and profitable business and at the same time support the work life harmony of people who work. Our vision is simple – a working culture that truly values work life harmony, enabling all people and businesses to thrive.

We bring a depth of knowledge and insight about flexible working, and years of practical experience to help businesses and individuals thrive. And we work closely with the Scottish



Nikki Slowey



Lisa Gallagher

Government and policy makers to drive forward the flexible working agenda. Everything we do links to our mission, which is 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.

Thank you to all our sponsors and supporters who made this research possible.

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

Supported by:



What is flex?

There's still some confusion about what flexible working is, in part because it can take so many forms, and there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Flexible working will look different depending on the person, the role and the organisation, and the sort of flexible working people need may also change at different life stages.

Flexible working can be around one or all of:



**Where
someone
works**



**When
someone
works**



**How much
someone
works**

It can be formal (in a contract) or informal (agreed with your manager), or a mix of the two. Put simply, flexible working is a pattern or schedule that's not a rigid Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

in the same place. And, crucially, it's a pattern the employee has some **choice and control** over, and is agreed with the employer, because it works best for both parties.

Some roles have more scope for flexibility than others. But we'd argue some flexibility in a working schedule is usually possible in almost every role.

Here's how we defined flex for the workers and employers we surveyed:

This is about 'ways of working' and / or flexible working approaches that can have an impact on your personal work life balance. No matter what your job role or current working pattern is, flexible working is about how much **control** you feel you have over where, when and/or how much you work.

- For example, being able to choose any of the following: work from home or some other location than your employer's premises, vary the length of your working day within the week or month, vary your start or finish times, take breaks for personal reasons during working hours without needing to ask permission or use your employer's hybrid working policy.
- For shift workers or frontline, on-site or customer facing roles, this might include the ability to swap shifts, self-rostering, the ability to adjust hours occasionally, make small adjustments to start and finish times etc. It might also include having predictable shifts and/or input into shift patterns.
- It can be informal or formal (in your contract) or a mix of both.
- It **does not** include things like zero-hours contracts over which you have no control

What do we mean by frontline workers?

While we're defining things, here's how we describe a frontline role:

» A role that involves dealing with people in-person or face-to-face, such as retail or nursing. Or, that requires you to be on-site to complete practical hands-on tasks, such as manufacturing.





Part one: Where are we now?

What's happened with flexible working in the last year since pandemic restrictions were withdrawn?

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Who's got flexible working in Scotland now?

The proportion of workers who work flexibly has stabilised since the pandemic. This year, we found 61% of Scottish workers are working flexibly, up 1% on last year. Pre-pandemic, 46% of workers said they could work flexibly.

Desire for flexible working remains high but stable too. One in five (21%) Scottish workers don't work flexibly but would like to, which together with the 61% who already work flexibly, means 82% have or would like flexible working. This compares with a similar proportion last year (84%), and 73% pre-pandemic.

Salary seems to be the single biggest differentiator when it comes to whether someone works flexibly or not. Eight in ten (80%) people earning more than £50,000 said they worked flexibly, compared with 51% of people earning under £20,000. Last year, we reported that 73% of the highest earners worked flexibly, compared with 50% of the lowest earners. This suggests that things are only improving for higher earners, and that the gap between the highest and lowest earners is widening.

Women earning more than £50,000 were the most likely to work flexibly, with 88% saying they did so. But overall, more men work flexibly than women – 63% and 59% respectively.

A total of 57% of frontline workers say they work flexibly, up from 53% last year but still below average. While 59% of workers with a disability or long-term health condition say they work flexibly, down from 64% last year.

People working in the smallest organisations, with up to 10 members of staff, were most likely to work flexibly with 71% saying they did. Larger organisations with between 251 and 500 workers had the next highest level of flexible working at 67%.

61%

of Scottish workers say they work flexibly

21%

of Scottish workers don't have flexibility but would like it

82%

have or want flex

Who's got flexible working?

Some industry sectors appear to offer more flexible working than others. This year, our data showed that people working in scientific and technical roles, information and communications, legal and consultancy and finance were most likely to work flexibly.

Sectors with the most workers with flexibility

88% Legal and consultancy

81% Information and Communications

80% Finance

73% Scientific and technical

Six in ten public and private sector workers say they work flexibly (61% and 60% respectively) in line with the national average. In the voluntary sector, the figure was slightly higher at 69%.

“ I work three days a week and I can control when those hours are to suit the business and myself. I have flexibility on location too. I work from home, the office, or client sites. If I need to go and collect my eight-year-old daughter from school, I won't think twice about it. I also have time to do DIY, I enjoy clay pigeon shooting, or just read a book. I love my job. But I want a life outside of work too.”



Male sales manager, IT services firm

57% of frontline workers work flexibly

63% of men and **59%** of women work flexibly

59% of workers with a disability or long-term health condition work flexibly

80% of people earning £50,000+ work flexibly compared with 51% of people earning under £20,000

88% of women earning £50,000+ a year work flexibly compared with 76% of men

“ It means I have a better work life balance and less stress. I'm currently working a lot more hours than I'm contracted but it's fine because I can cut the extra hours down again if I need to, and if I need time off from my contracted shifts I know I can arrange this. If I didn't have any flexibility, I just wouldn't be able to stay in the job.”



Female care worker

Who's not working flex, and who would like to?

More than one in three (36%) Scottish workers don't work flexibly. Of those who don't, 60% would like to and this equates to 21% of the Scottish workforce.

Women earning under £20,000 were least likely to work flexibly. A total of 43% said they didn't, compared with 39% of men earning less than £20,000. This echoes our finding last year that low-earning women are missing out the most on flexible working opportunities.

Overall, 43% of people earning less than £20,000 don't work flexibly. This figure is the same as the women-only figure because 67% of the lowest earners in our research sample were women and 31% were men, reflecting the fact women are more likely to take lower paid and/or part time roles.

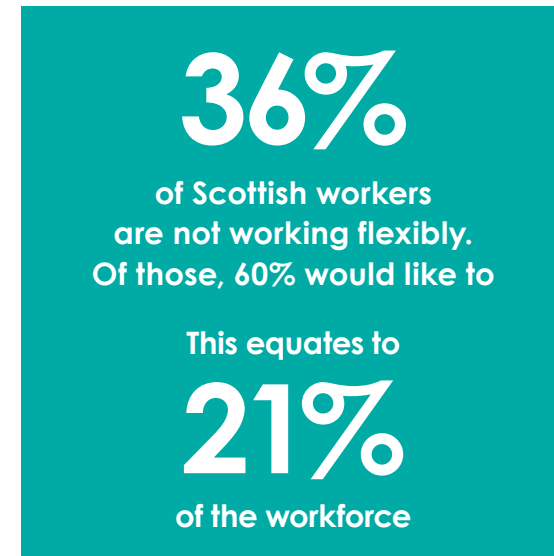
Frontline workers are also less likely to work flexibly. Almost four in ten (39%) don't work flexibly, compared with 30% of non-frontline workers.

Among workers with a disability or long-term health condition, 36% say they don't

work flexibly, the same as the Scottish national average, although a slightly higher proportion would like flex (65% compared with the Scottish national average of 60%). Among single parents, 34% said they didn't work flexibly. This is slightly better than average but possibly down to the fact many single parents simply cannot work unless they have a job with flexibility.

People working in medium sized employers with between 101 and 250 employees had the fewest flexible workers with 42% saying they don't work flexibly, followed by people working in organisations with more than 501 employees where 37% say they don't work flexibly.

People working in public and private sector organisations followed the national average when it came to who doesn't work flexibly. A total of 36% in each sector



say they don't work flexibly, compared with 26% of workers in the voluntary sector.

Some industry sectors appear to offer less flexible working than average. This year, our data showed people working in transport, education and retail were least likely to work flexibly.



Who doesn't work flex?

43% of women earning under £20,000 don't work flex compared with 39% of men earning under £20,000

39% of frontline workers don't work flex, compared with 30% of non-frontline workers

36% of people with a disability or long-term health condition don't work flex

34% of single parents don't work flex

Sectors with least workers with flexibility

64% of transport workers have no flex

37% of people working in education have no flex

34% of retail workers have no flex

Younger workers are the most likely to want flexible working. Among people aged 16 to 24 who don't currently work flexibly, 75% would like to, compared with 69% of those aged 25 to 34, and 67% of people aged 35 to 44. Fewer younger workers said they worked flexibly (55%) compared with the Scottish national average (61%) and nearly one in ten (9%) younger workers were unsure whether they worked flexibly compared with 4% or lower in all other age groups). Some of the aspiration for greater flex among younger workers may come from lower levels of flex, or uncertainty about it. But generational differences in attitudes to work life balance are also likely to have an impact.

Other groups where the desire for more flexible working is stronger are frontline workers, women and parents. A total of 64% of frontline workers who don't work flexibly would like to, compared with 53% of non-frontline workers. The same proportion of women (64%) who don't work flexibly would like to, compared with 58% of men, and the same proportion again (64%) of parents would like flex compared with 59% of non-parents.

Among people with a disability or long-term health condition who don't work flexibly, the desire to work flex was the same as the national average at 60%.

Who doesn't have flexibility and would like it?

75% of workers aged 16 to 24 who don't work flex would like to

64% of parents without flex would like to work flexibly compared with 59% of non-parents

64% of women without flex would like to work flexibly compared with 58% of men

64% of frontline workers without flex would like to work flexibly compared with 53% of non-frontline workers

60% of people with a disability or long-term health condition without flex would like to work flex

“I was running a small organisation and was looking for flexibility when I returned from maternity leave. This was refused, as was the possibility of a trial, and an appeal was also refused. I felt very distressed and upset. Ultimately I had to leave this organisation as I wanted to spend part of my week with my baby. I felt really let down. I did get another job quite quickly but the pay was much lower than my previous role. At that time, I felt I had to take the hit if I wanted to return to work.”



Female, charity sector



Who's asked for flex and been turned down?

More than one in six Scottish workers (17%) have had a flexible working request turned down in the last 12 months.

Of the 172 Scottish workers who told us they'd been refused flex, 81% were frontline workers, 61% were men, 55% were parents and 30% had a disability. We have to be sensible about what we can conclude from this. Our data sample is not huge, and we don't know any detail about the individual requests. Our overall sample group had more frontline workers than non-frontline workers, and we know parents are more likely to ask for formal flexible working than non-parents, which could explain at least some of the refusal rates for these groups.

However, other research including a 2016 report by the Fawcett Society on parents, work and care, shows fathers are more likely to be refused flexible working than mothers. While our own data shows consistently that frontline workers have less flexible working than office workers, and that all workers are generally attuned to what's possible for their role.

Employers can, and should, turn down flexible working requests if they genuinely feel business needs will not be met. But our data should be a reminder to all employers to think carefully about flexible working requests, to ensure they are dealt with fairly, and that solutions are found wherever possible.

“ I work from home one day a week but had to really fight for it. My initial request to work flexibility was declined as my employer was worried that if I wasn't at my desk I wasn't working. My appeal was successful and now five years later, other staff are also trusted to work more flexibly (I was the first), and have been given laptops to enable this. If anything productivity has improved.”



Female working in the education sector

Scottish workers who've had a flexible working request refused in the past 12 months

81% were frontline workers

61% were men

55% were parents

30% were people with a disability

Reasons people don't work flex

More than a third (36%) of Scottish workers don't work flexibly, and the main reason given was that flexible working simply wasn't available. More than a third (35%) of workers who don't work flexibly said flex wasn't available for their particular role, and the same proportion said it wasn't available for any staff. Another 7% said flex wasn't available at their level.

It's worth pointing out that more frontline workers who don't work flexibly said flex wasn't available for their role (39%) compared with 26% of non-frontline workers.

One in ten (11%) Scottish workers who don't work flexibly said this was because it wasn't 'appropriate' for their role (slightly different to just 'not being available'). Another one in ten (9%) said that while flex was available, they didn't make use of it because it was frowned on, and one in 20 (6%) said they didn't work flexibly because they didn't feel confident enough to ask.

Why people don't work flex (n=359)



Workers perspective

Flex is not available for any staff

35%

Not available for my role

35%

Not appropriate for my role

11%

Flex is available but frowned upon

9%

Flex is not available at my level

7%

I didn't ask because I didn't feel confident enough

6%

39%

of **frontline** workers who don't work flexibly said flexible working was not available for their role compared with

26%

of **non-frontline** workers

Why people don't work flex



Employers perspective

Frontline/public facing employees without access to flexible working

22%

Junior/ lower skilled roles without access

16%

More senior/director level roles without access

10%

Nobody has access to flexible working

11%

Employers said that people in frontline roles and more junior roles were least likely to have flex. More than one in five (22%) Scottish employers said that frontline and public-facing employees didn't have access to flexible working. One in six (16%) said that people in more junior, or lower skilled roles didn't have access to flex. One in ten (10%) said more senior and director roles didn't have flex, and a similar proportion (11%) said no one worked flexibly, which is significantly different from the 35% of employees who said there was no flex for anyone. Employer and worker opinions on the reasons for a lack of flexible working are clearly out of step with each other and suggests that many employers need to improve the way they communicate with workers about what flex is available, and if not, why not.

35%

of **workers** say flexible working isn't available to any staff compared with just

11%

of **employers**



What's the impact if workers can't work flexibly?

Almost eight in ten (78%) Scottish workers who use flexible working say that without it, their work and home life would suffer in some way. Nearly a third (32%) say their mental health would be affected, a similar number (31%) say they'd be less engaged and motivated at work, and 14% say their physical health would suffer.

One in seven (14%) would have to pay more for childcare, and the same number would have to rely more heavily on friends and family for childcare. More than one seven (15%) say they'd have no choice but to stop working, which would have repercussions for individuals and their families but also employers and the wider Scottish economy. Employers can ill afford to lose workers, especially in sectors with skills shortages, so it's vital they explore flexible working options to retain good staff.

One in five (22%) said they'd be disappointed but otherwise it would make no difference.

Impact for flexible workers if they couldn't work flexibly

(workers selected all options that would apply to them)

Mental health would suffer

32%

Less engaged and motivated

31%

Physical health would suffer

14%

Have to pay more for childcare

14%

Have to rely more heavily on family and friends for childcare

14%

Would have no choice but to stop working

15%

I'd be disappointed but otherwise it would make no difference

22%

How lack of flex impacts workers differently

Who would have to stop working if they couldn't work flexibly?

27% of people with a disability or long-term health condition

26% of mothers

21% of single parents

19% of women

18% of parents

A lack of flexible working impacts different groups of workers in different ways. Some of the largest differences were around who would have to stop working. People with a disability or long-term health condition were most likely to say that without flex they'd have no choice but to give up work. This was followed by mothers, single parents, women and all parents.

Another impact with a larger difference between specific groups of workers was around mental health. Single parents were considerably more likely to say their mental health would suffer if they couldn't work flexibly, followed by workers aged 25 to 34 and people with a disability or long-term health condition and women.

Whose mental health would suffer?

55% of single parents

45% of workers aged 25 to 34

40% of people with a disability or long-term health condition

35% of women

Impact of no flex on specific groups of workers

Men and women

Women reported worse outcomes of not being able to work flexibly than men across many categories. Almost one in five (19%) women compared with 13% of men say they'd have to stop working. More than a third (35%) of women say their mental health would suffer, compared with 29% of men. A third (34%) of women say they'd be less engaged and motivated compared with 28% of men and 17% of women versus 12% of men say their physical health would suffer.

Parents

We've already covered that parents are more likely than average to say they'd have to stop working if they couldn't work flexibly, and this affects mothers the most. More than one in four (26%) mothers say they'd have to stop working compared with only 11% of fathers. Interestingly, fathers were more likely to say they'd have to pay more for childcare (30% of fathers and 26% of mothers), or rely more heavily on family and friends for childcare (32% of fathers and 19% of mothers). Our data suggests women are

more likely to leave the workforce if they can't work flexibly while fathers are more likely to find a childcare solution that will allow them to stay in work.

We'll mention again here that single parents are the most likely out of any groups of workers to feel their mental health would suffer if they couldn't work flexibly, something employers should be aware of.

People with a disability or long-term health condition

We've also noted that people with a disability or a long-term health condition are more likely to feel negative impacts from not working flexibly. They are the group most likely to stop working as well as being more likely to suffer mental ill-health. They are also much more likely to say their physical health would suffer. One in three (33%) people with a disability or long-term health condition say their physical health would suffer, compared with 9% of people without a disability or long-term health condition.

3 in 10

Almost three in ten (28%) parents would have to pay more for childcare

1 in 4

One in four (26%) parents would have to rely more heavily on friends and family for childcare

1 in 3

One in three (33%) people with a disability or long-term health condition say their physical health would suffer if they couldn't work flexibly, compared with 9% of people without a disability or long-term health condition

What types of flexible working are people using?

It's no surprise that home and hybrid working dominate when it comes to the most common types of flexible working Scottish workers use.

Half (50%) of workers who say they work flexibly work from home some of the time and one in five (19%) say they are hybrid workers. Arguably, they are all hybrid workers and the difference in how people describe their way of working could be down to whether employers have introduced a formal and clearly labelled hybrid policy, or not. One in six (16%) Scottish flexible workers are full time remote.

However, flexibility around time is also prominent with more than a third (37%) of flexible workers saying they work their contracted number of hours but can amend their start and finish times, which is often known as 'flexitime'.

One in five (21%) make informal, or ad-hoc amends, such as finishing early for an appointment and making up time later, and almost one in five (19%) work part time. This illustrates how important flexibility is around **when** and **how much** people work, as well as location.

Smaller numbers of workers use other types of flexible working. For example, one in ten (11%) flexible workers are able to swap shifts and one in ten (10%) work compressed hours, where they work their contracted hours in fewer, longer days. Just 4% work a shorter week for the same pay, for example a four-day week on a full time salary.



Types of flexible working used by Scottish workers

some home working

50%

flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime

37%

informal/adhoc changes

21%

part time

19%

hybrid

19%

full time remote

16%

shift swapping

11%

compressed hours

10%

advanced notice of shifts

8%

seasonally adjusted hours

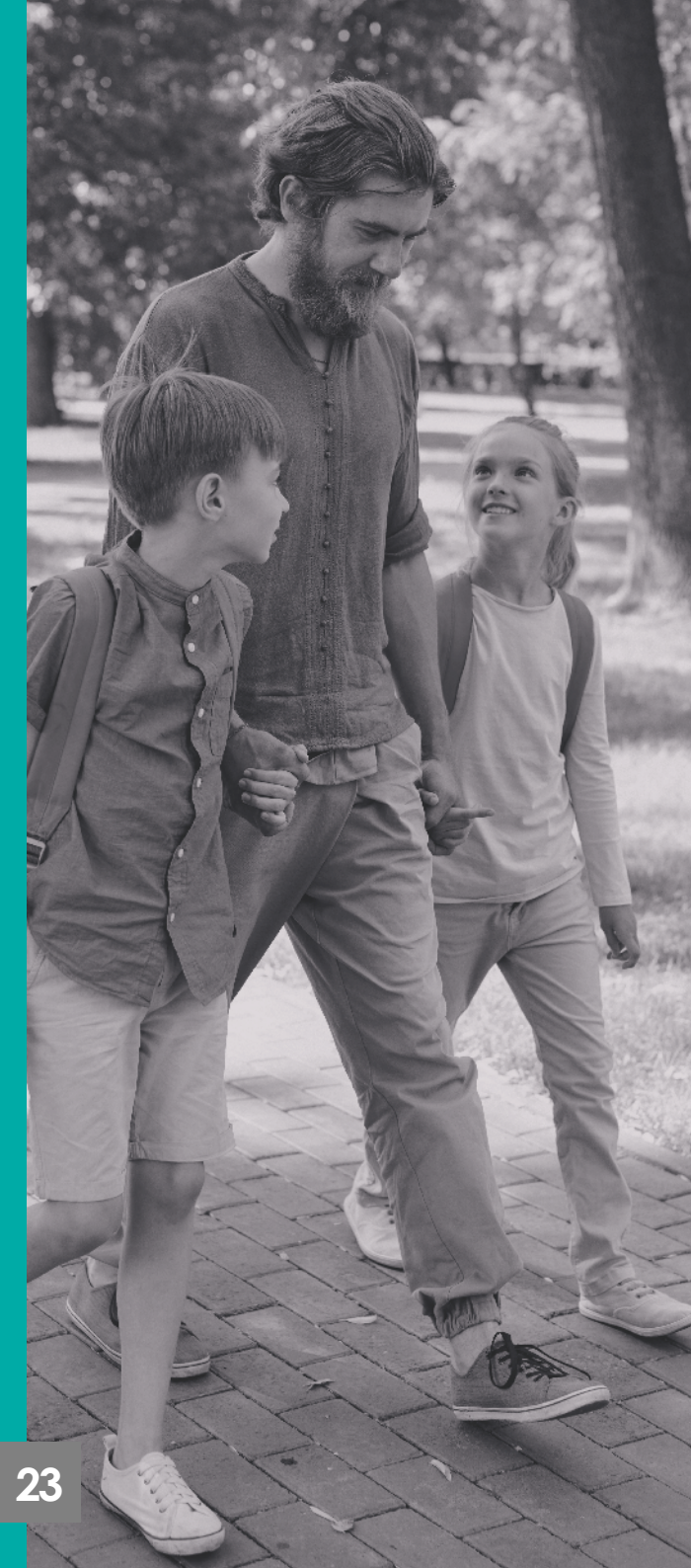
5%

input to rotas

5%

shorter working week same pay

4%



Types of flex used by specific groups

Men and women

There are some differences by gender. Women are more likely to reduce their hours than men. One in four (25%) women who say they work flexibly work part time, compared with 14% of men. The difference is larger when you compare mothers and fathers. A total of 26% of mothers who work flexibly work part time, compared with 10% of fathers who work flexibly.

Men are more likely to find flex without reducing their hours. For example, more men said they used flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime compared with women (38% v 35% respectively), and 17% of men worked full time remote compared with 14% of women.

Younger workers

The youngest workers (18-24-year-olds) had some of the lowest levels of flexibility. They were the least likely to work from home (17%), fully remote (6%) or make informal amends (8%). Yet younger workers were the most likely to want flexibility if they didn't already have it. More than three quarters (76%) of workers aged 18 to 24 without flex said they wanted it, compared with 69% or lower in other age categories, and the Scottish national average of 60%.

Frontline workers

People in frontline roles are more likely to work part time than non-frontline workers; 23% compared with 14% respectively. But otherwise, they generally had lower levels of flexible working. Unsurprisingly, fewer worked

from home more regularly than before (39% compared with 65% of non-frontline workers). But frontline workers are also less likely to make informal, or ad-hoc amends (16% compared with 27% of non-frontline workers). This suggests they have less choice and control over when, where and how much they work compared with non-frontline workers.

25% of women work part time compared with 14% of men

23% of frontline workers work part time compared with 14% of non-frontline workers

17% of 18-24 year-olds work from home compared with 50% of all workers

39% of frontline workers work from home compared with 65% of non-frontline workers

Types of flex used by income level

How much money someone earns correlates with the type of flexible working they use, and how likely they are to use it.

Higher income workers are significantly more likely to work from home than lower income workers. A total of 63% of people earning more than £50,000 say they regularly work from home compared with 24% of people earning less than £20,000. Nearly one in five (18%) people earning more than £50,000 work full time remote, compared with 10% of people earning less than £20,000. This means

people on the lowest incomes miss out on the convenience of working from home, and are more likely to pay higher travel costs to be at work.

Higher income workers are also more likely to make informal amends to their work pattern compared to those on the lowest incomes (25% and 9% respectively), and they're more likely compress their hours (18% compared with 7%).

Almost half (49%) of workers earning less than £20,000 are part time, compared with just 8% of people earning more than

£50,000. All other income brackets have between 10% and 13% of people working part time. This shows how scarce part time jobs are if you want or need to earn more than £20,000. We know women are more likely to want part time work, and our data illustrates how hard it is for women, and men, to progress into more senior roles if they need part time hours.

Lower income workers are more likely to have flexibility around swapping shifts and getting advanced notice of rotas, reflecting the type of work often carried out at lower salary levels.

63% of people earning £50,000+ worked at home regularly v **24%** of people earning under £20,000

18% of people earning £50,000+ work full time remote v **10%** of people earning under £20,000

25% of people earning £50,000+ can make informal amends to their work pattern v **9%** of people earning under £20,000

18% of people earning £50,000+ compress their hours v **7%** of people earning under £20,000

49% of people earning under £20,000 work part time v **8%** of people earning £50,000+.

21% of people earning under £20,000 can swap shifts v **6%** of people earning £50,000+

20% of people earning under £20,000 get advanced notice of shifts v **2%** of people earning £50,000+

What does hybrid working look like in Scotland now?

Almost one in five 19% of Scottish workers say they work in a hybrid way, while 50% say they work from home more regularly than before Covid.



Arguably, all these people are hybrid workers and yet many didn't identify themselves as such. By comparison, 72% of the employers we surveyed said they offered hybrid working. This disconnect might be because some companies have introduced formal hybrid policies and others have left things more informal.

Of the workers who specifically said they worked in a hybrid way, nearly a quarter (23%) said they had complete freedom to decide when they work in the office, and about one in eight (13%) have to be in at some point each week or each month, but they can decide when. While nearly seven in ten (68%) have specific weekly quotas for office work. Our sample for this question was small with 115 hybrid workers. But it follows the same pattern we found in a larger survey of office workers we conducted in 2022.

7 in 10

(68%) have specific weekly quotas for office work

Hybrid arrangements in detail

Hybrid policy	 Worker responses	 Employer responses
	Complete freedom to decide when to go in the office	23%
Must have weekly/monthly presence but not specified	13%	13%
Must spend 1 day in the office	19%	20%
Must spend 2 days	23%	21%
Must spend at least 3 days	16%	12%
Other	7%	7%

“ We officially started our hybrid way of working in April 2022. We trust teams to decide their own protocols on when they intend be in the office. One of the main benefits for us as an employer, as well as having happier staff, is that we can recruit from a far wider geographical pool if people don't need to be in the office very often. That helps with our inclusion and diversity aims too and will help us be more representative of Scotland as a nation, rather than Edinburgh where our office is.”



Professional and regulatory organisation, public sector

A note on younger workers

It's worth noting that younger workers had more concerns about home and hybrid working than older age groups. Among all workers aged 25 to 34, one in four (25%) were worried about having adequate space and conditions to work, such as having the right equipment and peace to concentrate, compared with 9% of workers aged 55 to 64. And one

in three (29%) workers aged 16 to 34 were worried about missing the social aspects of work compared with just 13% of workers aged 55 to 64. This makes a strong case of having a presence in the office, or on site, even when jobs can be done remotely, to support younger colleagues.

What are employers' views on flexible working now?

The vast majority (71%) of employers told us flexible working has been good for business, including 42% that said it had been 'very positive'. Interestingly the figures were higher among employers with frontline workers with (72%) saying it had been fairly or very positive compared with 65% of employers without frontline workers.

Only 4% (nine employers in our sample) said flexible working had a negative impact on the business.

There were some differences by sector. In our small group of voluntary sector employers, 89% said flexible working had been positive with no one saying it was negative. Among private sector employers, 70% said flex had been positive and 4% said it had been negative. Among public sector employers, 68% said it had been positive and 5% said it had been negative.

We asked about specific benefits and challenges, and found that nearly half (46%) of employers thought that employee productivity had improved because of flexible working. More than four in ten (42%) said flex had improved employee

loyalty, and more than a third (35%) said flex had improved employee retention. The same proportion (35%) said flexible working had a positive impact on business costs and almost a third (32%) said it had improved employee mental health and wellbeing.

Employers also reported some challenges with flexible working, which we'd expect given that many have moved to new ways of working. The most common challenges all related to hybrid working. These were bringing people together for collaborative tasks, which was mentioned by 27% of employers, and the fact some employees felt pressure to keep working even if they were ill (25%). One in five (20%) said getting people into the office was challenging and 17% said there was some confusion over when/where people are working.

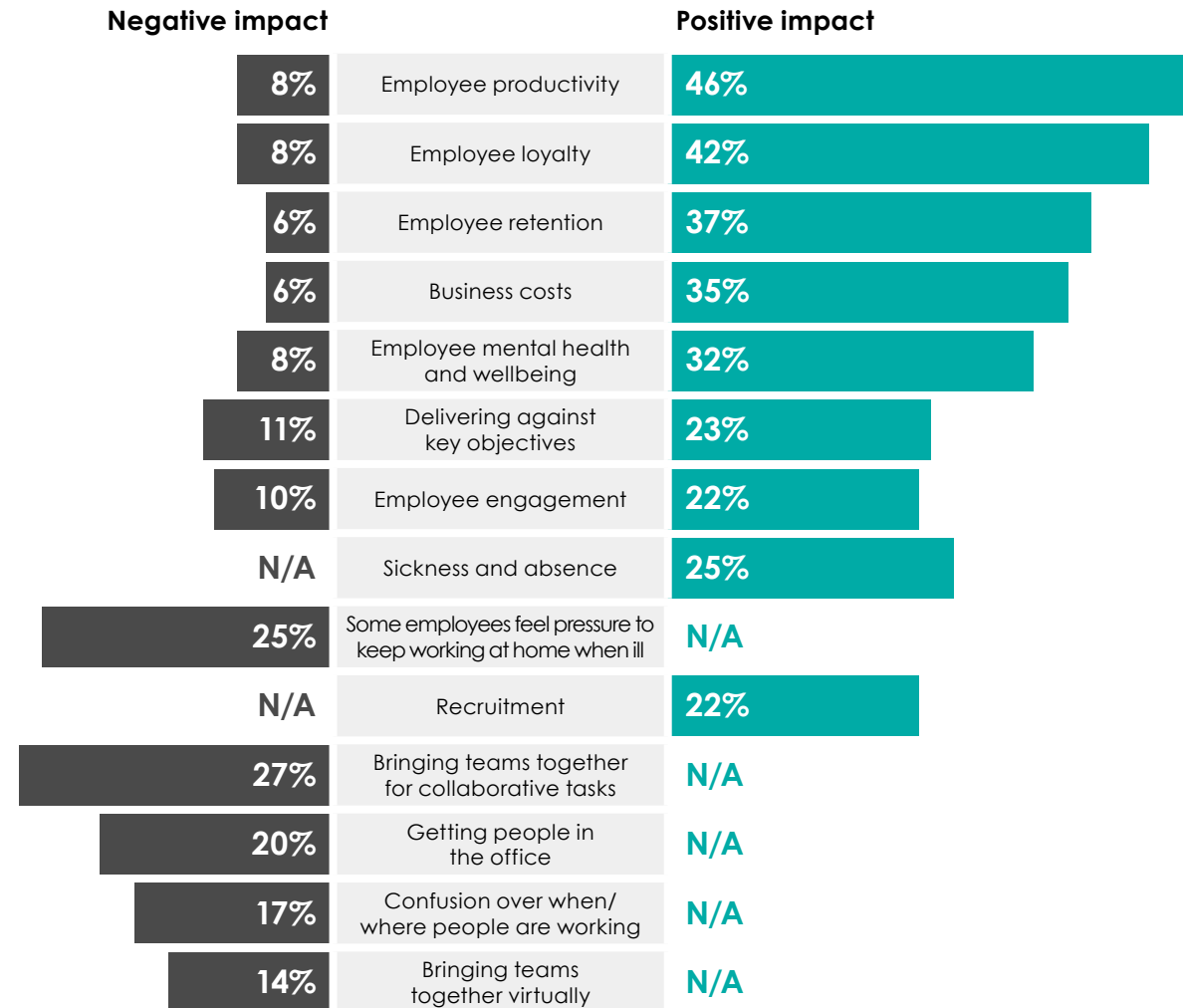
69%

of employers think flexible working can boost Scotland's economy

46%

of employers think employee productivity has improved because of flexible working

In which, if any, of the following ways does flexible working have an impact on your business?



Measuring and prioritising flex

Measuring the impact of flex

Despite 86% of Scottish employers saying they offer at least basic flexible working, fewer than half of them (42%) say they measure the impact of any flex they offer. Many employers, rightly, want evidence before they make permanent changes to working patterns, so we'd encourage all employers to consider what they're already measuring, such as progress against key objectives or KPIs, staff wellbeing, sickness and absence rates, or recruitment and staff turnover, and see if there is any difference when teams work more flexibly.

Flex as a strategic priority

Only four in ten (38%) Scottish employers say flexible working is a strategic priority for their organisation and just one in three (29%) have a dedicated working group or senior level sponsor to drive flexible working changes and communications. From our conversations with employers, ensuring high level buy-in for what flexible working can do, and having a clear organisation-wide framework for teams to follow make implementing greater flex much more straightforward. The fact six in ten employers haven't prioritised flexible working shows they are overlooking a critical shift in how workers think about work, and what they look for in new roles. There are big risks for employers that don't recognise this and identify flexible working as a strategic priority.

“ Flexibility is more and more a must have for any progressive employer. We have taken advantage of the fact some competing employers don't offer the same flexibility. We've got examples across pretty much every discipline where we've got flexible arrangements in place, and we know that it's given us an advantage in retaining and attracting really good people to our business.”



Managing director, SME business, manufacturing sector

“ It can be frustrating if someone has carried out the majority of a task and then is not in to complete it the next day and someone else has to pick up. But really that's about scheduling work better, and ensuring clean handovers.”



Managing director, small charity

What types of flex have employers increased?

We've already looked at what types of flexibility workers say they use. In this section we cover what employers say they've offered more of. Unsurprisingly home and hybrid working have increased the most since the start of the Covid pandemic three years ago. More than half of Scottish employers offer more home working, 30% offer more full time remote working, and 25% offer more hybrid working than before the pandemic.

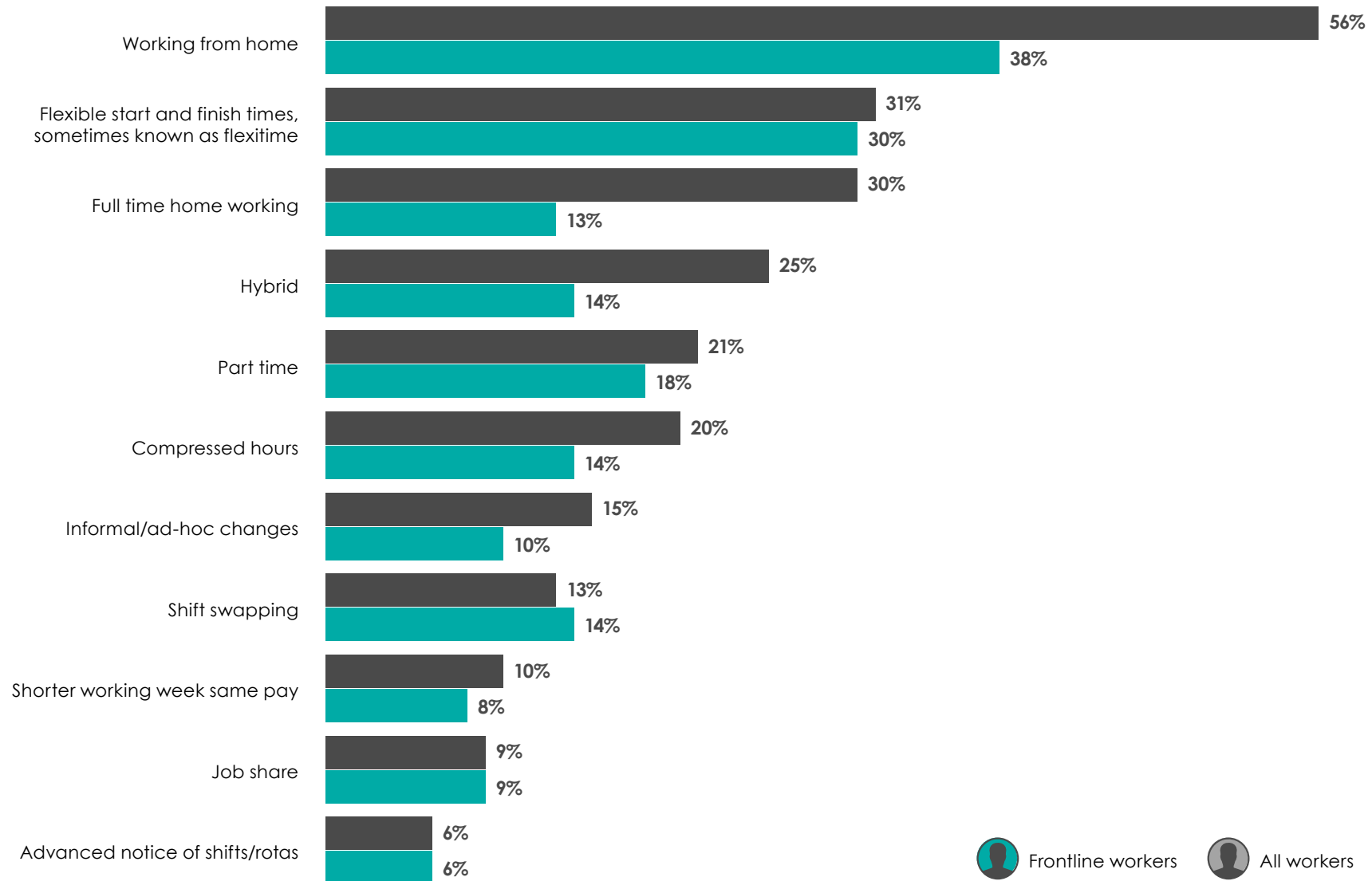
Even for frontline workers, 38% of employers say they now offer more home working, while 14% offer more hybrid and 13% offer more full time remote working.

Nearly a third (31%) of employers say they offer more flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime, and 21% offer more part time hours. Again the figures are fairly similar for frontline workers, with 30% of employers saying they offer more flexible start and finish times, and 18% offer more part time work.

However, frontline workers appear to have missed out on more compressed hours and the ability to make informal or ad-hoc amendments, even though these types of flexibility could be easier to implement than home and hybrid working in many frontline roles. Only 14% of employers said they'd offered more compressed hours to frontline workers, compared with 20% overall, and only 10% of employers have offered frontline workers informal or ad-hoc amends compared with 15% overall.



Types of flex on offer more than 3 years ago



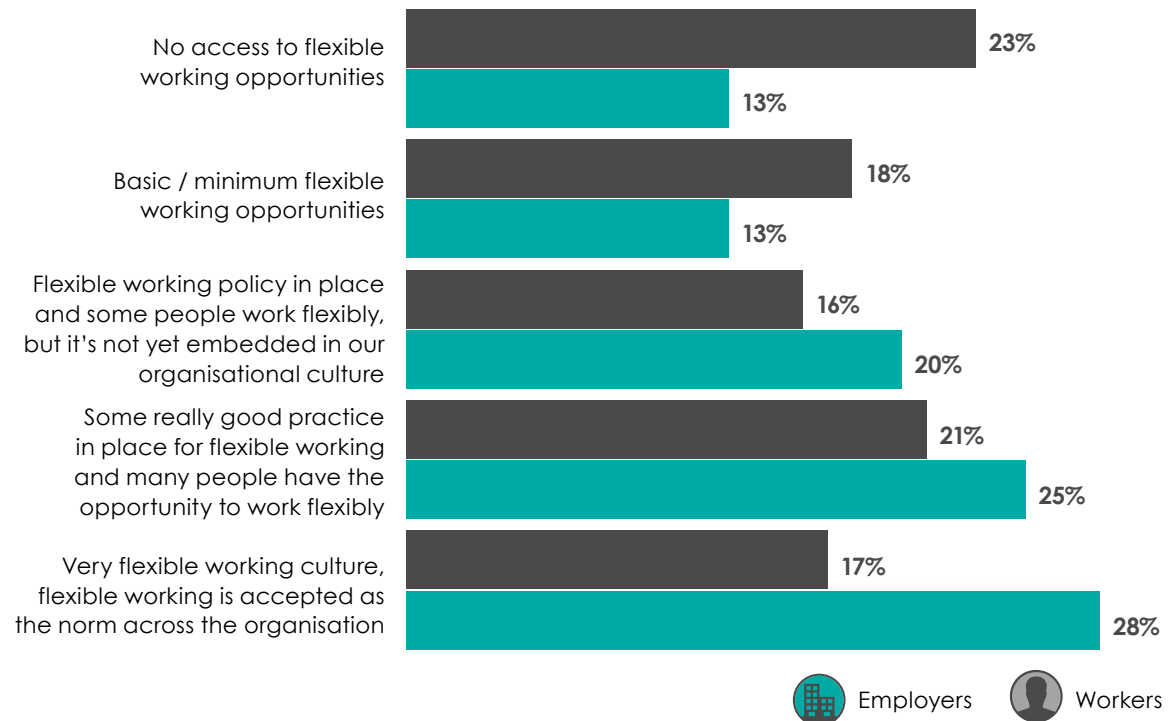
Do workers and employers agree about how much flex is available?

Employers generally said there was more flexible working available than workers did, and the figures were very similar to what we found last year.

Nearly one in three (28%) employers felt their organisation was very flexible and that flex was the norm, whereas only 17% of workers agreed. At the other end of the scale, nearly one in four (23%) of workers said there was no access to flexible working opportunities in their workplace, compared to just 13% of employers. There were more equal responses in the middle, where some flexible working was available but not necessarily to everyone.

If the employers are correct, many need to communicate much more effectively with teams about the flexible working on offer. As most communication comes via line managers, training and support for managers is crucial for ensuring that well-meaning written policies become reality for workers.

What flexible working looks like in Scottish workplaces, according to workers and employers



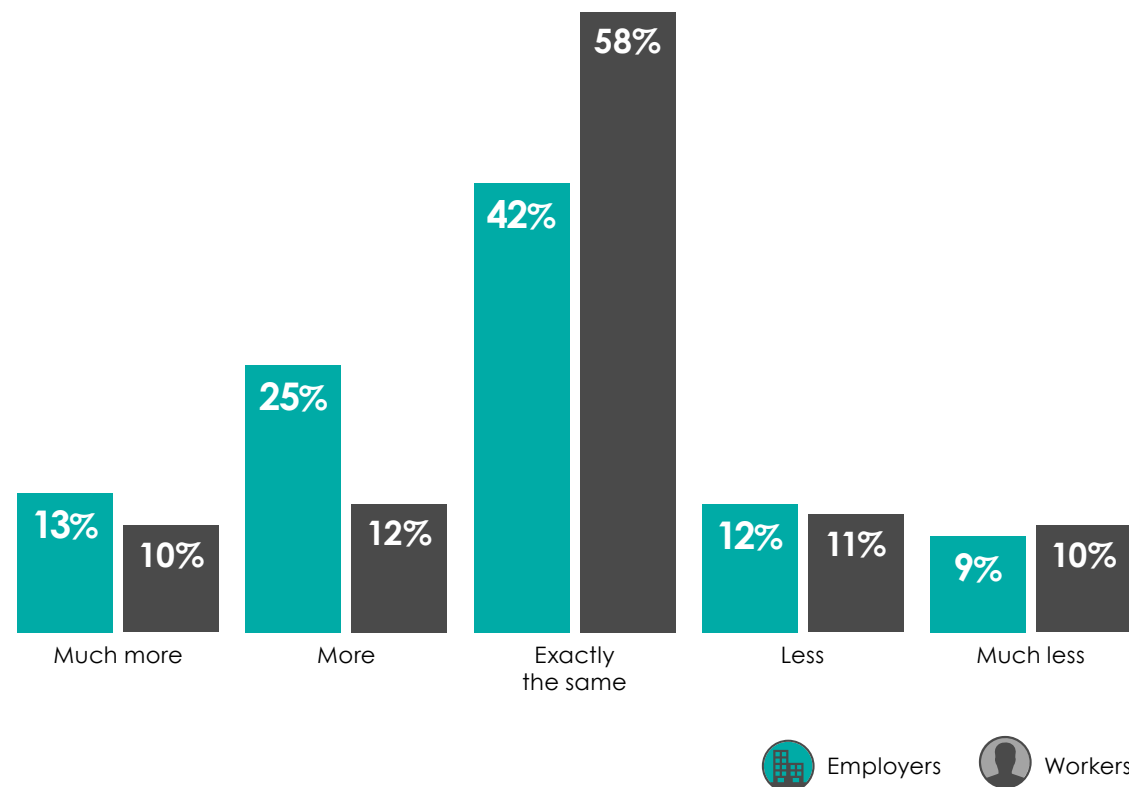
Has access to flex increased or decreased in the last 12 months?

We asked Scottish workers and employers whether flexible working was better or worse than 12 months ago.

Employers were considerably more optimistic about how much more flexible working is available. A total of 38% of employers said there was more, or much more, flex compared with just 22% of workers. This suggests that some employers are either not communicating the flex available effectively, or they think their organisation is more flexible than the reality for workers. We explore this theme in [Part 3](#).

In contrast, there was general agreement about reduced access to flex with around one in five (21%) of both employers and workers saying there was less, or much less, flexibility available. For context here, remember the proportion of Scottish workers who say they work flexibly has remained stable (61% this year compared with 60%) last year, so we're not seeing significant numbers of workers losing all access to flexibility. But it's clear that approximately one in five Scottish workers have less flexibility than a year ago as employers have adjusted to life post-pandemic.

How has your access to flex, or your company's approach to flex, changed in the last 12 months?



Employers offering the least flex most likely to have reduced flex

We found the employers most likely to say that access to flexible working had decreased in the last 12 months were the ones who say they offer no flexibility, or minimum flexibility. A total of 44% of employers that offered only statutory or very basic levels of flex said they were offering less flexible working than 12 months ago, compared with 9% of employers that offer good, or very good, flexible working. It's likely that employers that offer little or no flex allowed people to work from home more during the pandemic because they had to, and they've taken this away now restrictions are over. It suggests a widening gap between organisations that offer flex, and continue to improve or at least maintain their offer, and employers that do nothing more than the statutory minimum and appear to have no plans to change. Given the skills shortages in many sectors, organisations that don't seek to improve their flexible working offer will find it even harder to recruit and retain good staff.

Employers offering less flex than 12 months ago

44%

offer no flex other than statutory minimum, or basic flex

9%

offer good, or very good, flex

Bigger disconnect between frontline workers and employers

The difference between frontline worker and employer opinions is larger than for non-frontline workers and employers. A total of 40% of frontline employers say there's more access to flexible working compared with just 21% of frontline workers – a difference of 19 percentage points. Among employers without frontline workers, 28% said there's more access to flex, compared with 22% of non-frontline workers – a difference of six percentage points

In terms of who's working less flexibly, slightly more frontline workers and employers reported reductions in flex compared with non-frontline workers and employers but the differences were small. A total of 22% of frontline workers say they have less access compared with 21% of frontline employers. Whereas 20% of non-frontline workers and 19% of non-frontline employers say there is less flex.



Part two: What's next for flex?

What are workers looking for in the next year? What are employers likely to deliver?

#FlexForLife

Introduction

Where are we now?

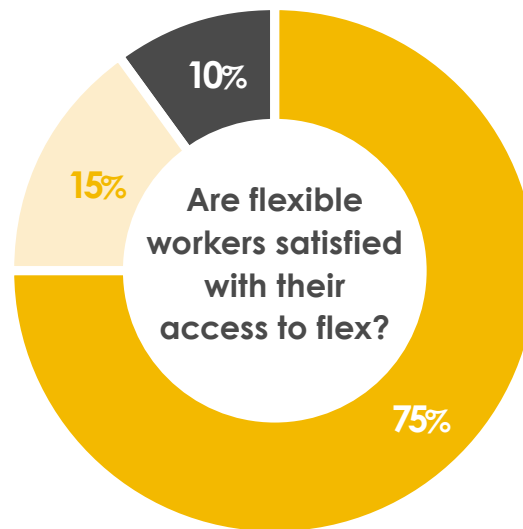
What next for flex?

Focus points for 2023

Are people satisfied with the flex they have?

Despite increased flex since the pandemic, our data shows there's still much room for improvement in how satisfied workers are with their access to flex.

Three quarters of people who work flexibly are satisfied with their access to flex. However, one in four (25%) people who work flexibly are not satisfied – one in ten specifically say they're unsatisfied, and another 15% are ambivalent. Employers should be aware of this if they want to retain good staff. Having good conversations with workers and finding out how their current flexible arrangements are working in practice is a good place to start.



- 75% satisfied
- 15% neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
- 10% unsatisfied

Frontline and lower income workers

Frontline workers and lower income workers were less likely to be satisfied with their access to flexible working than non-frontline and higher earners. Just 51% of frontline workers said they were satisfied, compared with 64% of non-frontline workers, and only 50% of people earning under £30,000 were satisfied with access. The figure for all other income groups was more than 60%, and was highest for people earning more than £50,000 at 68%.

Impact on work life balance

Almost three quarters (73%) of people who work flexibly said they were happy with their work life balance, compared with only 47% who don't work flexibly. This suggests again there is scope for employers to improve employee happiness, and thus engagement and performance by offering more flexible working opportunities. It should also be noted that flex doesn't solve everything. We found 12% of people who work flexibly were not happy with their work life balance.

Frontline workers were slightly less likely to be happy with their work life balance compared with non-frontline workers (62% compared with 66% respectively).

“ [Flexible hours] have given me a better work life balance. One day I can come in and do a 12 hour shift, the next day I can finish early and I can go and play golf or go to the gym. Coming in earlier or starting later, I can get either in before the traffic or after. That's a big benefit for me. It's just having the flexibility to choose when you want to work.”

 Male, SME business, engineering sector

Do workers think their jobs could be done more flexibly?

We asked workers whether they thought they could work more flexibly without impacting output and performance.

Regardless of whether people currently work flexibly or not, three quarters (76%) of workers who answered this question said they probably or definitely could. Figures were higher among workers who already worked flexibly. A total of 82% of workers with flex said they probably or definitely could work more flexibly without impacting output and performance, as did two thirds (67%) of workers who don't currently work flexibly.

76%

of workers believe they could work more flexibly

Employers should take note of the belief workers have that more flexibility is possible while still meeting the needs of the job.

It should also be reassuring for employers that 18% of workers with flex, and 35% of those without, said greater flex wouldn't work in their role, or they weren't sure. This shows that workers are more realistic than managers sometimes give them credit for in understanding what could be effective or detrimental.

Frontline workers responded in similar ways to the general survey with 73% saying they probably or definitely could work more flexibly without impacting output and performance, and 26%

saying they couldn't, or weren't sure. We asked frontline workers additional questions about whether parts of their job could be done at other times, or at home or another location. Seven in ten frontline workers felt their job could be done at other times and almost six in ten felt it could be done at home or another location. Significant numbers also said they didn't think this was possible, again showing that workers are realistic about what's possible. These findings are important because they illustrate how attitudes are changing among frontline workers. Pre-pandemic, the majority of frontline workers believed flexible working wasn't possible in their role. Now the majority believe it is.

All workers

Could you work more flexibly without impacting performance and output?

Yes definitely

48%

38%

Yes probably

34%

29%

Not sure

11%

15%

Doubt it

6%

14%

Definitely not

1%

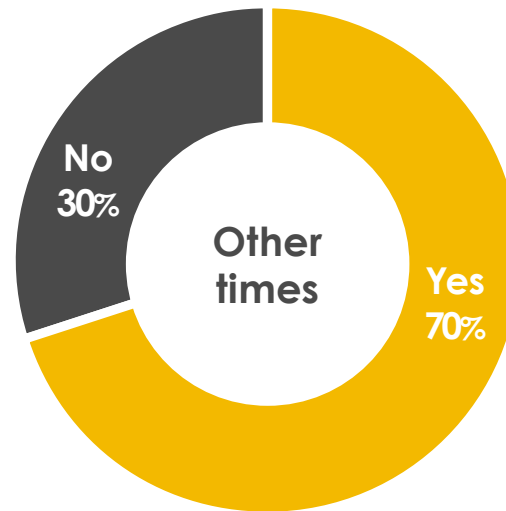
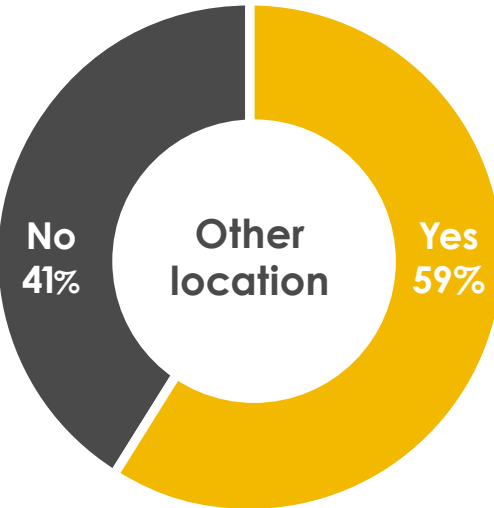
6%

All workers with existing flex

All workers with no flex

Frontline workers

Could some parts of your **frontline** job be done at home or another location?



Frontline workers
Could some parts of your **frontline** job be done at other times?

Why do people want or need flex?

There are many different reasons why people want or need to work flexibly from caring responsibilities and health reasons through to wanting to fit in hobbies and volunteering, or winding down to retirement.

Childcare equality?

Childcare is the biggest reason people work, or want to work, flexibly. More than half (57%) of Scottish workers say childcare is either their main or another reason. The difference between men and women who are currently in work is very similar; a total of 26% of women

and 26% of men say childcare is their main reason for working, or wanting to work, flexibly, and more men (35%) than women (29%) say childcare is one of their other reasons. This is good news and shows that more fathers are working flexibly so they can play a greater role in parenting at home, and it means more women can therefore return to work, or take on more work, if they would like to, or need to.

However, it's worth remembering that men and women tend to use different types of flexible working, and significantly more women work part time compared with men. Our data suggests that while men are around more for their families, women are still around the most and make bigger career sacrifices to enable this.

In addition, our data from **unemployed** Scottish adults looking for work shows there is still disparity between men and women. In this cohort, one in four (24%) women say their main reason for wanting a job with flexible working is for childcare compared with only one in 20 (4%) men. And 28% of unemployed women and 16% of unemployed men say childcare is another reason. This is backed up by **ONS UK data** showing 27% of women and 7% of men are not in work because of family commitments. This shows many more women are not working in order to look after children than men, and is an important part of the picture when it comes to looking at gender equality. It shows that if employers and policy makers want to attract more women into the workforce, flexible working and affordable childcare need to be in place.

Our data suggests that while men are around more for their families, women are still around the most and make bigger career sacrifices to enable this.

Reasons for flex

Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing were also common reasons for people working, or wanting to work, flexibly. Nearly half (48%) said wellbeing was their main or another reason, and a third (33%) said mental health was their main or another reason. Figures were higher among unemployed people looking for work. Six in ten (60%) said wellbeing was their main or another reason for wanting flexible working, and 50% said mental health.

While only 4% of Scottish adults said their physical health was their main reason for working flexibly, another 15% said physical health was another reason they did so. Figures were higher among unemployed people, of whom 14% said their physical health was a main reason and 11% said it was another reason. The

highest figures for physical health were among people with a disability or long-term health condition, of whom 18% said physical health was their main reason and 21% said it was another reason.

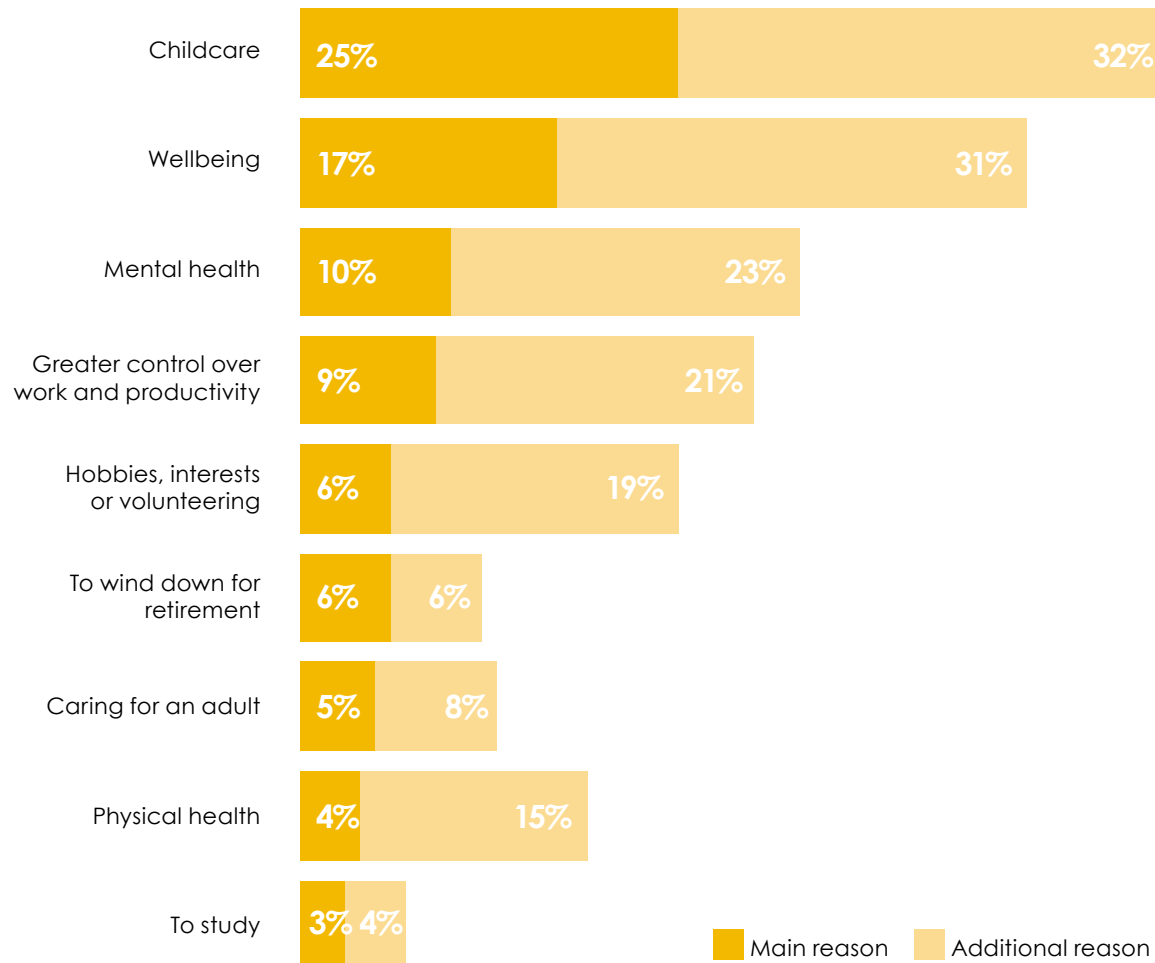
Personal choices

One in three (30%) people say they work flexibly to have greater control over their work and productivity, while 25% use flexible working to accommodate hobbies, interests and volunteering. More than one in ten (12%) use flexible working to help them wind down to retirement, though this figure rises to 40% for people aged 55 to 64 (20% say it's the main reason and 20% say it's another reason).

More than one in ten (13%) work flexibly, or want to, so they can care for an adult.



Reasons people work, or want to work, flexibly



53% of all parents said childcare was their main reason for working, or wanting to work, flexibly

46% of single parents said childcare was their main reason for working, or wanting to work, flexibly

20% of people aged 55 to 64 said their main reason for working, or wanting to work, flexibly was to wind down to retirement

18% of people with a disability or long-term health condition said their main reason for working, or wanting to work, flexibly was for their physical health

16% of workers aged 18 to 34 said their mental health was their main reason for working, or wanting to work, flexibly

What types of flex do workers want more of? And does this match what employers are likely to deliver?

Despite significant increases in home and hybrid working since the pandemic, these forms of flexible working still top the list of what workers would like more of in their current role in the next six months.

A total of 38% of Scottish workers would like more home or hybrid working and the good news is that employers look likely to deliver, with 33% saying they expect to offer more home and hybrid working in the next year.

30%

of workers would like more flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime but only 6% of employers expect to offer more



When it comes to full time remote working, more workers would like this (13%) than employers look likely to offer (8%).

But the biggest differences are around likely supply and demand for greater flexibility on time. Three in ten (30%) workers would like more flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime, but only one in 20 (6%) of employers expect to offer more in the next year. While one in five (21%) workers would like a shorter working week on the same pay, and the same number would like compressed hours but only 2% and 6% of employers respectively expect to

offer this. And 13% of workers would like part time hours but only 5% of employers expect to offer this.

This all suggests that employers have accepted and embraced home and hybrid working because of their experiences during the pandemic. But they've not yet embraced greater flexibility for workers around when and how much they work. However, with worker expectations so high, employers that don't consider flexible working beyond hybrid and home working risk losing good staff to competitors and struggling to recruit replacements.



Type of flex		
	% of employees that would like more	% of employers that expect to offer more
Working at home more	29%	12%
Hybrid working	9%	21%
Flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime	30%	6%
Shorter working week for same pay	21%	2%
Compressed hours	21%	6%
Part time	13%	5%
Full time remote	13%	8%
Informal/adhoc changes	10%	2%
Advance notice of shifts	6%	N/A
Shift swapping	6%	5%
Seasonally adjusted hours	6%	N/A
Self rostering	5%	N/A
Job share	5%	3%
More input to rotas	5%	N/A
Have as much flexibility as they want and need/ already as flexible as we need to be	15%	16%
Don't want to work more flexibly/ don't expect to offer more flex	3%	11%

What flex do specific groups of workers want more of?





Gender

Women generally want more flexibility around time while men tend to want more flexibility around location in their current role in the next six months. For men, being a father increases their desire for greater flexibility around location. Fathers were most likely to want more home working, full time remote working and hybrid working.

Mothers were mostly likely to want more part time hours, flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime, and term time working. While women (and a significant portion of mothers) were also most keen on compressed hours, and shorter working weeks for the same pay. Our figures suggest that working mothers still make more career sacrifices for their family – by working fewer hours – while fathers find flex to work around family.

We also noted that the small number of single parents in our survey were more likely than other parents to want more home working, flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime, informal amends and shorter working week for the same pay.

Measures that help frontline workers have more choice and control over their work, such as input to rotas, the ability to swap shifts and advanced notice of shifts were wanted fairly equally between men and women, and mothers and fathers.

Flex workers want more of in current role in next 6 months	 Men	 Women	 Fathers	 Mothers
	Home working	30%	27%	33%
Flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime	28%	32%	28%	32%
Compressed hours	19%	24%	16%	18%
Shorter week same pay	19%	22%	16%	19%
Fully remote	13%	11%	18%	12%
Part time	11%	14%	10%	15%
Informal	10%	11%	9%	9%
Hybrid	8%	9%	11%	7%
Job share	5%	5%	9%	7%
Seasonably adjusted hours	4%	8%	4%	6%
Term-time only	2%	5%	3%	9%
Rota input	5%	5%	6%	5%
Shift swapping	6%	7%	6%	4%
Shift swapping with technology	3%	2%	5%	2%
Self-rostering	5%	6%	5%	7%
Advance notice of shifts	7%	6%	6%	4%

Income level

We found that people earning more than £50,000 were much more likely to want more home working in their current role in the next six months compared with people earning less than £20,000 (39% and 19% respectively). This is likely because people earning higher salaries are more likely to be desk workers able to work from home, compared with people earning less than £20,000 who are more likely to be frontline workers.

We also found that 20% of people earning under £20,000 would like more part time working, compared with 14% of people earning more than £50,000. This could be linked to caring responsibilities because we know women still carry more of the childcare burden in particular, and are more likely to work part time and in lower income roles.

Frontline roles

We noticed patterns in the types of flexible working frontline and non-frontline workers would like more of in their current role in the next six months. For example, 33% of non-frontline workers would like more home working compared with only 27% of frontline workers. While frontline workers were more likely than other workers to want advance shift notice, part time work, self-rostering and shift swaps. This again suggests people tend to understand what kind of flexible working is appropriate for their role.



How important is flex for workers changing jobs?

Nearly a third (32%) of Scottish workers are currently thinking of changing jobs.

While salary topped the list of important factors in a job search, perhaps reflecting financial pressures in the cost-of-living crisis, finding a good work life balance was also very important. Six in ten (60%) people who are considering changing job said salary was important, while four in ten (42%) said work life balance was important.

More than one in five (22%) of people considering changing jobs said flexibility on location was important, while one in seven (14%) said flexibility on when they work, such as being able to amend start and finish times, was important and one in 20 (5%) said flexibility on how much they work, such as part time hours, was important.

Parents

Parents who are currently thinking of changing jobs want more flexibility over when they work. A total of 17% of parents say having more flex over when they work is important, compared with 11% of non-parents. There was no difference between parents and non-parents' aspirations about where they would carry out work.

Frontline workers

More frontline workers are looking for a better work life balance than non-frontline workers. Nearly half (45%) of frontline workers said a better work life balance was important in a new role, compared with 37% of non-frontline workers. While just 56% of frontline workers said salary was important, compared with 68% of non-frontline workers.

Important factors in a job search



How important is flex for people who are unemployed and looking for work?

We asked 216 unemployed Scottish adults who are looking for work what the single most important factor was in their job search. More than four in ten (43%) said 'that I can be flexible and have control over where, when and/or how much I work'. Just 15% said salary.

There are significant differences between men and women, with women prioritising flexible working the most. More than half of women (52%) said flexibility was the single most important factor, compared with just 27% of men.

Two thirds of women (66%) said that being able to work flexibly was 'essential' for them to take up employment and that without flexibility, it would be 'impossible for me to work at all'. More than half (52%) of men said this too.

The reason for the difference between men and women is caring responsibilities. The **ONS Labour Force Survey** showed that 27.6% of women were not working in the UK because of family commitments in the summer of 2022, compared to 7.4% of men.

52% of unemployed women say flexible working is the single most important factor when considering whether to accept a position v 13% who say salary.

27% of unemployed men say flexible working is the single most important factor, compared with 20% who say salary.

66% of unemployed women say flexibility is essential and that it would be impossible to work at all without it v 52% of unemployed men

When, where or how much?

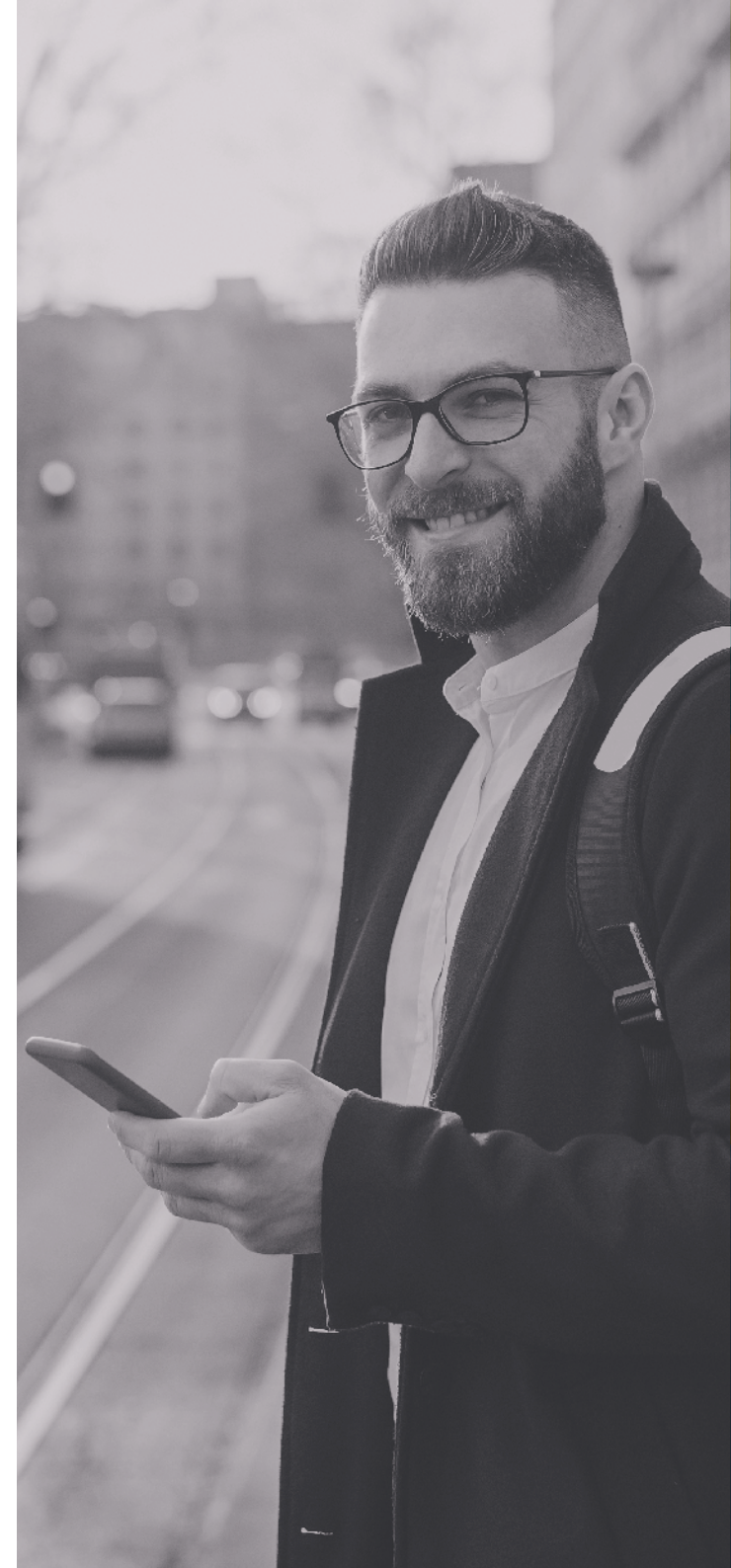
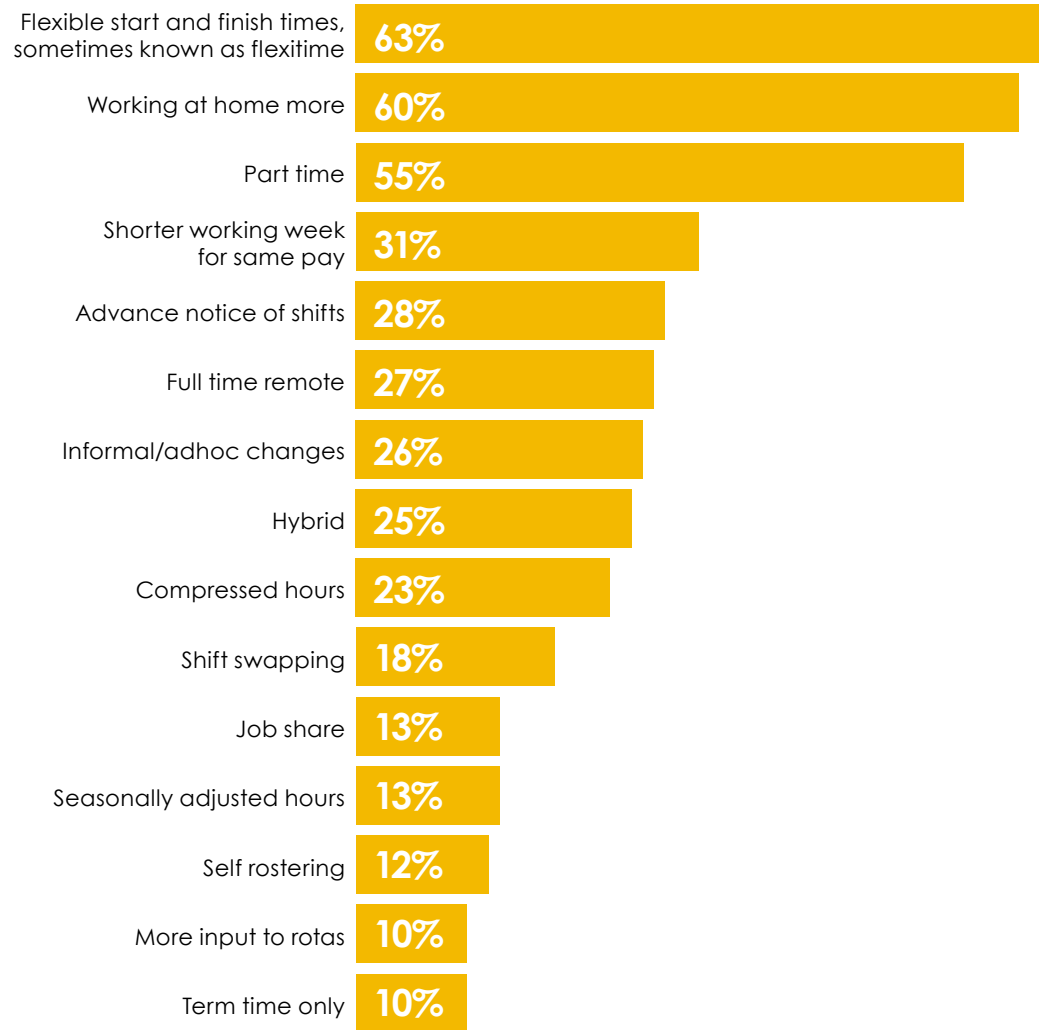
The vast majority of unemployed people said that having some control over where, when or how much they worked would make it easier for them to get a job, with the figures always higher for women.

- More than nine in ten women (91%) said having some control over **where** they worked would make getting a job easier, compared with 77% of men.
- A similar majority of women (92%) and 80% of men said having some control over **when** they worked, such as being able to make small adjustments to start finish times, work compressed hours or have input to rotas, would make it easier to get a job.
- A total of 89% of women and 74% of men said having some control over **how much** they worked, such as part time or reduced hours, or term time working, would make it easier to take up employment.

What type of flex do unemployed people looking for work want?

The desire for flexible working among Scottish adults who are not currently working and are looking for a job is very high. More than eight in ten (85%) unemployed Scottish adults looking for work would like some home or hybrid working, 63% would like flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime and more than half (55%) would like part time hours. The high levels of demand suggest that flexible working is a much more of a 'need to have' for people who are not currently in work. Employers, policy makers and employability providers could help fill vacancies, reduce unemployment levels and improve the wider Scottish economy if roles were designed and advertised as flexible.

Types of flex unemployed Scottish adults looking for work would like



What barriers exist for employers that want to create greater flex?

A lack of clear vision around flexible working and challenges in applying flex fairly are two of the most common barriers Scottish employers say they face when trying to implement greater flexibility for workers.

More than one in ten (11%) said a lack of clear vision was holding them back. We know from our conversations with employers that managers – and employees – can be unsure what new policies mean in practice, or they can be interpreted in different ways causing confusion and resentment.

One in ten (10%) employers say the fact they can't give all workers the same types, or levels, of flex is holding them back because they can't work out how to make it fair across different

Flex is embedded and working well for:

57%  **36%**
non-frontline employers frontline employers

roles. This affected more employers with frontline workers than those without (11% compared with 8% respectively).

One in ten (10%) employers say they struggle to get people in the office, or on site, as much as they'd like. A smaller number (8%) of employers say they still don't have enough senior buy-in to increase flexible working, and this is more prevalent in organisations with frontline workers – 9% compared with 6% of organisations without frontline workers.

It's also worth noting that many employers say there are no barriers, and that flexible working is embedded and working well. The figure is significantly higher for employers without frontline workers compared to those with frontline workers (57% and 36% respectively)

Barriers to flex for employers

- 11%** lack of clear vision

- 10%** unable to apply flex to all roles

- 10%** struggle to get people in office, or on site, as much as we'd like

- 8%** lack of senior buy in

What will the next 12 months look like?

Most workers and employers are fairly positive about the next 12 months and expect flexible working in their organisation to either stay the same or increase.

However nearly one in five (18%) employers expect to reduce flex for some or all workers, and about one in ten workers think their organisation will become less flexible on where people work, and a similar number think their organisation will get less flexible on time.

We found a fifth (22%) of employers expect to increase flexible working for all staff. A fifth (20%) expect to offer flex to more employees than before. Employers with frontline staff were almost twice as likely as those without frontline workers to say they expect to offer flex to more workers than before (22% compared with 12%). Nearly one in three (28%) of all employers expect their approach to flex to remain the same. Broadly, organisations that said they would get less flexible indicated this repeatedly across our questions.

Employer expectations for the next 12 months

22%↑ expect to increase flex for all

20%↑ expect to offer flex to more employees than before

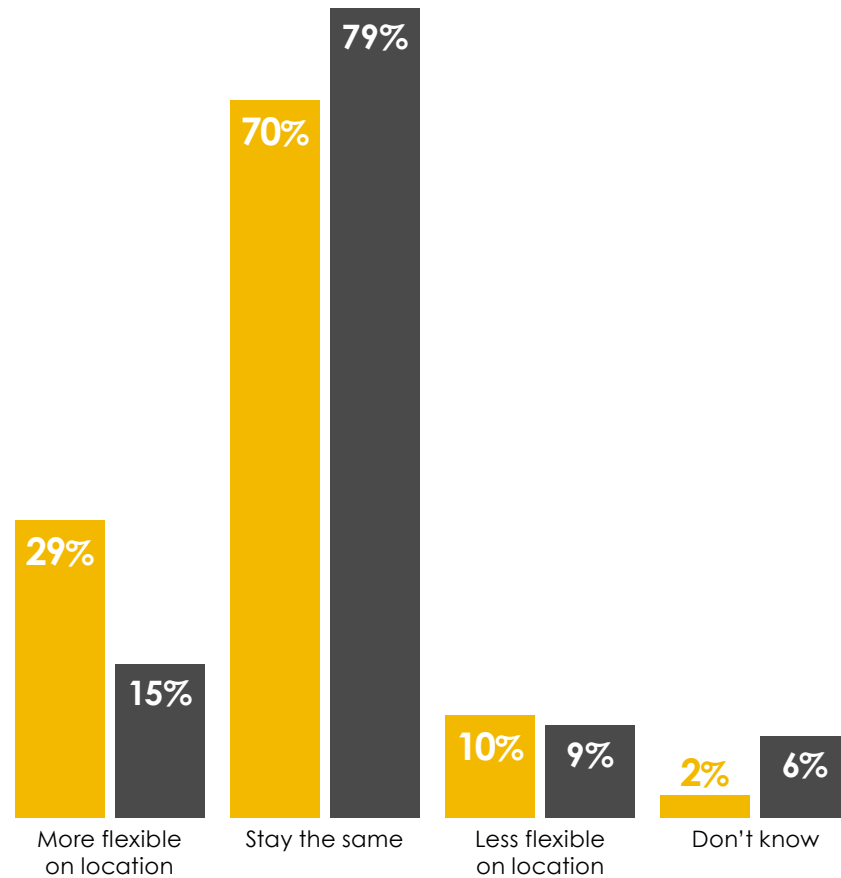
28% expect their approach to flex to remain the same

10%↓ expect to reduce flex for all

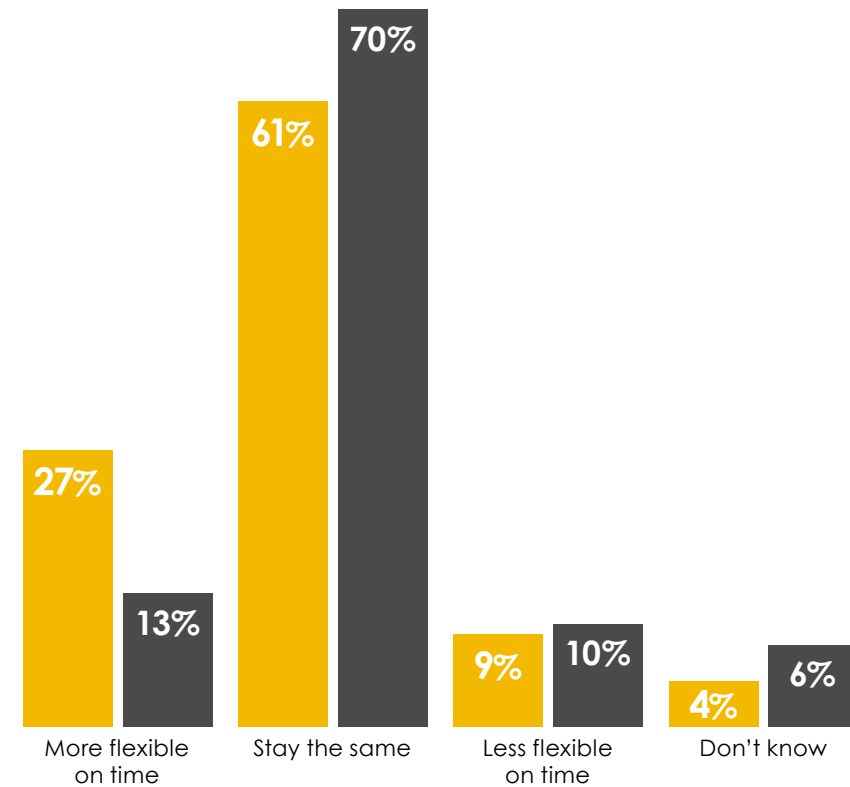
8%↓ expect to reduce flex for some



Worker and employer expectations



In the next year, do you think your organisation will get more or less flex on location?




In the next year do you think your organisation will get more or less flex on time?



Employers



Workers



Part three: Focus points for 2023

Most Scottish employers agree flex is here to stay and has benefits for the business as much as individuals. After our collective pandemic experience, the debate about whether greater flex is beneficial is over. But there's still plenty to talk about, and for employers to work on. Here are our top five focus points for flexible working in 2023.

#FlexForLife

1. Flex rhetoric versus flex reality

A consistent theme in this year's data is a disconnect between employer and worker opinions on how much flexible working has been available or will be available in the future. As a reminder, 28% of Scottish employers told us their company had a 'very flexible working culture where flexible working is accepted as the norm'. But only 17% of our workers felt this was the case in their workplace.

This backs up what we often hear anecdotally through our everyday conversations with Scottish employers and workers, that company rhetoric around flex doesn't always meet reality for workers. There's no doubt some employers are guilty of flex-washing, whereby they oversell the availability and culture of flexible working in public, such as in recruitment, but under-deliver for workers. The question is whether business leaders are aware of this. Do they knowingly turn a blind eye? Or are they genuinely unaware that something is blocking flex from being fully accessible to workers on the ground.

Our research suggests that poor communication could explain some of the disparity with many workers unaware of how they could be working more flexibly.

For example, while seven in 10 (71%) employers say they take on board the thoughts and views of workers across the organisation when designing their approach to flexible working, fewer than half (49%) of workers believed this to be the case. Conversely, more than one in five (21%) workers say their employer categorically does not take on board workers' opinions, compared with just 8% of employers.

Scottish employers told us they know whether information about flexible working has reached, and been understood, by employees at all levels of the organisation by checking via various communication methods. The most common were 1-1 feedback, feedback from team meeting discussions and staff surveys (all 44% each), followed by ad-hoc conversations with staff and ad-hoc conversations with managers.

Just under one in ten (8%) employers say they don't know whether information about flexible working has reached, and been understood by employees.

And yet – more than one in four (27%) workers say they don't know, or aren't sure, what's available and expected of them in terms of flexible working and more than half (53%) say they've not discussed flexible working with their line manager in the last year.

27% of workers say they don't know, or aren't sure, what's available and expected of them in terms of flexible working.



53% of workers say they've not discussed flexible working with their manager in the last year

How employers communicate flex changes

We asked employers how they shared information about flexible working with workers, and found they consistently report higher levels of communication across all channels than workers say they receive. The employers and workers involved in our research were from different organisations so we can't directly compare but the consistent differences certainly suggest that employers aren't communicating as effectively as they think they are.

How employers share information about flexible working

Finally, we know that employers often expect workers to ask for flex if they need it. They say they're 'not psychic' and if someone's circumstances have changed, they can't know unless they're told. This is all true. But it's also true that lots of people are uncomfortable asking about flexible working. They're worried their manager might think they're less committed, or that they might rule themselves out of a future promotion.

Communication method	 % of employers that use this method	 % of workers saying their organisation does this
	Through supervisory/line-management 1to1s	41%
Management communications	36%	25%
Staff surveys	35%	19%
Website	21%	15%
Management meetings or events	31%	14%
Internal blogs or newsletters	21%	13%
Staff focus groups	21%	10%
No particular information about flex is provided	9%	27%

We found that almost one in three (29%) frontline workers and almost a quarter (23%) of non-frontline workers are not comfortable asking for flex. Employers don't need to be able to read minds. But they could be more proactive in asking workers about flexible working and starting more conversations about flex.

“ Consult with your employees on what type of flexibility they need and how this would work from a practical point of view. The reason we've been able to implement our new approach so successfully is because we made sure we spoke to all relevant stakeholders and considered their needs.”

 Large car retailer

Recommendations for employers

1 Support line managers

Line managers are the lynchpin for successful flexible working. You can have the best policies in the world but if line managers don't understand the benefits of flex, how to create more flexibility in roles, talk to someone constructively about flexible working and then successfully manage people who work flexibly, your brilliant policies won't make it into practice. Support and training for line managers is crucial for flexible working to be a success in any organisation.

But we found only 54% of Scottish employers say they offer specific support for line managers around flexible working. And more than a third (37%) don't offer any support for line managers. Among employers that do offer support, 47% offer training on flex, 46% offer coaching and mentoring and 40% provided guidance documents (in addition to policy documents) for line managers.

We're encouraging all Scottish employers to invest in supporting their line managers to ensure effective communication with workers about flex, and greater adoption of flex that is mutually beneficial for the business and workers.

2 Review communications across your organisation

Messages about changes in ways of working and the benefits of this should be repeated regularly and at all levels. Can you make work patterns a standing item for team meetings? Can you support external campaign weeks to drive awareness internally? Can you share stories and information more prominently on your intranet and staff newsletters? And make sure you are always listening to staff feedback. Can you run a regular staff survey? Can you ask questions in a focus group?



3 Create team protocols

Teams are all different, so each team should have its own protocol on how often everyone meets in person and for what purpose, as well as how and when people can get hold of each other. If you agree this as a team, rather than have a manager dictate the arrangement, people are much more likely to stick to it.

4 Create a framework for flex

Give managers and workers a framework that sets out your vision for the working culture you want to create as well as some specific detail about what kinds of flexible working are available for different workers and, equally importantly, what's not possible. While workers are usually realistic, managers can – and should – be able to say 'no' if something isn't going to work, and then discuss any other options that might help.

5 Monitor flex and ensure it's on your organisational agenda

Despite 86% of Scottish employers saying they offer at least a basic level of flexible working, just 42% of all Scottish employers say they measure the impact of the flex they offer. Almost four in ten (38%) say flexible working is a strategic priority and nearly one in three (29%) have a dedicated working group or senior level sponsor to drive flexible working changes. Having a senior member of staff and/or a working group responsible for exploring and promoting new ways of working will help ensure constant communication happens, and that crucial evidence is gathered to show whether changes are working for staff and for the business.

6 Role model from the top

Showcasing how senior managers work flexibly helps normalise flexible working and show what's acceptable. People tend to take their cues from what they see others doing, rather than what's written in a policy document. A manager shouting goodbye as they leave early for an appointment, or making public in their diary that they will be on a school-run for an hour, or a dog walk at lunchtime, can make a big impact.



2. Flex for recruitment, retention and career progression

This is a perennial big topic for employers. But even more so with the impact of the pandemic, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis. Whether you're in an industry where competition for staff is fierce and you don't have budget for big salaries, you're looking at your talent pipeline and the fact many older – and highly skilled and experienced – workers are getting close to retirement age, or you're repeatedly coming up against candidates who only want to work from home, flexible working is core to it all.

Flexible recruitment

We've already shown that 82% of Scottish workers either already have, or want, flex, and it's high on people's priority lists for new jobs. But our research with employers suggests there's more employers could do to make the most of flex they already offer, or design new roles with greater flex.

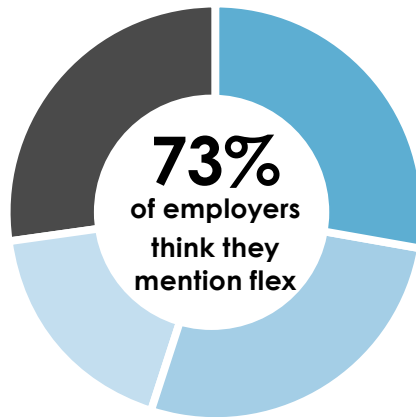
More than half (55%) of employers told us they mention flexible working in most, or all, job adverts, and another 18% said they mention flex in some adverts. Just over a quarter (27%) said they don't mention flex.

The employers in our data sample that advertise roles as flexible, 62% say they create tailored statements about the kind of flex on offer, which is considered best practice, and 38% say they use a generic statement on all adverts.

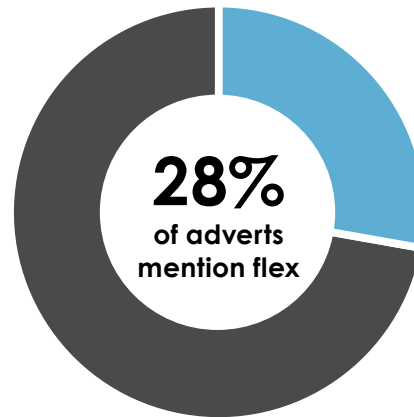
But the *Scottish Flexible Jobs Index 2022* by Timewise, which analysed 700,000+ Scottish job adverts between January 1 and November 30 2022, found just 28% of jobs mentioned flexible working. There is a big gap between what employers think they do, and what actually makes it into job adverts.

Our research with Scottish workers shows nearly one in four (23%) 'definitely' or 'probably' wouldn't apply for a role if it didn't mention flexible working. Only 9% would 'definitely' apply regardless of whether or not they could get flexibility, while 12% said they'd 'definitely' apply but hoped they'd get flexibility later. Another 19% said they'd 'probably' apply and hope they'd get flex later but there's no certainty this group would apply. It's clear employers would attract more potential candidates if they offered flexible working and made this clear in job adverts.

Mentions of flexible working in job adverts



28% all job adverts
27% most adverts
18% some adverts
27% we don't mention flexible working



28% of 700,000+ Scottish job
adverts analysed by Timewise
mentioned flexible working

Unemployed job seekers

Scottish adults who are unemployed and looking for work often need flexible working in order to work at all. More than half (54%) of women and 34% of men who are unemployed and looking for work said they wouldn't apply for a job if it didn't mention flexible working.

We also found that 74% of women and 60% of men who are unemployed and

looking for work said it had been difficult to get information on the level of flexible working available in most jobs they have considered applying for.

Finally, while many employers are open to talking about flexible working during the recruitment process, 62% of women and 44% of men who are unemployed and looking for work said they'd feel uncomfortable asking about flexible working in an interview, illustrating that employers need to be more proactive and upfront about potential flexible working options.

“Flexible working has given us access to a higher calibre of staff by reaching a wider and deeper pool of talent, either those who personally welcome or require flexibility but also by those who want to be aligned with a progressive organisation. It helps us retain good staff too. We know our staff are happy, and they value the flexibility they have and stay with us in part because of that. When you factor in all the costs of someone losing interest in a role before they leave, and the time it takes someone new to get up to speed, as well as the costs of recruitment itself, you're looking at losing the equivalent of a whole year's salary.”



CEO, small charity

Flexible working for retention and progression

Flexible working isn't just something to tempt new recruits. More than a third (37%) of Scottish employers noted that flex helps them retain staff. It can also help workers progress in their careers – so long as the workplace culture is right. We found one in five (20%) Scottish workers are worried that working flexibly might negatively affect their chance of promotion. Employers can challenge this stigma by showcasing how senior leaders already work flexibly, whether that's from home, on reduced hours, or just leaving early occasionally, to show that flexible working doesn't have to be a barrier to promotion. Leaders and managers also need to demonstrate that promotions and more senior roles are human-sized jobs and that increasing seniority doesn't equate to a 'long hours' culture.

We've already shown that people with a disability or long-term health condition, parents and women are the most likely to drop out of the workforce if they can't work flexibly, so employers that want to encourage more women and other workers with diverse needs to stay and move into more senior positions

need to keep reviewing flexible working opportunities for existing staff. For example, managers often encourage team members to apply for internal promotion opportunities. But how many point out that the role could be done as a job share, or that some of it can be done from home, or that the hours could be flexed around school runs?

Gender dynamic

Particularly around career progression, we noted a gender dynamic at play, with male workers and managers more sceptical about flexible working.

More male workers worry that flexible working might negatively affect their chance of promotion than women (43% and 36% respectively). Male workers are also more worried than female workers that flexible working will negatively affect how their performance is perceived (48% and 42% respectively).

We found lower levels of agreement that flex can aid career progression and reduce the gender pay gap among

male employer respondents too. Just over half (55%) of male employer respondents we surveyed think flexible working helps people progress in their careers, compared with almost three quarters (74%) of female employer respondents. While 42% of male employer respondents think flexible working can reduce the gender pay gap, compared with 57% of female employer respondents.

This is important because it suggests men feel a stigma around flexible working more than women – perhaps rightly so as other studies show men are more likely to have had a request for flexible working refused. But if this stigma continues up the ranks into managers and business leaders, who still feel flex is something negative, and they can't see how offering flex to existing staff could help keep highly skilled workers, or enable workers to take a promotion, the business will never benefit from greater diversity, or meet their own targets.

Recommendations for employers

1 Showcase the flex you have in job adverts

Lots of employers offer good levels of flexible working but don't make this clear in job adverts. If you offer flex, make sure this is part of your advert copy. If possible, list the types of flex that are possible, such as home working, flexible start and finish times, or part time hours, for each role.

2 Design roles with flex in mind

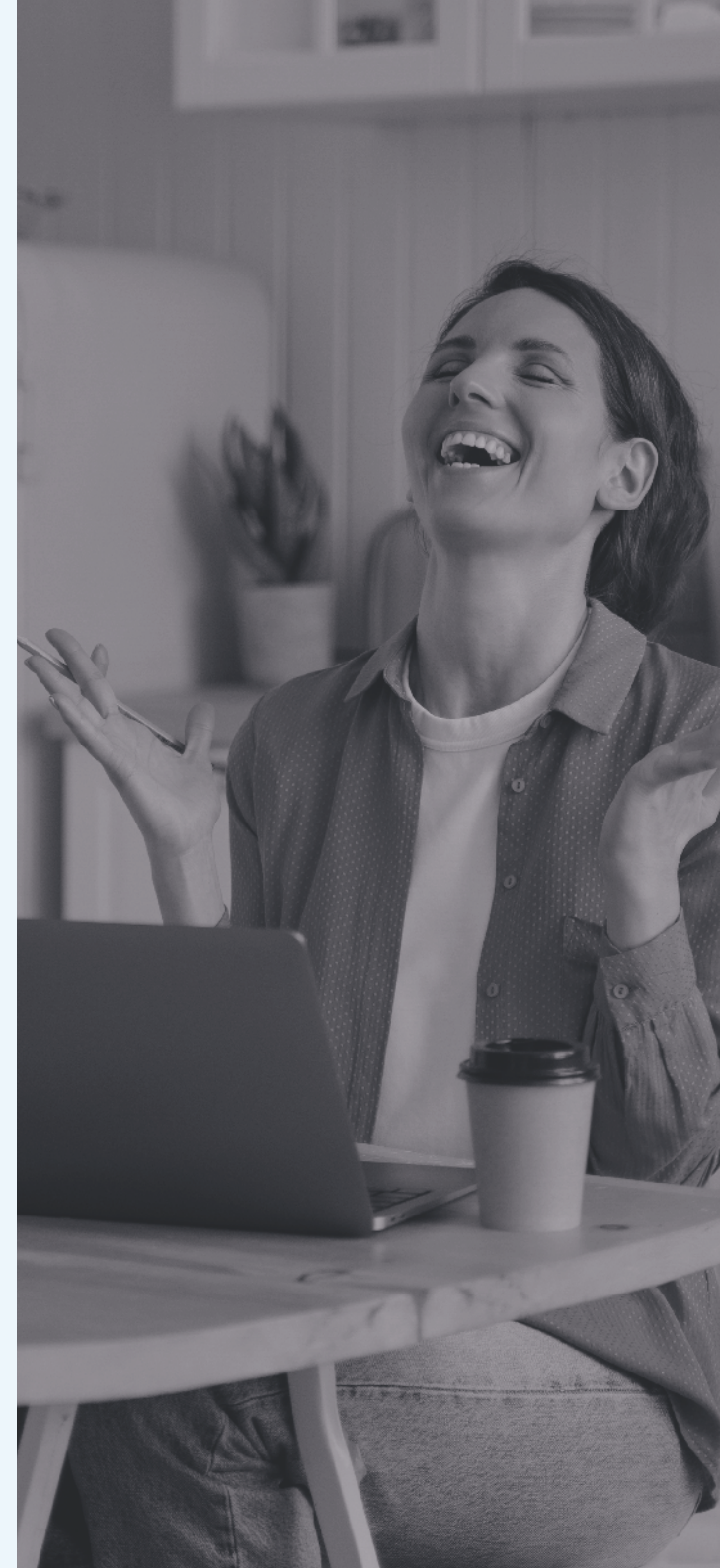
If you are designing new roles, think about what flexibility could be accommodated. Could the role be done at home or another location? Do the hours need to be fixed? Could it be done part time or job share? And be realistic about the size of each job you design so that it's suitable for the flexible working on offer.

3 Train your line managers

Training your line managers so they understand the benefits of flex for the business and individual, and how it can support retention and career progression will ensure that your aspirations about workplace culture and diversity become reality. Training managers will ensure remote and part time workers are not overlooked for juicy projects or training that will help them progress. For more on line manager training see p58.

4 Monitor progression of flex workers

Monitoring whether flexible workers get promoted can show whether programmes to improve diversity and inclusion are working, or whether particular groups, such as women, people with disabilities and people from ethnic minority groups are still being left behind.



3. Supporting mental health and wellbeing with flex

The pandemic brought mental health and wellbeing to the fore for employers, and it remains a focus area for progressive organisations that can see how supporting workers' mental health and wellbeing delivers benefits in work and beyond. It's well documented that flexible working makes an important contribution and it should be integral to wellbeing programmes.

At a societal level, transitioning to a Wellbeing Economy, in which people's fundamental human needs and the environment are considered alongside economic growth, is a priority for the Scottish Government. Both employers and policymakers should utilise flexible working as one way they can support good mental health and wellbeing.

“Having some flexibility means our people are much happier. And for us as a business, we benefit hugely from their ongoing loyalty and hard work for us. We're only as good as the people who work for us. Without them we couldn't deliver for our clients, so it just makes good business sense as well as being the right thing to do.”



Managing director, small manufacturing firm

Nearly eight in ten (79%) Scottish employers agree flexible working in general can contribute to improved wellbeing, and almost a third (32%) say flexible working has positively impacted workers mental health and wellbeing in their own organisation.

We found three in ten (30%) employers proactively monitor wellbeing, compared with 46% that don't and 25% that aren't sure. While from Scottish workers' perspective, nearly half say their employer cares more about their life outside work than before the pandemic. This is encouraging although nearly one in five (18%) workers say this isn't the case. All these figures suggest there is some good practice among Scottish employers but there is plenty of room for improvement.

“Being able to work flexibly and spend less time in the office has had a tremendously positive impact on my work life balance. I now do the drop-off and pick-up of my children from school and nursery most days and build my time in the office around this. I am also able to get out for a walk or run when I want now, at lunchtime or the end of the day, whereas before I would be grabbing a quick sandwich at my desk or sitting in commuter traffic. As a result my physical and mental wellbeing has improved, as has my relationship with my children.”



Male business manager, charity sector

Impact of flexible working on burnout and sickness absence

Our data suggests that flexible working benefits both workers and employers when it comes to reducing burnout and time off sick. In our research with workers, we found a link between flexible working and reduced levels of burnout. Nearly one in ten (9%) Scottish workers who don't work flexibly say they experience feelings of burnout on a daily basis, compared with just 2% of workers with flexibility. Likewise, the number of workers with flexibility who say they experience burnout more than once a week is just over half the number of workers without flex (8% and 13% respectively). This is important because according to UK **ONS statistics**, mental health problems account for approximately 10% of work sickness absence.

A quarter (25%) of Scottish employers told us flexible working helps reduce sickness absence. This has a direct impact on productivity and is of significant benefit to employers. It's worth noting another quarter (25%) of employers flagged the rise in home working as a cause for concern

because some workers feel pressure to keep working at home even if they're ill.

It's also worth noting that 27% of men and 22% of women who are currently unemployed and looking for work in Scotland say they left their last job because of their mental health. We don't know if these people worked flexibly or not. But it does illustrate how important supporting good mental health is for our wider Scottish economy.

Impact of flexible working on life outside work

Our research with workers shows that flexible working makes a difference to people's lives beyond work. We found nearly half (47%) of workers with flexibility say their work has a positive impact on their home and family life, compared with just 31% of workers without flex. While the vast majority (80%) of workers with flexible working said their flex had a positive impact on their home and family life and relationships outside work. This suggests that flexible working can help build a happier and more resilient workforce.

Levels of burnout for Scottish workers with and without flexible working

Never



Occasionally



More than once a month



More than once a week



Daily



Recommendations for employers

1 Monitor wellbeing

This could be a regular staff survey question but informal methods, such as asking how people are in regular 1-1 meetings, are also effective for checking how people are feeling.

2 Encourage conversations about mental health and wellbeing

You could support national health and awareness campaigns and share stories from staff members who've made changes to improve their mental health or wellbeing.

3 Train managers and workers

Many companies now have dedicated staff who are externally trained to look out for colleagues who may be struggling and offer peer-to-peer support and signpost suitable professional

services. But employers can also ensure that line managers are aware of symptoms of stress and anxiety and understand the importance of asking how people are on a more informal basis. Informal daily check-ins, especially when people are working remotely can be a good remedy for this.

4 Think about job design

Stress and burnout can often be caused by a job that is just too big for one person to deliver. Managers need to keep an open mind on whether roles need updating if projects and responsibilities grow. Conversations about job design and workload and how they impact wellbeing should be discussed in regular 1-1 meetings, rather than just when a job description is reviewed for a vacancy or new role. This is particularly important for people working part time hours, to make sure they're not expected to complete full time responsibilities. If your

organisation doesn't currently have many part time workers, it's even more important to show that part time working is possible because workers may be put off asking for part time hours if they can't see it happening elsewhere in the organisation – and part time roles will likely help you recruit and retain more skilled and diverse staff.

5 Social connection

Make time for social connection among colleagues because this helps wellbeing and team cohesion. This could be online, with time at the beginning or end of team meetings to chat about life outside work, or it could be in-person meet-ups for a meal, or a non-work activity. We're hearing informally from many employers that they're planning social time for teams to ensure people are together face-to-face at specific times throughout the year.

4. All kinds of flex for all kinds of workers – including frontline workers

Hybrid and home working have been the main focus for changes in working patterns since the pandemic.

But we think we're seeing the start of a transition now where employers are beginning to consider other forms of flexible working, such as flex on time, as well as flex for people who can't easily work from home. This is significant given **43% of workers** in Scotland are in roles that cannot be done from home, according to CIPD Scotland.

For many Scottish employers, this all-encompassing transition to 'flex for all' isn't easy. As mentioned earlier in this report, one in ten (11%) employers with frontline workers say the fact they can't give all workers the same types, or levels, of flex is holding them back because they can't work out how to make it fair

across different roles. Certainly, among organisations that approach us for support, this is a topic that comes up a lot. We find plenty of well-meaning employers who want to do the right thing but are scratching their heads about how they can deliver flexibility for a factory worker who has to be on site for set hours, or a care worker who has to be with the people they support at set times. But if employers fail to make changes, they risk losing dissatisfied workers to competitors that have found new ways of working.

Here's a quick re-cap on what frontline workers told us:

- **57%** of frontline workers already work flexibly, compared with **67%** of non-frontline workers
- **39%** of frontline workers don't work flexibly, compared with **30%** of non-frontline workers
- Of frontline workers who don't work flexibly, **64%** would like to
- Of the **172** Scottish workers who said they'd had a flexible working request refused in the last 12 months, **81%** were frontline workers
- **51%** of frontline workers are satisfied with their access to flex, compared with **64%** of non-frontline workers

Frontline worker expectations

Our figures show that doing nothing isn't an option. For a start, more than half of frontline workers do have some flexibility and while all roles are different, employers can – and should – look at what their peers are offering to see if they could do something similar. Overall, there is a strong desire among frontline workers for flex, or more flex, and only half say they're 'satisfied' with what's on offer. Many frontline employers are in industries with chronic staff shortages, which coupled with workers' expectations for flexible working means employers will struggle to recruit and retain good staff unless they find new ways of working.

“Our office staff have more flex than frontline colleagues and this is something we know we need to address. But it will take time to work out what is possible because our frontline workers need to be on site at set times to look after the animals in our care.”



CEO, animal charity

What type of flex

More tellingly, almost three quarters (73%) of frontline workers think they 'probably' or 'definitely' could work more flexibly without impacting output and performance. In particular seven in ten (70%) frontline workers think their job could be done at other times to normal, and almost six in ten (59%) think some of their role could be done at home or another location. This shows there's huge value in employers asking workers what else could be done.

It's worth noting that four in ten (41%) frontline workers don't think their role could be done at home or another location, and three in ten (30%) don't think their role could be done at other times to normal. These are significant numbers and illustrate that workers are generally sensible about what's possible and practical for their role.

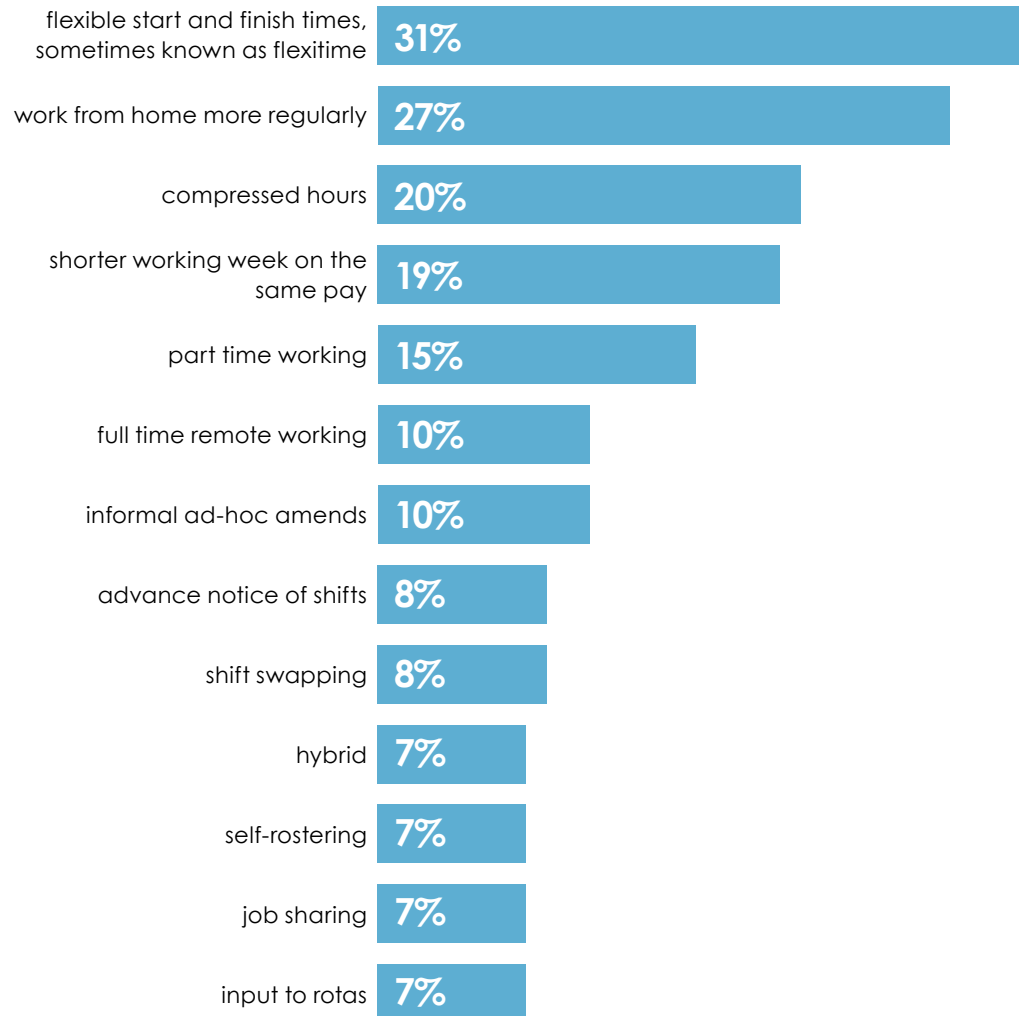
We also asked frontline workers specifically what types of flexible working they'd be interested in exploring in their current role in the next six months. Nearly a third (31%) were interested in flexible start and finish times, sometimes known as flexitime, 27% would like more home working and 20% would like compressed hours, where they'd work fewer longer days. One in ten (10%) would like to be able to make informal, ad-hoc amends, such as being able to finish early for an appointment and make up the time later or another day and nearly one in ten (8%) were interested in being able to swap shifts more easily. Another 8% wanted more advance notice of shifts. It's worth remembering here that among Scottish adults who are currently unemployed and are looking for work, nearly one in three (28%) said they'd like advanced notice of shifts.

“Flexible working should be the norm as I don't believe we will be able to tackle the huge issues we face around the gender pay gap and equal pay without it.”



Female senior manager, large insurance company

Types of flexible working frontline workers are interested in exploring in their current role in the next six months



Tackling workplace inequalities

The fact flexible working can be entirely bespoke for each person means it can help address many forms of inequality in the workplace. For example, part time hours can help parents spend time with their children but they can also help older workers wind down to retirement, or enable someone with a mental health condition to work when a full time role would be too much. Likewise, home working can help workers with a disability or long-term health condition just as much as it can help parents nip out for the school-run. Flexible working, in all its forms, enables many diverse groups of workers to work, stay in work and progress at work.

“Flexible working contributes to a fairer economy as it enables more people to be part of the workforce, whether that be full time or part time. This also aids key staff retention and enables business to attract new talent to contribute to the success of a business.”



Male manager, large financial and banking firm

Recommendations for employers

1 Talk to your teams and canvass opinion

Our data suggests that frontline workers themselves may have good ideas about different ways of working that would give them more choice and control while still delivering what's needed for their team and the business as a whole. Talk to your teams and canvass their opinions, whether that's through staff surveys and focus groups, or more informal team meetings and 1-1 catch-ups. You're not committing to anything by having a conversation and it may present solutions you've not thought of.

2 Start with small changes

Flexible working for frontline workers doesn't have to involve dramatic changes. The most common type of flex that frontline workers are interested in getting more of is flexible start and finish times. This could be just 15 minutes' difference, allowing people to drop children at school or nursery before

their shift starts. And while a quarter of frontline workers would like more home working, this could also be quite a small change – care workers completing paperwork after visits at home rather than in an office, for example. We also noted small but significant numbers of frontline workers who wanted more notice of their shifts, more input to rotas, and to be able to swap shifts more easily, which we hope feels achievable for employers.

3 Consider all forms of flexible working

Home and hybrid working are just one form of flexible working. But there are so many others employers can explore too, from part time and job share roles, compressed hours, or smaller changes, such as workers being able to have some choice on their start and finish times, take time off for an appointment, or be able to swap shifts more easily.

4 Trial it

Sometimes employers are worried about introducing more flexible working in case it doesn't work. But there's no 'one size fits all' approach to flex, and often the only way to know if a change in work pattern is successful is to try it. A well-communicated trial – even within one department – with review and evaluation points scheduled in, is a sensible and practical way to see if changes will work. Communication with workers is essential so they understand the changes may not be permanent. Feedback from workers should be part of the review and evaluation process too.

5. Reducing poverty with fair flexible work

More than a million people in Scotland live in poverty. Some are working and some are not. For those in work, employers might think that pay increases, or bonuses, are the only ways they can improve workers' financial wellbeing but offering flexible working also has an important role to play. While ensuring roles are designed and advertised as flexible can help those not in work find the kinds of jobs they need.

We know that specific groups of people are more likely to live in poverty, such as women, parents with very young children, or several children, as well as people from minority ethnic backgrounds or people with a disability or long-term health condition. The majority of people living in poverty are likely to be in more than one group, exacerbating their risk. For example, a parent may also have a disability.

These same groups of people are also more likely to **need** flexible working in order to take a job in the first place, stay in work, or progress at work. Without flexible working, many just can't work at all. But if they get the flexibility they need, fair work can help provide a route out of poverty.

Flex to help people enter work

Our research with Scottish adults who are not currently working and are looking for a job shows how much of a difference flexible working could make. Many mentioned that it would help their mental or physical health, and allow them to work and manage caring responsibilities. But the most common benefit – mentioned by four in ten (41%) unemployed Scottish adults – was that they'd be able to take on a role with more hours and earn more money. More than a third (36%) said they'd be able to work when previously that's not been possible, and 17% said they'd be

able to take on a more skilled or senior role, which would make them and their families better off. This illustrates the role flexible working can play in tackling poverty by enabling people to enter work and progress at work.

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For unemployed people looking for work, flexible working would mean:

- 41%** I could take a role with more hours and earn more money
- 40%** It would improve my mental health
- 36%** I'd be able to work when previously that's not been possible
- 32%** I'd be able to work without paying too much on travel
- 30%** I'd be able to work and manage family/caring responsibilities
- 26%** I'd be able to work and manage a disability or long-term health condition
- 17%** I could take on a more skilled or senior role

Flex to help people stay in work and progress at work

Flexible working can also help reduce poverty for people who are working. For starters, working from home, or flexing hours to avoid peak travel times and shorten the working day, can reduce costs, such as for travel and childcare. Flexibility can enable people to make the best use of their skills and experience and take higher skilled roles that generally pay better, rather than having to take a lower paid role just because the hours or location fit their home responsibilities. If flexible working is embedded within an organisation, it means people who need flex can still progress and get promoted too, again allowing them to earn more income.

Employer opinions and actions

More than eight in ten (83%) Scottish employers agree in principle that flexible working helps people enter the labour market, and 64% agree flex helps people

maximise their income. But there's little evidence this is being put into practice. We know it's much harder to find flexibility in lower-income jobs (51% of workers earning less than £20,000 work flexibly compared with 80% of workers earning more than £50,000). And our data shows flex seems to be getting better for people on higher incomes but is only staying the same for people earning less than £20,000. The gap between the highest and lowest earners is widening. We know that many people who are working are still living in poverty.

While it was heartening to see that one in six (17%) Scottish employers had offered additional support to their workers in light of the cost-of-living crisis, we can't tell from our data whether this was financial support or something else. But what we can tell from our data is that Scottish employers could do much more to create flexible working for lower paid workers, who are often in frontline roles, and that the Scottish Government and policy makers could do more to encourage this because of the positive impacts on poverty alleviation and boosting the national economy.

Recommendations for employers

1 Get personal

Get to know your teams well by asking what works best for them. Find out if there are times of day that work better to avoid peak travel and additional childcare costs for example.

We know that flexible working is harder in some roles than others. But talking to your teams to find out what would make a difference to their work life harmony could give you new ideas and show that you don't need to make huge changes.

2 Small changes can make a big difference

Sometimes employers are put off flexible working because they worry everyone will want to go part time, or work from home permanently. But many workers only want small changes to their work pattern, such as starting and finishing 15 minutes later in the day, or more notice of shifts and to be able to swap shifts more easily. By canvassing workers' opinions you'll know what will really make a difference.

3 Advertise flexible working in job adverts

We've shown that lots of people, especially those who are not currently working, are put off applying for roles if they can't see any flexible working available. You will attract more candidates and stronger candidates for roles if you are able to offer flexible working and be specific about what type of flexible working is available for that role, such as part time, when hours can be worked and any flex on location.

4 Commit to Scotland's Fair Work principles

We encourage all employers to commit to Scotland's five Fair Work principles. The aim of the principles is to create fairer - better - working conditions for workers that drive productivity, performance and innovation for employers. All the principles matter. But when it comes to reducing poverty, offering flexible working and paying the real Living Wage are key.



Thank you to all the people and businesses who contributed to this report, helping to create a more flexible Scotland.

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