



FLEX **FOR LIFE**

**YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE
TO FLEXIBLE WORKING
AFTER COVID**

Choose **#FlexForLife**

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Introduction

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Long story short

So here we are. At the infamous anniversary of the first national lockdown. We've endured tragedies and frustrations, as well as sweeping changes to our home and work lives in this pandemic-filled year.

One small sliver of silver lining has been an acceleration towards flexible working, with more than a million of us in Scotland working from home – and many also shifting their hours around home responsibilities too.

Of course, 'Covid flex' hasn't been normal flexible working. True flex doesn't materialise overnight, nor come with simultaneous home schooling.

Yet despite these considerable challenges, we've collectively busted the myth that flex workers are skivers less committed to their jobs. We've proved more flex is viable and advantageous for business – and makes people happier too.

But you know that. There are reports and news stories about companies 'not going back' aplenty.

So why read this one?

Because we'll show you what to do **now**.

Now you know 'there's no going back', we'll show you how to move forward. Not in nebulous conceptual speak. But real-life, practical terms.

Flex is undoubtedly front and centre of workplace discussion and future design right now.

To guide you in your own plans, we take stock of what Scottish businesses – and employees – have learned during the pandemic. We've got the nerdy hard data you need (first of its kind in Scotland), as well as personal and business stories and insights, and our own practical tips on how to make more flex happen in your workplace now.



Nikki Slowey



Lisa Gallagher

We'll show you how wellbeing has bounced up the corporate agenda in tandem with flex, and a new more caring, more human approach to management has emerged.

And how flex fits hand-in-glove with wellbeing because it allows people more control over how, when and where they work, which ultimately creates more harmony between our work and home lives. This harmony lasts a lifetime too. Flex isn't just for specific moments. It's forever.

The quid pro quo for a flexible future is a range of tangible businesses benefits (that have always been robustly documented) including increased engagement and productivity as well as reduced staff turnover and sickness absence.

As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, and businesses can finally step off their crisis footing and begin planning for a more positive future, it's essential we keep hold of the good things we discovered when flex was foisted on us, and do it properly.

For those of you who like to know the detail, our research is the first Scotland-specific data covering the impact of the pandemic on work patterns. It involved:

Now is the time for employers to work together with employees, co-creating ways of working. Managers don't need all the answers, and teams often come up with the best solutions, if you ask them.

Those who don't adapt and change risk getting left behind, losing their appeal with new recruits and existing hard-to-replace talent.

So come with us, and we'll show you how. We're not calling for a revolution. Flex is mostly about small changes and common sense – and we're always here to help you. Because we believe, as we hope you do now, that flex is for life.

Nikki & Lisa



Surveys

with 204 Scottish business leaders and managers as well as 1,002 Scottish workers who weren't furloughed during the first lockdown.



Interviews

deep-dive interviews with 14 Scottish employers across public, private and voluntary sectors about their experiences and aspirations of flex during and post pandemic.



Focus Groups

with a diverse mix of 25 Scottish employees about their understanding, experience and thoughts about flex.

Who are we and what do we want?

We're Flexibility Works, co-founded by Lisa Gallagher and Nikki Slowey. We're a small, dynamic team of flex workers (naturally) who believe passionately in the value of flex for people and for business.

We want a world where everyone has work life harmony.

Because we care about people. We know that flexible working improves lives. We understand that empowering people benefits business. We provide the bridge between people and business to unlock the power of flexible working.

Creating a successful, fair and flexible workforce for the future is pivotal step in addressing many societal and economic

challenges facing Scotland today, including poverty and inequality. To facilitate this change we predominantly work directly with employers, offering practical support and encouraging them to see the benefits of flexible working.

We are a social business, not-for-profit. We're funded by the Social Innovation partnership – a partnership between the Scottish Government and The Hunter Foundation along with our own self-generated income.



What is flex?

Before we start, let's get something straight.

Our research showed there's still lots of confusion – from managers and employees – about what flex really is. Pre-Covid, the default answer was part-time. Now most associate it with home working. The reality is that it could be either, both or neither. And it could be formal, informal or a mix of both.

Put simply: flexible working is a working pattern or schedule that's not Monday-Friday, 9-5 in the same place every day. And most importantly, it's a pattern **chosen** by the worker (and agreed with the employer) because it works best for both parties.

We've shown some of the options here. But ultimately, flex is about giving employees **choice and control** over how much, when and where they work, and there are infinite permutations.

term time home working shift swaps flexitime part-time compressed hours formal flex input to rotas flex on start and finish times job sharing time off for appointments remote working annualised hours informal flex

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Flex before Covid

Covid didn't create flex. It was here before, and had been steadily growing as more people cottoned on to the benefits on both sides.

Almost half of Scottish workers said they had flex before Covid and a further quarter said they wanted it. But it was a varied picture across Scotland with some progressive companies offering brilliant choice and control to employees, while others offered only the statutory minimum. Supply was nowhere near demand.

■ Almost three quarters (73%) of Scottish workers had flex, or wanted it, before the pandemic. Breakdown:

46%

Worked flex
pre-Covid

27%

Would have
liked flex

■ The reasons people worked flexibly were varied. It wasn't all about childcare:

65%

Work life
balance

51%

Health and
wellbeing

41%

Caring
responsibilities

35%

Control over work
and productivity

30% caring for children
and 11% caring for others

“I feel a lot more in control because not only have I got my family but my dad has dementia and my mum doesn't keep well so I'm kind of a carer for them as well. I can go 'you know what, I'm going to do all my (work) visits on these days so I can use that day for mum, that day for paperwork'. I'm just a lot more in control.”



Family support worker

“I had flexible working before Covid and it was purely for the fact I could start later and miss the rush hour in the morning. Everyone should be entitled to flexible working.”



Online retail officer

■ Employees said flex made a positive impact to their:

65%

Family and
home life

64%

Mental health and
wellbeing

55%

Physical health
and wellbeing

What was stopping greater flex?

Before the pandemic, more than a quarter (27%) of Scottish workers said they wanted flex but didn't have it. This was for a range of reasons, some squarely because employers weren't keen, others because workers themselves felt flex somehow didn't belong to them and their role.

■ The main reasons people gave us for not working flexibly were:

40% Flex wasn't available for my role

37% My employer didn't allow flexible working

23% Flex wasn't appropriate for my type of work

Pre-Covid, the idea of flex was simply not on the radar for many. Some couldn't see what flex would look like in certain industries, such as small trades, retail, construction, call centres, and small owner-operated businesses.

Others were concerned about trust. They worried about how their colleagues would feel if they began working flex, that they might be perceived as less committed, or classed as 'different'.

31% Almost a third of those earning less than £20,000 said flex wasn't appropriate for their type of work.

45% Younger workers (aged 18-34) were most likely to say their employer didn't allow flex

“Before Covid, if I'd seen that advert (for a job with flex) I would be wondering what it meant but I wouldn't even ask. Now I'd definitely ask because I'd be wanting to get it. But before Covid, I would've thought 'oh well, I'll not be allowed to do that'. I've been timed to go to the toilet in jobs before.”

 Family support worker

“When I applied for my own flexible working I found that the process was more for parents, more for people with more experience. It's very difficult to get it done for someone who was younger. I had to email different people, it dragged on and on. The compromise that was ultimately agreed was that I withdrew my formal application...to get an informal arrangement. But then Covid happened and that informal arrangement was worth nothing.”

 Online retail officer

The bigger flex picture

There was a lot of good flex in Scottish workplaces before the pandemic.
But it was abundantly clear there was huge room for improvement.

 $\frac{1}{6}$

Just one in six employers and employees felt flex was the norm in their workplace.

 $\frac{1}{3}$

A third of employers and employees reported that their workplace only offered a bare minimum of flex.



= Employee



= Employer

Barely flex

“We had basic/minimum flex opportunities”



34%



35%

Flex lite

“Some people worked flex but it's not yet embedded in our culture”



25%



17%

Pretty good flex

“Really good practices in place and many people work flex”



22%



23%

Exemplary flex

“Very flex work culture that's accepted as the norm”



18%



16%

Interestingly, employers and employees had similar perceptions of the amount of flex available. Though more employees (9%) ‘didn't know’ compared with just 1% of employers.

“Don't know”



1%



9%

Business benefits of flex

We asked employers what they felt the benefits of flex were, regardless of Covid and lockdown.



● Strongly agree or agree
 ● Neutral
 ● Strongly disagree or disagree
 ● Don't know

“We were doing what was right for the business and what's right for the people and if you do what's right for the people, more often than not you're going to get a more positive outcome for the business itself.”



R&W Scott

66% of employers agreed flex helps them in a number of areas.

83% of the largest employers were the most likely to agree flex helps them have a more diverse workforce.

81% of employers with 250-499 employees agreed that flex increases productivity.

78% of the largest employers agreed it reduced sickness/absence.

The number of 'don't knows' suggest some organisations are not measuring flex impacts, perhaps because they are sceptical or unaware of business benefits and the widespread evidence of them.

Sectoral differences

Our data shows differences in opinion about the use and value of flex across different industries. We have to be mindful that our sample sizes here are small, though our research does back existing data showing that sectors such as health, retail, construction and manufacturing find flex more challenging.

Clearly factory workers or healthcare professionals can't do their job from home. But we'd argue that some flex is usually possible in almost every role. Our 'Making Flex Happen' section includes creating a team protocol. This allows team members to come up with solutions themselves, and can be particularly helpful in sectors where managers may find it harder to see how flex fits.

“I'm trying to implement a new scheme (on a building site) where we can work three 10-hour shifts and then one 8-hour shift Monday to Thursday and then the Friday we take off. It's easing the traffic on the road...and the guys travelling on public transport, there's less chance of transferring infection.”



Construction contract manager

Standout points

You can cut data in so many ways and there many differences across sectors. We've recapped what we feel are the most standout points here. And if we've piqued your interest and you want more detail, we're very happy to provide it directly.



Profitability

Only **44%** of health organisations feel flex increases profit, compared with **71%** in professional, scientific and technical firms.



Diversity

93% of professional, scientific and technical firms, and **73%** of health organisations feel flex improves diversity. Whereas in retail, only **43%** feel flex makes a difference to diversity.



More work for managers

75% of manufacturing businesses feel flex makes more work for managers, compared with **47%** of those in health.



Productivity

Overall, **67%** of employers agree productivity is improved with flex while just **10%** say it's not. However, among financial and insurance firms, **50%** of employers feel flex workers are less productive.

“It's really hard to think about how our front facing staff might have the opportunity to work more flexibly when their shift patterns are driven by the opening times of the venues.”



Glasgow Life

Flex and Lockdown



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Flex during lockdown

Etched in our memories, March 2020 marked the start of our first national lockdown to combat Covid. In Scotland, more than a million workers decamped from their offices to set up at home, with very mixed experiences.

Many of us had to flex our usual work pattern. It wasn't necessarily our choice. We simply had to react to the crisis, whether that was line managers figuring out how best to communicate with employees remotely, or parents juggling work with home schooling.

61% of Scottish workers (who weren't furloughed) worked from home at least some of the time during lockdown,

46% Almost half worked exclusively from home

29% moved their hours around home responsibilities



But flex wasn't available for everyone. Who was not working flexibly?



“A really important part of what we do is client engagement at the front end, to understand what your business's needs are...[Lockdown] was a bit of a test for us because we were very much, we'll come and sit in the same room, read the room and look at the body language, and then all of a sudden it was 'who's saying that? Which boxes have a yellow perimeter on Zoom?'”



Consultancy Firm

“With the reduced orders, especially at the start of the pandemic, we had to flex our production hours and resource the factory to match changing customer demand. It wasn't a rigid plan from the start...and that's our normal way of working. But when the crisis started, it was a significant change because of the number of people that were furloughed.”



R&W Scott

“It was a whole new world because you weren't just working from home that odd day here or there. You were working from home five days a week, your kids were there and your husband was there. So we tried to support as much as we could in the sense of flexible working – just do what you can do, start earlier, take a couple of hours out in the afternoon, just work with your manager to understand what you need and what you don't need.”



Three

Positive impacts of lockdown

Lockdown was tough for so many reasons. But our new ways of working led to some unexpected benefits for many people, including saving money, more quality time with family and having a better work life balance.

I saved money on travel to and from work

41%

More quality family time

33%

A better work life balance

30%

Felt less stressed than usual

26%

More time to do the things I enjoy outside of work

24%

More control over when and how I worked

22%

Felt more productive at work

19%

None

21%

“ I always felt as if I was rushing here and rushing there, everything was just a mad rush. Since Covid I've slowed down and I'm not so stressed, I'm not so harassed. ”



Office manager

“ I've spent more time with my daughter and step-daughter and that just made life easier. Normally I wouldn't see them because by the time I'm home, they're off to bed. But this has made it a lot easier to have that connection, that bonding. ”



Software engineer

Those who worked out of the home during lockdown (47%), those aged 55+ years (30%) and those on lower household incomes (29%), were most likely to report no positive impacts.

Scottish workers reported negative impacts too

For all the unexpected benefits we've just covered, many people found lockdown incredibly hard. Feeling isolated and more stressed were most common, followed by people struggling to switch off from work and worrying about the future of their job.

Feeling lonely or isolated

31%

Felt more stressed than usual

26%

Found it hard to switch off from work

24%

Worried about job security and redundancy

23%

Worried about household finances

20%

Worked longer hours than usual

19%

Spent more money on household bills

18%

Lacked the space to work comfortably at home

16%

Felt less productive at work

16%

Struggled to juggle work and home life

13%

None

20%



Standout points



Women

Women were more likely than men to:

- Feel lonely
- Feel stressed
- Find it hard to switch off from work
- Worry about finances



Lower incomes

Those on personal or household incomes less than £20k were more likely to feel stressed, worry about finances and worry about job security.

“ I was working from a bedroom and I do compressed hours, so I was doing 10am to 8pm days stuck in my bedroom. It was a lot mentally.”



Telephone banking agent



Part-time workers

Part-time workers were more likely to be worried about finances, than full-time workers.



Higher incomes

Those on higher (£20k+) incomes reported working longer hours, found it harder to switch off from work.

“ When the kids were off and I was working from home and we were so busy changing our processes it was absolutely crazy. I had many a meltdown...I found myself working at 9pm or 10pm.”



Community justice mentor

Working from home

While not everyone's job can be done from home, more than 60% of Scottish workers did work from home during lockdown. This was on a scale never seen before. Pre-Covid just 12% of UK workers said they worked from home. The en-masse experience provoked mixed feelings for Scottish workers.

I missed social interaction with colleagues

51%

I struggled with the technology needed to work from home

13%

I felt my employer's expectations were unrealistic

10%

I felt my employer trusted me

44%

I felt supported by my employer

37%

I felt my manager communicated well with me

35%

I had autonomy over when and how to get my work done

31%

I worked at different times of the day or days of the week than normal – times that more suited me

29%

“If you're going to let people work remotely from home, you have to make sure they've got a proper set-up in their house. My son's got an office space but his girlfriend is just working from her home on the couch with her laptop and it's not ideal.”



Office manager

Wellbeing, care and support

The pandemic has brought wellbeing into sharp focus. Managers needed to know more about personal circumstances so they could keep employees safe, and colleagues have had a window (albeit virtual) directly into one another's homes. Partners, children, pets, home improvements and deliveries have all been visible on Zoom and Teams and a more human, empathetic approach has emerged.

Before lockdown

We asked people how much they felt their employer cared about their wellbeing before the pandemic.

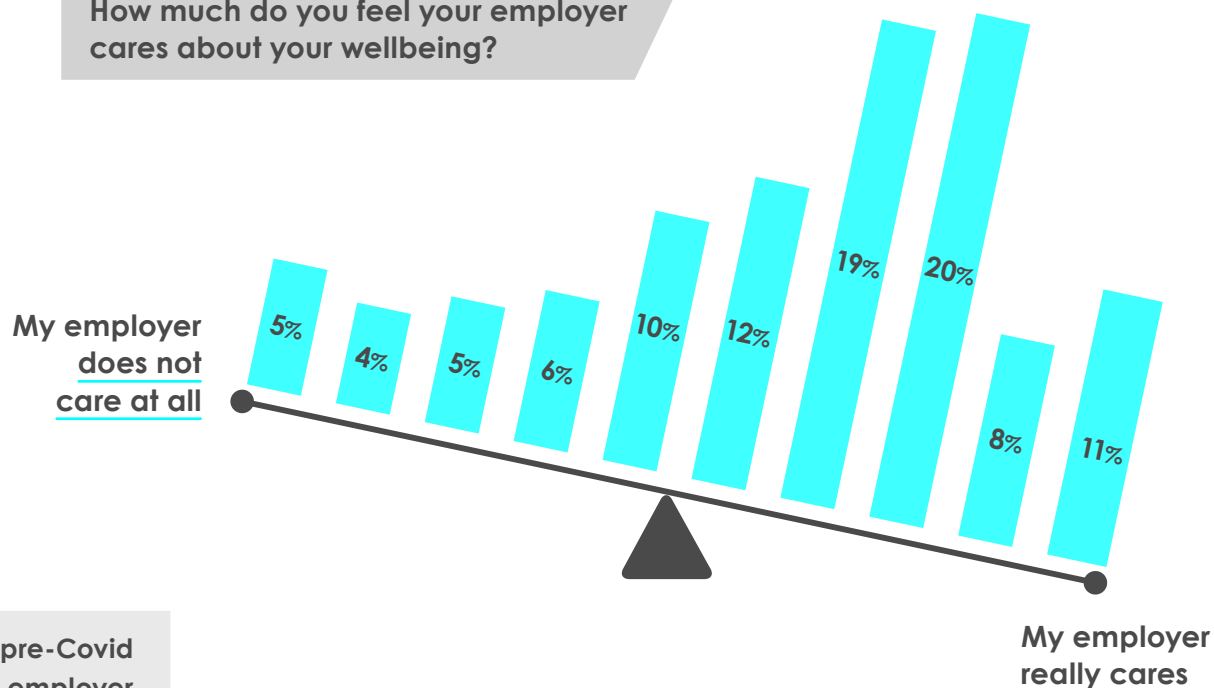
27% of those with flex pre-Covid rated their employer 9-10 for their care of wellbeing ...

... compared with 12% of those without flex

Interestingly, those who had flex pre-Covid were much more likely to feel their employer cared, and gave significantly higher scores.

Balance of opinion

How much do you feel your employer cares about your wellbeing?



During lockdown

We also asked employees how much support they were offered in lockdown. The results were fairly similar to the levels of care pre-Covid, suggesting that more caring employers offered greater support during the crisis. Again, flex workers gave higher scores.

36%

36% of those with flex gave 9-10 scores for their employer's support during lockdown ...

22%

... compared with 22% of those without flex

Those on lower incomes and in younger age groups were most likely to say their employer was less caring pre-Covid and less supportive during lockdown.

“I had to make sure what needed to be done was getting done, but more importantly to make sure that people were coping and were mentally adjusting to the change.”



A large firm in the construction industry

Balance of opinion

How much support were you offered during lockdown?

My employer is not supportive at all

“We've got a really good chief executive and he's promoting wellbeing at work with a flexible approach. So long as you get your outcomes done, you do that within your hours that suit you. He had wanted it to happen prior to lockdown and lockdown just forced us to get it up and running quicker. I feel really lucky. It makes my life easier...”

He's brought in counsellors... for our mental health and we have health and wellbeing coaches who give us classes. He really does care...and obviously he knows he gets more out of his staff.”



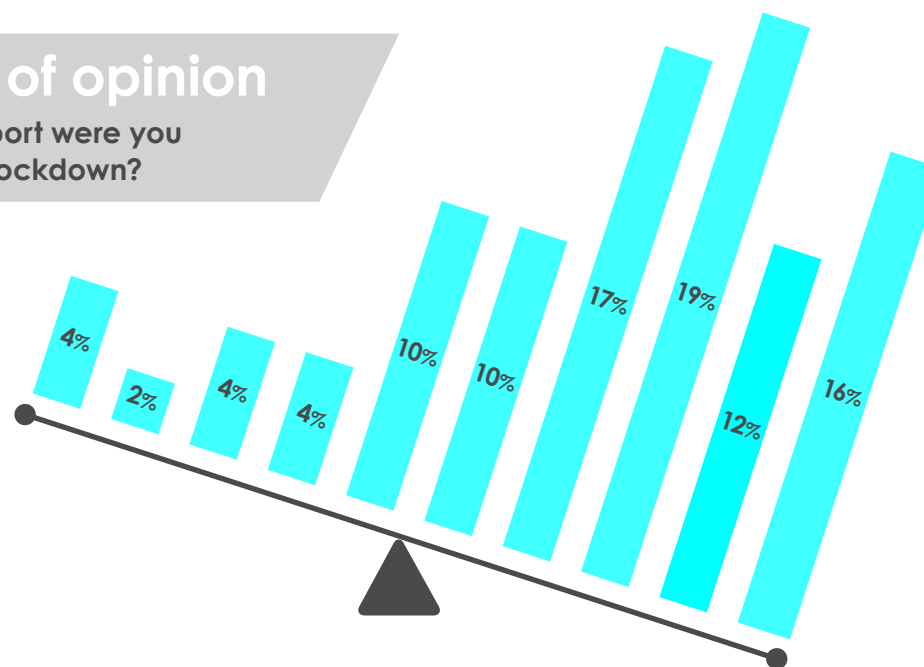
Community justice mentor

My employer is very supportive

“People have become more understanding since this all this happened. People are more aware of other people's situations. We were stuck in a rut before and it was like 'these are your shifts and that's it'. But since Covid people realise that if she can't do that, she should be able to swap with that person, or work from home if she can. I think there have been a lot of positives, a lot more understanding and flexibility.”



Office manager





Impact of flex on employers

The wholesale increase in flex for employees was an unexpected – sometimes unwanted – experiment for Scottish businesses. Fortunately, the vast majority discovered benefits in allowing staff to work more flexibly during the pandemic.

76%

said flex helped the business survive the first wave of the pandemic

“I guess people embracing change is such an important thing in business anyway, so this was an absolute case in point, if you didn't embrace change you wouldn't survive or prosper.”

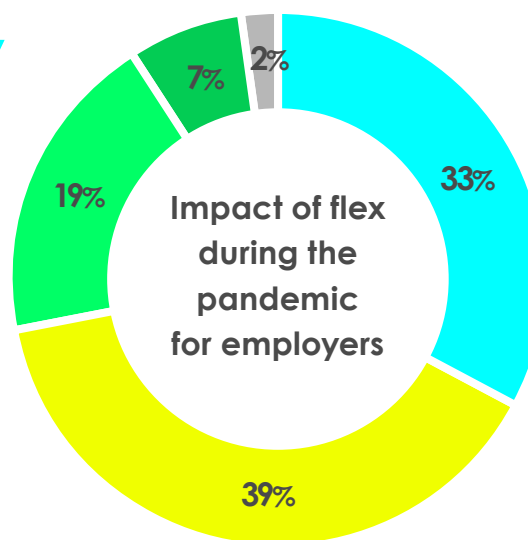


Brewin Dolphin

“It's a two-way street and I think that definitely came through. The collaboration across different teams, people being agile and actually working with teams that you've never worked with before and learning about different things.”



Three



- Very positive
- Fairly positive
- No difference
- Very negative
- Don't know

Flex benefitted employers during Covid

Enabled us to deliver key objectives



Supported employee wellbeing



Improved work life balance across the business



Reduced costs



Increased employee loyalty



Reduced sickness and absence



Improved productivity



Improved employee engagement



Improved equality amongst employees



Improved employee retention



Increased engagement with clients/customers



Increased profits



“When you are so flexible, and provide choice, you get greater engagement and output. That's not why we do it. We do it so that people have a full work life balance. Work and home life are intrinsically linked, and we recognise that.”



“Everything is based on results and we've delivered. Projects have been delivered very quickly. It exploded the myth you have to be in front of someone to get results out of them. It is evidenced by the fact reports have been sent out in time, client meetings have been arranged, we're just fulfilling our brief to clients.”



TOP 10

Business lessons learned

To help you plan more flex in your organisation, we've digested the data so far and pondered the findings from our deep-dive interviews with 14 Scottish employers who each handled the pandemic slightly differently. These organisations were from the public, private and voluntary spheres, as well as reflecting a range of business sizes, industry sectors and geographic locations. The result is a (hopefully) helpful and handy set of common lessons learned by companies like yours when they offered more flex.

1 Performance is separate from flex

The pandemic proved people could still meet objectives, despite working in a different place, or at different times. Managers learned to trust their employees and realised flex itself had no impact on getting work done.

You know that poor performers will be poor performers whether they are working flexibly or not. This is where flexible working works hand-in-hand with robust performance management processes, setting clear objectives and managers being confident to deal with any performance issues as and when they arise.

“You realise we can still work from home. We can still deliver. What we're delivering isn't any less. For some people, they're delivering more because they've not got a commute or they've got more headspace, they can take time out and are not running from meeting to meeting.”



“We are fortunate at the National Park to have fantastic staff and they adapted well to the unique circumstances we have all been working with this past year. Everyone played their part and flexibility was key to enabling this. It is amazing to see what we have achieved.”



Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park

2 Home working works but not always

Enforced home working showed it was perfectly possible to work effectively from home. But not everyone wants to, or at least, not all the time. And most people really missed the social interaction from the office. Our experiences show we still need offices where people can work and also meet, work collaboratively and creatively and socialise. Businesses also found that peer support, and learning and training opportunities were often much better in face-to-face office environments.

“There are people who previously had wanted to [work from home who] are now saying, ‘No, it’s not for me. I want to go back in the office environment.’”



“We always assumed that our front-line student services had to work in the office. We now know that that’s not true. Though we also do know that performance is better in the office and that’s to do with the robustness of IT systems and network connectivity, and also having other peers and managers around to offer on-the-spot staff support, development and training etc. I think going forward, we can have a mixed model.”



3 Flexing time can work too

Many staff were allowed to flex their hours to help companies comply with social distancing guidelines or accommodate home responsibilities, such as home schooling. Some people worked earlier, or later in the day, and employees and employers alike realised not all roles needed to fit into the 9am to 5pm traditional working day. Many flexed their work successfully across seven days.

“We’re fortunate we’ve got a committed team so we didn’t have to remind people they still had responsibilities, we just almost gave them permission to decide their own hours as appropriate and the only check we were doing was just making sure people weren’t working at 4am.”



“It’s breaking that mindset, isn’t it? We’ve shown that we can work round people and work round different hours. It has equalised things between our academic and operational staff.”



4 Cutting travel saves time, money and the environment

Many employers are drastically re-evaluating how much and how far people should travel. Face-to-face meetings are still recognised as important. But employers say they will question whether the travel – and time lost travelling – are worth it now they know video meetings are also effective.

“Let’s not just jump in a car and drive 100 miles or 150 miles for the sake of it, let’s actually think about it because we now know we can provide service and support virtually and we were geared for that.”



Brewin Dolphin

5 Communication methods had to change

The instant transition to home working meant organisations, managers and teams had to focus on new ways of communicating. Sometimes there was too much, sometimes too little. Teams had to work out whether phone or video calls, emails or WhatsApp messages worked best for work, and also for social and team-building purposes. Most employers talked about the necessity of increasing company and team-wide communications to keep people connected and to maintain clarity about objectives. Some employers reported greater collaboration across teams once physical meetings and 'normal' protocols weren't followed. Many employers noted the importance of good two-way communications, with the onus of checking-in and updating not always falling to the manager.

“We had these great calls set up where different execs would come on, just chatting to all staff members on a Teams call to say ‘this is what we’re doing’ and just being as honest as they can. Also, what our senior execs were doing during that period was talking openly about the bits of lockdown they were struggling with and it just felt really human and real.”



Brewin Dolphin

“Comms has been the most important thing, letting people know that they’re important and what is happening.”



City Building

6 Fairness and consistency is vital

Employers have been working out how to offer flexibility fairly, understanding that not everyone can work flexibly the same way. This has been an issue for line managers within teams and across whole organisations. Pre-Covid, many felt that if some people couldn't work flex, then no one should. The Covid experience has shown that a fair principle and a fair process is actually accepted by staff, even when it leads to different outcomes.

“ Obviously a joiner can't do blended working.

As a business we didn't facilitate working from home other than on a very selective basis for people doing particular projects. It tended to be more senior people. We had taken the view that because the front line couldn't do it, it was unfair to facilitate other staff doing it. Lockdown has demonstrated that not only can more flex be done but it can be done effectively.”



“ We have to be open minded, and employees as well have to be open minded, in terms of what is workable and what isn't workable and as long as you're being open-minded, fairness and consistency is key across anything. I think we've got a journey to go on and I think in a couple of years we will look different.”



A large firm in the construction industry

7 Role-modelling flex shows what's 'normal'

Teams all had to work differently, including managers learning to manage differently, and organisations had to support them. Blogs, vlogs and personal updates from CEOs and senior leaders helped reassure staff that everyone was working differently, feeling thrown by the situation, and this was ok and normal.

“ Our chief executive has done a weekly video that has very much focused on the fact we understand everybody has a life outside work, and at the moment, that life has been turned upside-down. The other thing he's been quite clear on is making sure you're taking breaks.”



“ I've had a few issues with some more senior staff who want to be in the office, I'm saying 'absolutely not because you're setting the wrong example'. If people see a senior person in, then they will feel they should be in.”



8 Wellbeing matters

Lockdown forced employers to focus on staff wellbeing, and on long hours and entrenched presenteeism. The experience of giving people more control over when and where they worked revealed this autonomy helped workers' sense of wellbeing. Some employers also began discussing workloads, and are beginning to think about how much employees are expected to do and whether this is reasonable – or in some cases even possible.

“Across my team we were able to build in one-to-one support that was about friendship and collegiate support, rather than from an organisation and HR perspective. There's been a huge display of kindness and care across the organisation.”



The Open University in Scotland

“We were absolutely clear for all staff that wellbeing has to be a focus for them, looking after their own wellbeing. But also managers thinking about their staff, not just in terms of working longer hours but facing the environment we were in and the situation that was unfolding around them.”



Fife Council

9 IT can't be an afterthought

Unsurprisingly, companies that transitioned well to home working had good IT and infrastructure in place. Employers learned this is essential for business continuity and shouldn't be left to chance in future.

“All of our managers, have been trained to support our agile and flexible staff – managing our staff from home. Our full staff have been equipped with laptops and home working equipment for the last two years. We've been so very, very fortunate, but we have, over the years, been prepared for our business continuity plan to be actioned and all the training supporting this has helped this as well.”



ILF Scotland

10 Upskilling and cross-training helps business continuity

Employers learned that having more people who could cover and carry out specific tasks and processes in a crisis was important for business resilience. But it also presented good training and personal development opportunities for staff.

“We have various teams across the business involved in major projects behind the scenes and they would never have been involved in any of that before. But we knew the people we normally ask to do that are really busy, so let's look around the business and look at who's not at capacity. It's really exciting for everyone because maybe when people get back into offices this will create different opportunities for people within the business.”



Brewin Dolphin

“During Covid, we started to share different job roles. Within a big shared location we would have someone who didn't need to be a specialist of this or that division, but they could do some back office work for both divisions, or they could drive for both divisions. This worked, so we're going to try to do more of that.”



A large firm in the construction industry



The Future of Flex



#FlexForLife

Introduction

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Pre-Covid

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Aspirations for a more flexible future

Everyone agrees the world has changed because of the pandemic. We've managed an entire year working in different places and at different times.

It's been hard work, utterly exhausting at times. But our collective hard work has proved – even to the mightiest of naysayers – that businesses continue to function, even function well, when people can work more flexibly. The notion of flex has shifted for many people from something enforced and timebound because of the pandemic, to something we could all benefit from forever. Employers and employees alike anticipate more flex in the workplace as we emerge from Covid.

81%



of employees say Covid has changed the way we work forever

78%



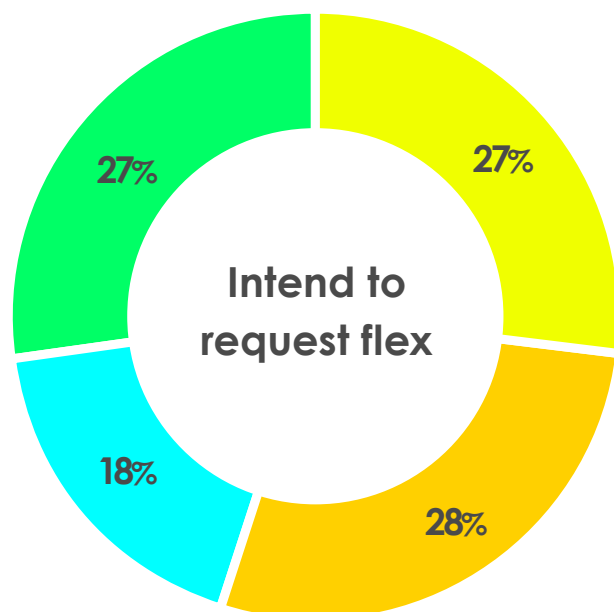
of employers say Covid has permanently changed how, when and where we work



Who wants flex now?

55%

Over half of Scottish workers say they are considering requesting more flex in the future. This includes many who didn't work flexibly before Covid.



34%

Younger workers aged 18-34 were **more likely** than other age groups to say 'yes, definitely', showing the extra value younger workers place on work life balance.

- Yes, definitely
- I'm considering it
- Not sure
- No

69%

of all Scottish workers say flex would make a positive difference to their work life balance

39%

18-34 year olds **more likely** to agree strongly with this ...

33%

... and those with personal income more than £20k **more likely** to agree

“we all asked about three or four years ago if we could do home working and we were told our IT department could never support it. Covid has proved they can.”

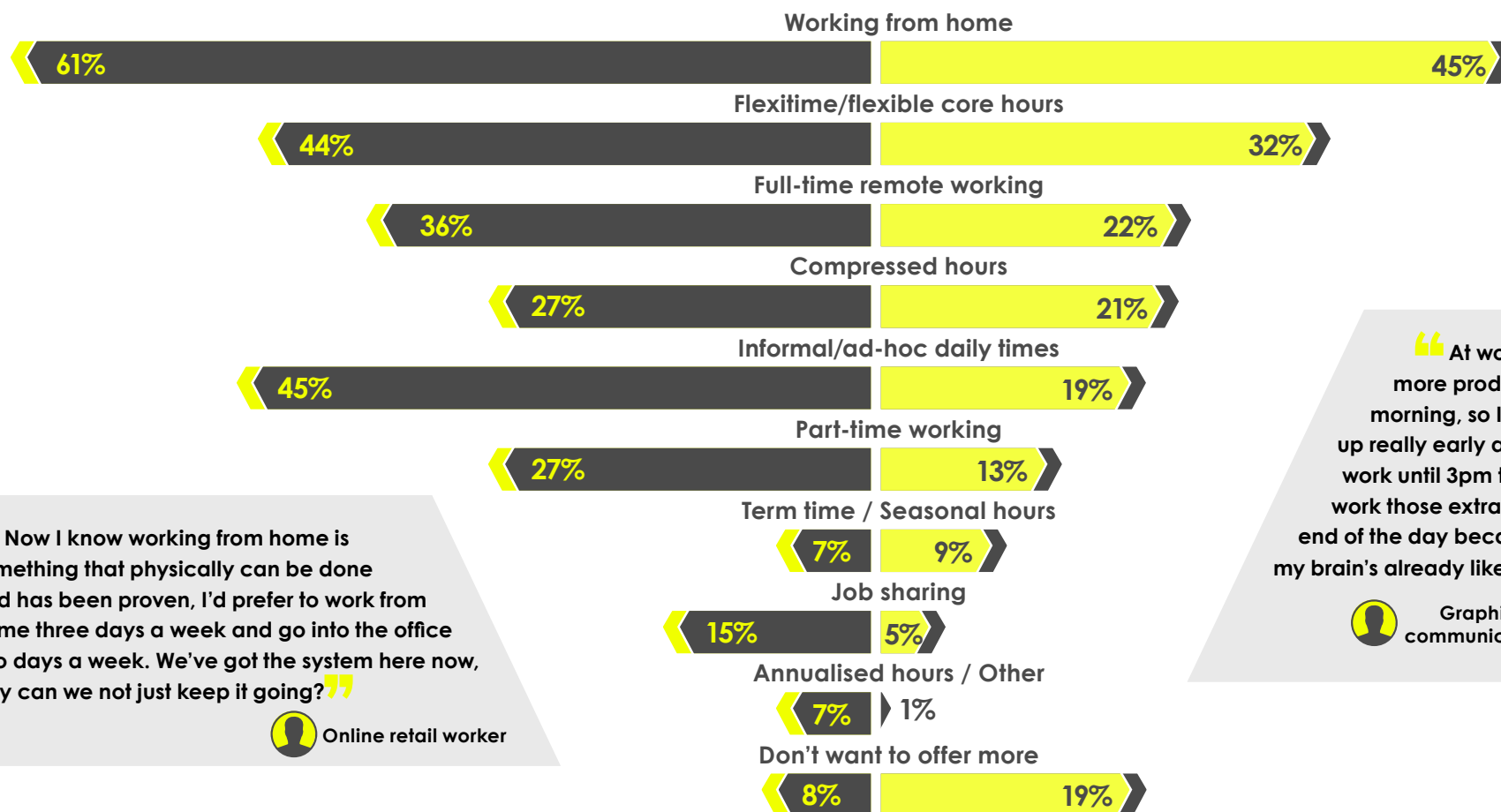


Local government finance officer

What kind of flex?

Most people want relatively small changes such as more working from home or amending their start and finish times. Few want to reduce their hours. The good news is that many employers are already expecting to offer more of the informal and ad-hoc flex that employees say they want.

Expected employer supply ↔ Employee demand



“Now I know working from home is something that physically can be done and has been proven, I'd prefer to work from home three days a week and go into the office two days a week. We've got the system here now, why can we not just keep it going?”



Online retail worker

“At work I'm much more productive in the morning, so I'd rather get up really early and do some work until 3pm than have to work those extra hours at the end of the day because by then my brain's already like 'wahey'!”



Graphic design and communications officer

Dodging flex pitfalls

Before you roll out greater flex, there are some big-picture issues to consider.

1. Don't be duped by false flex

True flexibility is about having choice and control. Enforced home working, or working while simultaneously home schooling or carrying out other care responsibilities, is not true flex.

And true flex doesn't materialise overnight without planning and preparation to help it run smoothly.

People might think they've been working flexibly. But if they had no choice in the matter, they weren't. Much of the so-called flexibility during Covid has, in fact, been false flex. Employees and employers might have been put off flex because of bad experiences during the pandemic, so it's important to be clear. The benefits of flex, from wellbeing to greater productivity, will only materialise when true flex is in place. It's a given that flex needs to work for the role, the

team and the wider organisation, but remember true flex is achieved when employees feel that they have choice and control around where, when and how long they work. You have arrived at true and genuine flex when it runs through the core of the organisation.

“There's a difference between people asking for flexible working and...people who are forced into something that could be conceived as flexible working but it's (only being done) because it suits the organisation. The organisations that have just shut their offices, I know that suits some people but it doesn't necessarily suit all people. It's not necessarily the right thing for them, or good for their mental health.”



HR officer





2. Make flex a great equaliser

Flexibility can be a force for good. It can help people enter the work force, stay in work and progress to better skilled or higher paid roles.

Increasingly, flex is seen as a way of working for everyone, not just for working mums, and all this helps close the gender pay gap, as well as creating more equal workplaces for everyone.

62% of employees said the pandemic has opened up more opportunities for flex which will reduce inequalities in the workplace

52% said flex would allow them to maximise their income.
57% of employers said the same.

But as we emerge from Covid new divides could open up, such as differences in how remote workers are treated compared with those in the office.

If tasks and opportunities are divvied to those in the office first, remote workers, who are more likely to be women, could miss out. Managers will need to be extra mindful and inclusive to avoid this. Employers will also need to think carefully about who can access flex and how this fits with career progression.

Access to flex

18% Almost 1 in 5 employers said access to flex wasn't equal across their organisation.

47% Nearly half of employers felt people in higher skilled roles had more access to flex and **44%** said people in higher salary roles had greater access to flex.

71% This is worse in some sectors – 71% of health employers think higher skilled roles means greater access to flex.

Progression and earnings

19%

1 in 5 women said flex had a negative impact on their earning potential, as did a quarter (**24%**) of those earning less than £20K and **28%** of those in low income households (household income less than £20K).

20%

of those in low income households felt their career progression was negatively impacted.

28%

For context, more than a quarter of employees we surveyed earned less than £20K. Of these, **76%** were women.

Applied well, flex can be a powerful force in tackling inequalities in the workplace. But managers must consider flex as something universal and present through entire career lifecycles to avoid creating new problems.

“I was looking at other jobs with more money and I had got interviews...but I ended up not going due to the flexibility my employer gives me – because I can do all the things [I want] as a mum whereas if I'd gone with these other employers, I wouldn't have had that.”



Community justice mentor

“The diversity of the organisation that we are...means we need to be much more receptive to flexibility that is a much wider concern as opposed to just about homeworking or working part time because you're a mum and you need to do the school pick up.”



Fife Council





3. You'll need to keep winning hearts and minds

Despite a major mindset shift during Covid, there are still significant numbers of managers who are resistant to flex.

52% of managers think flex means more work for line managers

30% think flex workers are less committed to their careers

29% think flex workers are less productive

There's lots of robust evidence that flex is good for business, increasing engagement and productivity and reducing sickness absence and recruitment costs to name just a few. Flex isn't a favour to staff and it has to work for business too.

But changing processes and ingrained cultures is not easy. Read on for our tips on 'how to make it happen', or contact us and we can help you engage and influence sceptics.

“Our culture of self-directiveness is obviously within a framework of things that we still need to do. For example, as Chief Exec I still want financial reporting five days after the end of month. So the autonomy is there, but so is the responsibility to deliver those things that you're responsible for.”



ENABLE Scotland

“If you've got a line manager that says 'well I'll give you it because basically I have to because the policy says I have to' that's really different to somebody saying 'that's great, I'll work with you on that'.”



HR officer

Making Flex Happen



#FlexForLife

How to make flex happen

Your journey to a more flexible future starts here.

Now you've got the data. You know flex is desired by all kinds of employees for all kinds of reasons, not just mums. We've shown you the benefits Scottish workers have experienced with greater flex this last year in terms of work life harmony and wellbeing. And we've shown you how the majority of Scottish businesses have found benefits from flex too, such as reduced costs, increased staff loyalty and simply – but crucially – enabling them to deliver to customers despite the pandemic.

The future looks like greater flex all round. While location is important, there will also likely be more flex on hours.

But we've also learned what we don't like during the pandemic, and many people are desperate to return to the office. Those jobs that can be done remotely are likely to become a hybrid of home and office working. Hopefully we've reassured you not everyone is going to demand full-time remote working and most people are simply looking for small adjustments.

Here's the nitty gritty. A dozen practical things you can start doing right now to encourage more flexibility in your own organisation.

“What we're seeing now is more of a recognition that the output and productivity is actually more important to (us) than somebody sitting at their desk for seven hours and 12 minutes per day.”



12 steps to flex

1 Focus on outcomes not just hours

Think about what people get done, rather than how many hours they've clocked up. It's a much better measure of success and efficiency.

2 Find out what people want and canvass ideas

People often want only small amounts of flexibility and come up with team solutions themselves. Workers are tuned into the needs of the business and they're generally realistic about the flex that's possible for their roles, teams and the wider organisation. Take time to truly listen to your people.



3 Establish a team protocol

Involve the whole team in discussions about objectives/deliverables. Agree how, and where people are working and how to contact them. Be clear about who is available when and where. Use digital diaries and e-signatures as reminders. The team can agree how frequently everyone needs to meet face-to-face formally and informally and set core hours/slots for this. The protocol can be reviewed regularly as circumstances change, and helps everyone feel included and informed.

4 Think about job design

Understand that some roles are dependent on location or time – or not. This can open up new ways of thinking about how best to provide choice and control for your employees. Look at both existing and new roles and work out what flexibility is possible.

“If we can't give flexibility to them, how do we remain attractive as an employer? We will have to start thinking about answers before we have retention issues in future years. Unless we start to get into the depth of this and understand it better, it will catch up on us before we know it.”



A large public sector body

5 Avoid 'flex haves' and 'have nots'

We need to avoid a new divide between remote and office workers, so tasks are not divvied first among those in the office and latterly to remote workers, who are more likely to be women. Make sure your meetings are when everyone can attend (in person or virtual) and that out of sight does not mean out of mind.

6 Lead with your values

Flex is generally more successful when based around a set of well communicated values. The pandemic has brought about more kindness and empathy from employers, and more human leadership, which usually creates better results from employees.

7 Model 'good' behaviour from the top down

Ensure you have senior buy-in and normalise flexible working by showcasing executive flexible work patterns in everyday conversations (make sure your leaders shout 'goodbye' loudly if they're leaving 'early') and via your internal communication channels.

8 Invest in training and support for line managers

They may feel nervous about managing remote team members, or feel unsure of the value in working flexibly. Training will ensure they understand the benefits – on both sides – and establish positive, two-way communications.



9 Allow honest communication

Whether it's personal, or all-company, greater communication and honesty has helped firms weather the pandemic. Wellbeing is fast rising up corporate agendas and it all starts with being able to have a conversation. In addition, how we build team dynamics and company culture in the 'new normal' will look different in each organisation. Good, open communication will be key.

10 Keep thinking about wellbeing

This goes hand-in-hand with flex. Happy, healthy employees will be able to focus better, take less time off sick and stay with you for longer, all of which is good for your bottom line.

“We've proven we can do it, everything was still achieved, we've still got clients, we're still working away so I think that was a massive shift in people understanding that we can do it.”



Graphic design and communications officer

11 Don't ditch your office

While the pandemic has proved many people can work from home, our research shows not everyone wants to. Having space for work as well as meetings, creative sessions and socialising and wellbeing will still be important.

12 Consider your reputation

Increasingly organisations with more ethical practices are winning more business. If you can show how you consistently meet customer needs while also being a modern, flexible and caring employer, you're more likely to attract top new talent and clients. Make sure you mention this in job adverts and during recruitment.

“Employers have to realise this is the way forward and they will be left behind if they don't keep up. Especially because so many people are now seeing the benefit and they won't move if they're not offered the same. Times are changing and that [offering flex] is just what you have to do as an organisation now to be modern and attract the right people.”



HR officer

Final thoughts

As we finally begin to move on from Covid, and lift our heads out of a long year of fire-fighting and crisis operations, we hope you will seize the opportunity to make changes to your workplace for the better.

There's been so much disruption and change. Let's hold on to what we've discovered works, and let go of what doesn't.

We firmly believe that flexibility is for life. It's not for specific people, or specific situations. It's good for everyone – all the time. And that applies whether you're a single employee, or a huge corporate business.

From a business perspective, you've probably realised we're talking about culture change. Policies and procedures are useful to a point. But true flex stems from a mindset.

We want to show managers you don't need to start a scary-sounding revolution. What most people want are small, common-sense changes, and often teams come up with the best solutions if you just give them permission to think like this.

We know culture change takes time and is not always easy. You'll need to hear from others with similar goals to learn what's going well and what isn't for them too. That's why we've included three business stories next, to show you what's happening right now in organisations like yours.

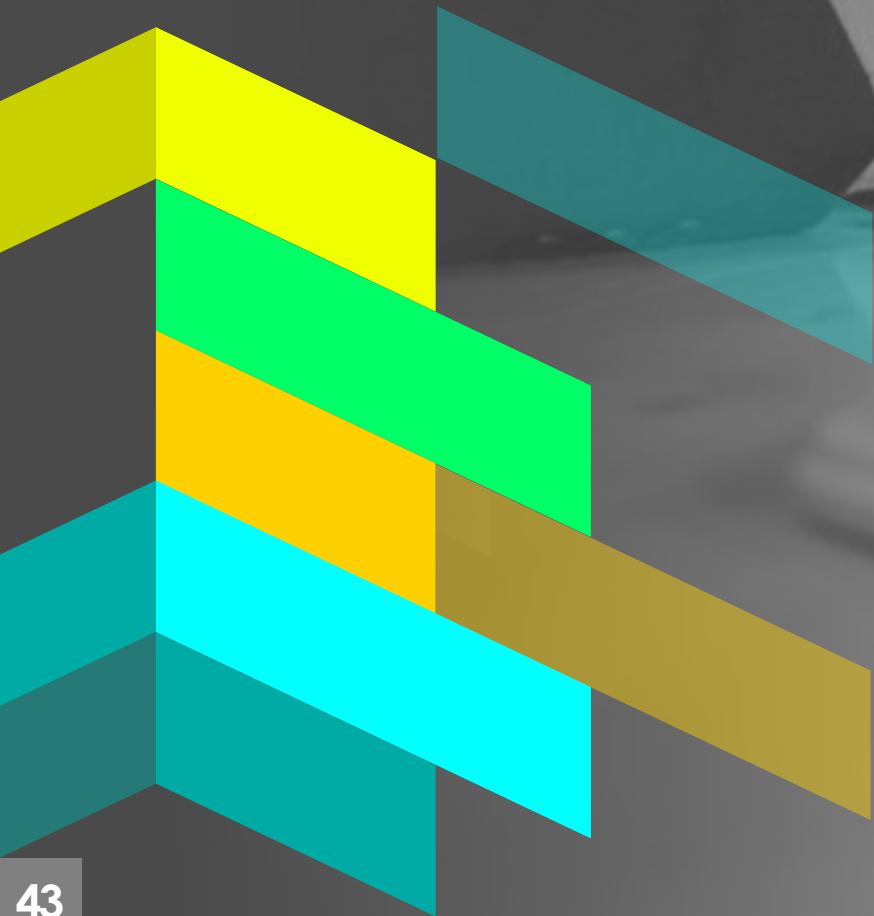
And if you need a little extra help, we're right here to support you too.

flexibilityworks provides practical training, support and coaching to employers to help create a flexible culture, which offers significant business benefits. With a practical and creative approach, we can help your business and people to work in a more flexible way.

Call or email us today for more information

E: hello@flexibilityworks.org | T: 0141 378 8330

Business Stories



#FlexForLife

Introduction

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City Building | Construction

1 Pre-Covid

City Building is one of Scotland's largest construction companies with around 2,000 employees. No staff were laid off during the pandemic. Many were furloughed, 67% were not working. Not all could be furloughed as a small number of jobs are funded by grant income. Everyone was kept on full pay, including agency and temporary workers

2 Adjusting to lockdown

City Building delivered emergency repairs and kept up core functions, such as finance and communications from its Head Office.

All construction sites closed as well as City Building's training college and factory which manufactures kitchens and furniture.

As fewer staff were needed, those who continued to work did shorter days. Those who could work from home and needed to deliver services were prioritised for IT kit and support.

The organisation took a task-based and very flexible approach to working from home. They kept a careful eye on workloads and our HR helpline meant people could make contact any time.

“ We didn't need [people to work full-time hours] because we said it's task based. So, if you've got invoices to pay, you need to pay your invoices by X date to make the run for the payments etc. We were very flexible, because bearing in mind the schools were off as well, we know that people were balancing.”

Staff wellbeing was a priority. A new intranet section provided access to financial advice, occupational health, virtual physiotherapy sessions and mindfulness training. A counselling service was open to family members too.

The company kept in touch with people who were shielding, and have been doing individual risk assessments to assess when and how it will be safe for them to return to work.

“ We had over 100 people that told us that they were shielding at the outset, we just accepted that all at face value, anyone that told us they were self isolating... we've managed through this.”

Communication was a key area priority action, not just by the communications team but for the executive team as a whole. Daily, then twice weekly, then weekly messages were issued. But the onus was on individual managers to keep in touch with their teams as well.



Business Stories: City Building

“There’s been communication from day one. What we’ve said is – you need to tell us what’s happening with you, we’ll tell you what’s happening with the business. Please keep in touch.”

During the extreme challenges of lockdown, the business did not measure performance. But feedback from clients showed workers went above and beyond expectations.

“We’ve had probably more letters of praise and correspondence about how people have approached them in their homes.”

Working flexibly helped to keep the business going.

“I think the home working has worked much better than anybody had envisaged. We’ve managed to communicate with each other, finally came into the 21st century and we are using Microsoft Teams now.”

“The flexibility of shorter days and less shifts worked significantly, albeit people were on full pay. What we found was they were prepared to do a bit more, so we recognise that the flexibility we were offering [meant that] if they were asked to catch a job or whatever, they were happy to do that. There have been benefits to the business.”

“The key thing is recognition by our management team that flexibility can work. Now people recognise that it is doable, and it is about output rather than time and location.”

“We’re getting there in terms of prioritising the tasks that need doing... and that’s been a decent learning curve for managers. They tended to think it would only be senior people or people they would trust that could work from home.”

City Building has realised that managing performance and managing flexible workers are two distinctive things.

They have also realised there will be limited demand for home working in the future as many prefer being in the office; that some routine tasks dropped during lockdown don’t need to be reinstated; and that authentic two-way communication with staff enables greater two-way trust.



3 Challenges

Persuading managers to support home working outside lockdown

Some managers doubted remote working could work in more general terms.

“It was about persuading the manager that people would be working and they would do what needed to be done, and making it task based rather than time bound. Some of our managers didn't think that it was going to be able to work. A benefit of lockdown was we didn't have that level of choice, so this has moved us on significantly.”

A working from home policy was developed and managers were reminded they should set an example by continuing to work from home where possible when offices reopened, in line with Scottish Government guidance.

Managing returners so people feel it's fair

Staff members will be asked to return at different times and this may cause resentment if people are anxious about safety. Clarity about roles and business areas is important, and two-way communication enables the business to answer questions as they arise.

Protecting mental health of those not yet working

Communication and sensitive support will be required for those still not working so they feel valued and secure.

4 Flex in future?

Flexing hours and time, based on agreed output

Staff with defined tasks such as repair and maintenance will have the autonomy to manage their time.

“If you've got all your jobs in the morning and you're finished by 2:30pm, then unless an emergency comes in, we're not going to send you another job...[Before Covid] if you were only working part of the day, we were only paying you part of the day. What we want to do now is pay everybody full pay and get the best out of them. That would be a significant change. Giving control to the worker.”

Blended working will be more common.

“Obviously a joiner can't do blended working. As a business we didn't facilitate working from home other than on a very selective basis for people doing particular projects. We had taken the view that because the front line couldn't do it, it was unfair to facilitate the [office] staff being able to do it. So, we were very old fashioned. Lockdown has demonstrated not only can it be done but it can be done effectively.”

Flexibility for trades-people on-site

For the foreseeable future, it will not be possible to have full teams on a construction site because of social distancing. Seven day working but with reduced numbers may result in a four-days-on, four-days-off pattern, with slightly longer days. This will be assessed for its longer-term effectiveness.

Brewin Dolphin | Wealth Management

1 Pre-Covid

Brewin Dolphin is a wealth management firm employing around 2,150 staff – of whom 40 are based in Glasgow – and managing over £50Bn in assets across 30 offices. The business continued to grow during 2020. No staff were furloughed or made redundant.

2 Adjusting to lockdown

All but two offices were closed completely, and everyone bar about 30 staff moved to home working. Digital investment over the previous few years meant the business was already geared up for remote working. Staff dialled in through a virtual private network, and the business functioned as normal, but remotely.

But even for a business already accustomed to flexible working, this was a major shift. Before lockdown, about 95% of staff had been office-based so experience of working remotely was not extensive.

Key to a smooth implementation was central support, for managers and for staff, and the importance the leadership placed on communication.

The business focused on the human impact of lockdown, and prioritised the physical and mental wellbeing of the staff. Within the first couple of days, staff were offered £100 each to help with adjusting to home working; and health and safety assessments were carried out, **where appropriate**.

“It was up to leaders at a local level to make sure we could cascade the information we were getting from the business, so that we could reassure people, deal with all of their concerns. It's all about information, isn't it? When these things happen.”

Because Brewin Dolphin has to ensure its service to investors is maintained, individual targets were not reduced during lockdown. However, people were working from home, many with care responsibilities or home schooling. It was an advantage that line managers have no more than eight in their teams, and they had the autonomy to offer very personalised support.

“Particularly with schools being off, that had a big impact on families, so we were very insistent that people had to deal with those things first and then fit in the meetings. As things have been adjusting over time, they've been able to deal with that a bit more. So people have probably extended their working day, but had more flexibility during the day.”



Business Stories: Brewin Dolphin

Leaders were open about the challenges facing the business, and themselves personally. Frank communication across the business paid dividends in engagement.

“ We had these great calls where different Execs would come on, just chatting to say 300 staff members, to say ‘this is what we’re doing’ and just being as honest as they could. Also [they] were talking openly about the bits of lockdown they were struggling with. It just felt really human and real.”

“ The feedback from the staff opinion survey is that engagement has been really high, and interestingly, whilst a really difficult situation, staff are generally saying they actually feel closer to the business.”

Prior investment in IT enabled the initial seamless transition to working from home. New digital processes resulted in efficiencies and productivity increased, despite the challenges of working in lockdown.

“ We probably made more strides in two months than we would have in the previous two years in terms of being forced to adopt digital practices. It makes you change, makes the businesses change. I guess people embracing change is such an important thing in business anyway so this was an absolute case in point, if you didn’t embrace change you wouldn’t survive.”

3 Challenges

Not everyone enjoys working from home

Line managers had to be aware of the impact of isolation, or of not having a suitable or safe home environment, or simply of personal preferences, and offer appropriate support.

Managing performance remotely was NOT a challenge

Managers had been used to having their team in the office, but because teams are small, people knew each other well, so trust when it came to remote working was not an issue. They have realised that managing performance and flexible working are two very different things and have to be handled as such.

Volume of comms to begin with

Getting the balance right with comms took time, but the result was improved, more thoughtful, communication between senior managers.

“ I would say that at the initial period, it probably felt as though we had too many meetings, and then thankfully, we all relaxed, adjusted and adapted.”

“ Between the senior employees in the office there was more communication because you had to do it that way, because you weren’t seeing folks in the office.”



Business Stories: Brewin Dolphin

How to deliver new business, without face-to-face meetings

Brewin Dolphin deals with financial advisor firms, whose clients' assets they manage. Making the firm's own internal resources available to clients as value-added services (for example, around building staff resilience, or making better use of social media) has built goodwill and supported continuing new business development.

“We very quickly geared up to saying, how can we support these people who give us business who are also business owners, who have their own challenges, and who are also adapting to working from home...”

4 Flex in future?

Expect hybrid working to become established as the norm

“It will be more flexible, but not at the expense of productivity and development. So that's evolving, but all those difficult questions are getting asked just now. It won't be everybody working in the office all the time, and it won't be everybody working at home all the time, it will be some sort of half-way house, depending on people's styles of jobs, their work life balance, whether they are business winners or support staff.”

Flexible working, especially hybrid patterns, will enable the business to support employee wellbeing and mental health.

“[A couple of my team] said to me 'I'm really enjoying working from home. When lockdown ends will there be an option to be more flexible?' I didn't even have to think about that twice. Of course, because if you're telling me that for your wellbeing, productivity and general happiness levels, it is going to be better for you, and therefore we're going to get the best of out of you if you work from home a day or two a week, no problem. The ability to embrace the concept of agile working will be key to our success in the future.”

Better use of technology will improve quality of life and also reduce business costs.

It's been proven that targets can be met, and productivity maintained or increased, without spending time travelling for in-person meetings. Although some face to face will continue, especially for establishing new relationships, less travel is likely in future, saving costs and time.

There will be much less presenteeism

The equality of everyone working from home has broken the assumption that presence equates to performance.

Cross-organisation communications will be retained and developed

The whole-organisation communications that were initially simply a response to lockdown have proved their worth, in breaking down silos and enabling increased cross-organisation sharing and learning.

R&W Scott- Food & Drink | Manufacturing

1 Pre-Covid

R&W Scott has been handcrafting jams and preserves from Carluke for more than 130 years.

The impact of the pandemic on the business has been difficult, although not critical to its survival. Before Covid, the firm had 97 employees, most of whom worked in production. More than half the staff were furloughed, with some redundancies.

The culture for office staff and managers was based on delivery rather than hours at the desk, although offsite working was used only occasionally.

2 Adjusting to lockdown

In response to the drop in business, reduced numbers of production staff remained on site.

As the furlough scheme became more flexible, they were able to bring back some people part time, and to furlough people in and out. This was important especially for colleagues who had been working full time and flat out from the start of lockdown, to give them a break.

The production area is large, and so with reduced staff numbers there were few issues around social distancing. Health and safety and hygiene was not a challenge because running a food facility meant they already met very high standards.

Very few office staff worked from home pre-Covid. But 80% were homebased during lockdown. Good IT infrastructure was in place and, just as importantly, so was the mindset to support working from home.

“We have an advantage over our bigger competitors in that implementing flexible working isn’t that much of a challenge for us. It is more of a mindset thing. We’ve always been very supportive of it, and I’m 100% convinced you get more productivity by offering flexibility.”

The firm had recently upgraded its digital capability and capacity including cyber security measures. And the firm already expected employees to work to outputs and not by hours.

“We don’t pay much attention to people’s working hours. It’s not a relevant metric to us. The only relevance it had is if people are working too many hours and then they have impacted productivity. It’s a case of, you’ve got some tasks and you’ve got areas of responsibility, you’ve got to manage them.”



Business Stories: R&W Scott

“In terms of performance we continually reviewed our sales targets in line with what we felt was the new reality. It was more a case of making sure we fulfilled the customer demand and met the customer service requests and queries with fewer bodies.”

Culture helped them to adjust to working off-site.

“We were fortunate we were relatively progressive. It was part of the DNA of the leadership team and that went through the rest of the managers.”

As people began to come back into the business, social distancing was made easier by a rota system. Communication was supported by daily morning briefings over Teams.

Performance and productivity improved during lockdown. However, it was not sustainable over the longer term.

“There was an element of, ‘we just need to work hard and get through this’. That definitely happened, but that wasn’t sustainable because after several weeks, we had to give people a break.”

“I think if it had gone on any longer before we got some people back from furlough, you would have had longer term issues such as people getting burnt out. It was a short-term increase in productivity, but that genuinely wasn’t sustainable in the longer term.”

3 Challenges

Covering core skills

“There are certain processes and machines that need specific skills, so we can’t run the factory without these five or six people. We couldn’t even switch them in and out.”

Getting everyone to support difficult changes

“We were fortunate the team embraced the vast majority of what we asked them to do, and a lot of that is because they share the same values. When you have similar values, you might not agree with every single specific decision, but you trust the guys that are directing the business. We were doing what was right for the business and what’s right for the people and if you do what’s right for the people, more often than not you’re going to get a more positive outcome for the business itself.”

Supporting inexperienced managers

Several managers had no experience in managing remote team members. Practical peer-to-peer support helped to build confidence.

“We quickly identified those managers who weren’t overly-experienced at managing teams remotely and gave them support. Sometimes it’s just old-fashioned ‘lead by example’. It might not be our preferred coaching approach. But in a crisis you need to go back to basics.”



Business Stories: R&W Scott

Avoiding overwork and burnout

One of the biggest challenges, especially for office-based staff and those managing childcare as well as work, was setting boundaries around their working day, and avoiding working long hours.

4 Flex in future?

Flexible working is the right thing to do for the future

“The benefits I’ve seen over the years, in terms of productivity in giving people flexibility, they’re undoubted, it’s 100% clear it’s the best way to go.”

“It’s about doing the right thing and flexible working is most fundamentally part of doing the right thing.”

Flexible working will be different for everyone, although different parts of the business make different demands of staff and will need different solutions.

“The challenge is going to be offering flexibility in the plant because if you need to produce 150 tonnes of product each week, you need people on the ground to do that. The flexibility we may offer is expanding our twilight shift offering, which is the four hours during the day. We may need to offer increased night shifts. We’re very much of a mindset that if we can produce the output we need to service our customers, in a flexible way and keep people happy, all well and good.”

Flexible working will become the norm and not the exception

“Now is the time to formalise what was already in our minds before and, to a certain extent, is already in place. We’re going to ask our Head of HR to pull together a policy around flexible working on the back of the Covid crisis. But we would embrace this as our new world, our new way of working.”

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Fife Council | Public Sector

1 Pre-Covid

The local authority employs over 17,500 people including teachers and care workers.

Few staff were furloughed because most roles are Government funded and not eligible. Everyone remained on full pay and there were no redundancies.

2 Adjusting to lockdown

The Council started pandemic planning from January. But the lockdown was still a huge adjustment.

“Everything changed so quickly and that’s something we really struggled with. It wasn’t just the implementation of lockdown, there was change to government guidance. It didn’t just feel like daily, sometimes it felt like you were living hour to hour.”

“Although there were business continuity plans in place, it felt really different than anything we had prepared for.”

“We’ve had to be extremely reactive at understanding the guidance, but also putting that out to 17,500 staff and managers.”

The impact of Covid was profound with some services suspended, and others more crucial than ever but in Covid-secure ways. Around 10,000 people became home workers overnight. A 'Use Your Own Device' scheme introduced in 2019, helped many workers achieve this.

Wellbeing was a priority. Managers were responsible for monitoring hours, and the Council's health and wellbeing team delivered information and support.

“We were absolutely clear for all staff that wellbeing had to be a focus for them, looking after their own wellbeing. But also managers thinking about their staff, not just in terms of working longer hours, but actually just facing the environment that we were in and this situation that was unfolding around them.”

A wellbeing strategy was being finalised before Covid. This was refreshed and included online mental health awareness training.

A regular video from the Chief Executive reminded staff the importance of balancing family responsibilities with work, as well as providing business updates.

The Council's flexitime system was suspended to avoid staff who couldn't work all their hours 'owing' time.



Business Stories: Fife Council

As restrictions lifted, managers did expect staff to work their usual hours. However, the lockdown experience helped change mindsets.

“ [Before] we didn't focus on people's output, we measured how long they sat at their desk every day and that's clearly not the best measurement of productivity or output. What we're seeing now is more recognition amongst managers that output and productivity is more important to [us] than somebody sitting at their desk for seven hours and 12 minutes per day.”

A significant number of employees were not able to work because they were at increased risk with Covid. To fill gaps in service, the Council launched 'Team Fife' to attract and reassign members of staff to critical roles. Several thousand Council workers volunteered.

A new form of paid special leave was introduced for anyone who could not work from home – for whatever reason.

3 Challenges

Upskilling managers

“ A lot of the work was about getting managers to accept this was not just as you would have worked in the office being dumped in the household, there is a whole shift which is required along with that.”

“ Generally managers are more accepting of the responsibilities that staff have outside work now.”

Managing time and workloads

“ Rather than people not being able to work, there were people who were doing too much... I think people were trying to prove they could do everything from home.”

“ It's not about working ten-hour days so you can then take a day off in three months' time, it's you've got your hours to work in a, maybe, four weekly cycle. You might work a longer day, you might work a shorter day, but it's up to you to manage that. It's a different way of working and some people are totally embracing it and loving it, whereas others are struggling.”

Productivity increased during lockdown, but this is not likely to be sustainable.

“ My team productivity levels are probably way up on where they were previously. People have worked running on adrenaline. We're looking at that levelling off now because people are realising this is for the long term, and we can't maintain that high level. But, certainly within my team, we're producing everything that we produced prior to lockdown and more.”



4 Flex in future?

The Council will offer more flexibility

Flexibility allowed the Council to continue delivering essential services and it wants to sustain new ways of working.

“How do we harness some of the learning we’ve had during this time, how do we harness that flexibility?”

“Had we been rigid about either ‘you need to work in a specific location’ or ‘you need to work within a specific time period’ then we wouldn’t have got anywhere.”

Flexibility for a diverse staff

“The diversity of the organisation and the number of employees we have that work in all different types of places and all different times of the day, we need to be much more receptive to flexibility that is a much wider concern, as opposed to just about homeworking or working part-time because you’re a mum and you need to do the school pick-up. A lot of that is going to be focussed on how we can actually have flexibility across as many of our employees as possible.”

Practical issues about expenses and kit.

Staff have questions about kit and personal expenses, and these need to be worked out.

Understanding roles better

Understanding whether roles are location and/or time dependent – or not – opens up new ways of thinking about how to provide choice and control.

“It might be that we’ve got shift patterns, we might have flexitime for some staff and we might have ‘true flexibility’ in terms of I can choose when I do my work.”

“We’re also looking at different ways of getting that flexibility. For example, some people could move to a nine-day fortnight [and] work their contracted hours within those nine days.”

“We need to consider with staff and trade unions if, instead of going back to our very structured flexi system, there are different things we can do to give people more flexibility.”

Flexibility has accelerated questions around property use.

“We’ve always [been] trying to work towards reducing our office capacity, allowing people more flexibility, allowing people to work from home or from hub locations. This has really accelerated the thinking we’ve got around about that.”

“I think we’ve flipped our thinking about what we go into work for, and actually [it’s] the social aspect. We’ll be able to think about how we’ll have our team operating.”

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

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