



Flexible working:
Scotland's untapped
opportunity for people,
employers and society

Flexibility Works' Manifesto
October 2025

A smart investment in Scotland's future



Flexible working isn't a niche issue. It's a powerful lever for economic growth, social justice, and wellbeing. And it's one the next Scottish Government can and should pull much further than before.

At Flexibility Works, we believe flexible working is good for people, good for business, and good for our wider economy and society. It helps parents stay in work, supports carers, enables people with health conditions to thrive, and opens doors for those furthest from the labour market. It also helps employers attract and retain talent, boost productivity, and build resilient, high-performing teams.

While employment law sits with Westminster, there is a vital role for Holyrood in shaping the culture, expectations and practical support around flexible working in Scotland. And with the UK Employment Rights Bill set to change how employers can legally refuse flexible working requests by 2027, the next Scottish Government has a crucial window of opportunity to lead the way for Scottish employers.

This manifesto sets out seven practical (and non-legislative) actions we urge all political parties to include in their 2026 Scottish election manifestos. These actions will help unlock the full potential of flexible working - for workers and their families, for employers, and for Scotland's economy and society.

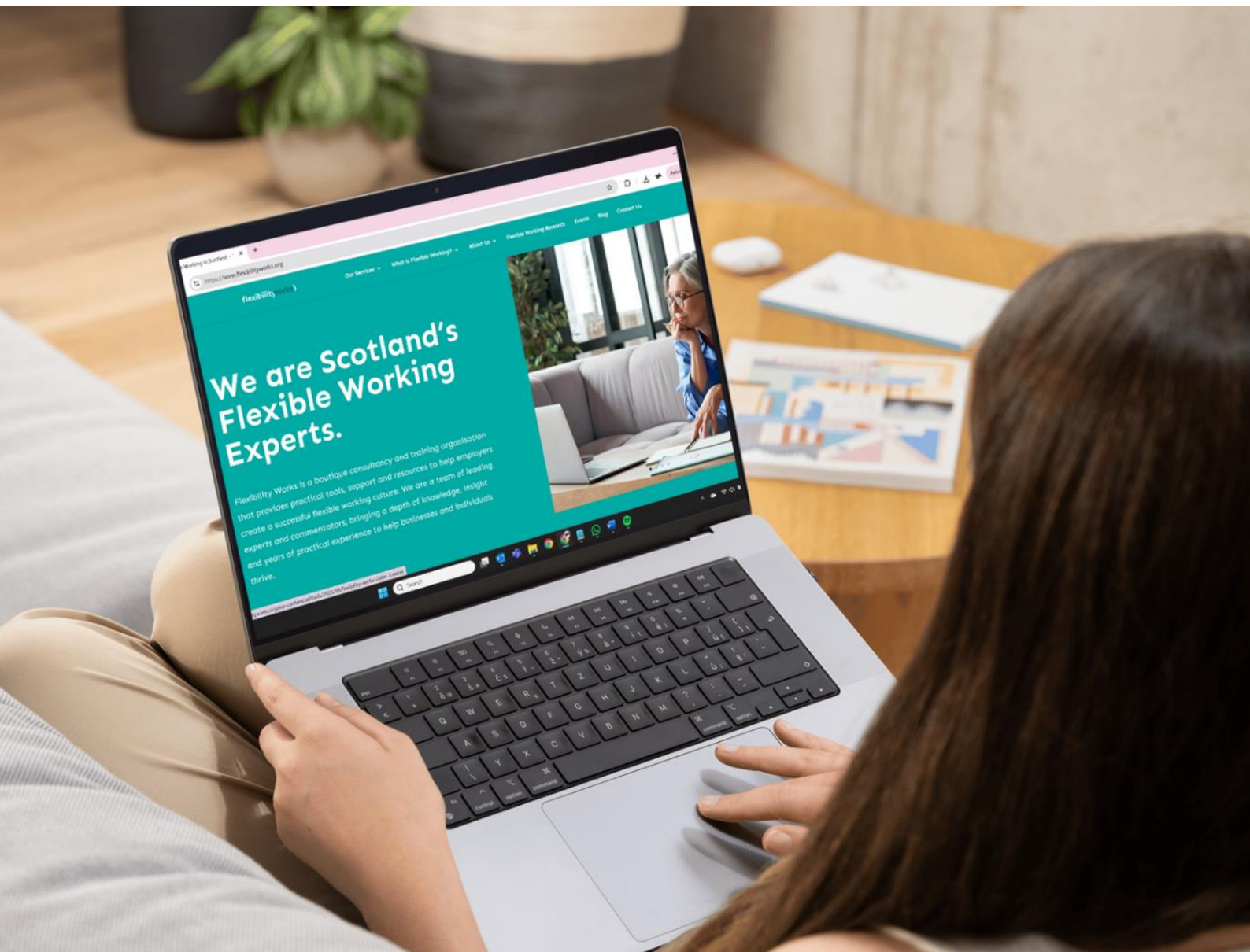
About Flexibility Works

Flexibility Works is Scotland's leading voice on flexible working. We're a social business and registered charity supporting employers to build successful flexible working cultures through training, consultancy and practical tools.

We also lead on research and policy influence, publishing Scotland's most comprehensive flexible working data and working closely with the Scottish Government's Fair Work team and other stakeholders to drive systemic change.

Our work shows that flexible working improves wellbeing, supports business growth, and reduces poverty by enabling more people to access and sustain employment.

For more information visit flexibilityworks.org



Why flexible working matters



This is our brief, data-driven summary based on our research with more than 1,000 Scottish workers, 250 Scottish employers and 200 unemployed Scottish adults looking for work.

1. Demand is clear - and growing

Despite headlines suggesting a post-pandemic retreat from flexible working, our data shows otherwise.

- 67% of Scottish workers already have some form of flexibility.
- 18% don't but would like flex.
- That's 85% of the workforce either working flexibly or wishing they could.

This demand spans all demographics - gender, age, sector, and role type. Flexible working is no longer a perk, it's a mainstream expectation.

2. Inequality persists

- 31% of Scottish workers still lack access to flexible working.
- Salary is the biggest differentiator:
 - 80% of workers earning over £50K work flexibly, compared with 57% of workers earning less than £20K

This matters because for many, flexibility isn't a 'nice to have', it's the only way they can work at all. Sadly, as is often the case, workers earning the least are most likely to miss out on the benefits of a flexible job.

3. Flex helps people get into work

- 28% of unemployed Scottish adults actively seeking work say flexibility would enable them to take a job.
- 13% of current workers say flexibility was their gateway into employment.

Yet according to Timewise, only one-third of Scottish job adverts mention flexible working. And 28% of unemployed adults have turned down a job offer because the role lacked the flexibility they needed.

4. Flex helps people stay in work

- 1 in 6 (16%) flexible workers say they'd have to stop working altogether if they couldn't work flexibly.
- This rises to 26% of mothers and 30% of workers earning under £20K.

We'll remind you of point 2, and how workers on the lowest salaries are least likely to work flexibly. This group is also the most likely to drop out of work without flexible working. The people who need flexibility most to stay in work get it the least. This should be a wake-up call for any government serious about tackling economic inactivity and poverty.

5. Flex supports career progression - but often a lack of flex holds people back

Flexibility can help people work more hours, take on more skilled roles, and earn more. But a lack of flexibility can stall careers, especially for women and part-time workers.

- 20% of Scottish working parents say they're working below their skill level.
- Of those, 46% of mothers, 45% of parents earning less than £20K a year, and 44% of parents working part time say this is because they can't find flexible roles at a higher level.

This sense of stagnation is a missed opportunity for individuals and for Scotland's economy.

6. Employers benefit from flex too

Flexible working isn't just good for workers, it's good for business.

- 72% of Scottish employers say flexibility benefits their organisation.

Top reported benefits include:



Flexible working helps employers tackle strategic challenges from talent shortages to performance and sustainability. It's a business necessity.

Action on flexible working



We're calling on the next Scottish Government to:

1. Lead by example

Scottish Government should be a positive and influential role model for flexible working. This is particularly important right now, as many employers are taking cues from media coverage of high-profile organisations and leaders that are pulling back on the flexibility available to workers. The Scottish Government, along with other public sector organisations, should continue to ensure they offer all their own workers some form of flexible working, whatever their role, making flexible working the default way to work. They should seek feedback from staff about their flexible working practices. Job adverts should lay out flexible working options so they're clear 'at a glance' rather than in the small print, and this should be standard practice across all platforms used for advertising public sector roles. In addition, we encourage Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and all local authorities to undertake Flexibility Works' forthcoming FlexMark accreditation for workplace flexibility - or join our 'incubator' programme if they don't feel ready - to demonstrate a robust commitment to flexible ways of working.

2. Make flexible working a measurable requirement for grants and procurement

Currently, flexible working is listed as 'desirable' rather than 'mandatory' for organisations applying for Scottish Government and other public sector funding and contracts. Flexible working should be a measurable requirement for procurement and grant giving, with clearer expectations about acceptable levels of flexible working in supplier organisations and around advertising roles as flexible in recruitment. Flexibility Works' forthcoming FlexMark accreditation scheme for employers should be added to Fair Work First guidance as an example of good practice and evidence of a genuine commitment to flexible working.

3. Widen the focus of employability programmes

Scottish Government, in partnership with local authorities and employability providers, should widen the role of employability programmes, so the focus is not solely on making people 'fit' the existing jobs market. This should include informing and upskilling all employability staff so they understand what flexible working is and the benefits for people and employers, as well as recognising where flex could support individuals into work, and being able to advocate for flexible working with employers. Second, funders should endorse the use of some employability funding to work directly with employers, encouraging and supporting them to design and advertise more flexible roles.

4. Increase support for career returners

To help parents, and others, get back into work the Scottish Government should re-start funding 'returner' programmes for specific groups locked out of work. And it should influence other public sector organisations to do the same. These should include helping people understand the types of flexible working available to them, what their legal rights are around requesting flexible working, as well as how to find and apply for a flexible role and negotiate for flex during recruitment. Returner programmes should also establish closer and on-going partnerships with employers, to drive wider change within employers.

5. Embed flexible working in business and economic strategies

Given its vital role in workforce participation, productivity, and business sustainability, flexible working should be embedded in Scotland's economic strategies, including plans for business growth and major initiatives. The Scottish Government (and all public sector bodies and agencies involved in economic development and business support) should actively champion the benefits of flexible working and ensure flexible working is a core part of discussions between businesses and the

government. In addition, Scottish Government should be proactive in communicating with, and seeking feedback from, private sector employers, especially SMEs, to find out what help and support they need to implement more flexible and family friendly working. This should specifically include employers with non-office staff and workers in low paid roles.

6. Fund pilots to drive more flexible working in low paid roles

Many people in poverty are in low paid roles, often with very limited flexible working arrangements. In addition to providing business support services, Scottish Government can fund pilot programmes trialling flexible working (beyond public sector four-day weeks) for sectors with the highest numbers of lower paid workers. These are often in frontline industries, such as hospitality, construction or social care, which the Fair Work Convention has already identified as urgent priority sectors for increasing fair work opportunities. This will create new sector-specific evidence to influence Scottish employers, and help low-paid workers stay in work and progress, potentially helping them escape poverty.

7. Fund activities to support employers to explore and embed flexible working

Too many employers still don't understand what flexible working can look like, including hard-to-flex sectors such as retail, manufacturing, care and engineering, and employers are unaware of the significant evidence that flexible working benefits people and organisations.

Scottish Government can spearhead a Scotland-wide awareness campaign to support employers. This could bring together national employer-facing organisations, such as Flexibility Works, CIPD, ACAS and other unions or trade bodies to build momentum and cascade information and resources. And the campaign could include research with workers, employers and unemployed adults looking for work to provide data-driven insights, as well as best-practice employer stories, or delivering free online and in-person events for employers to learn more.

Funding for manager training and/or consultancy services would also help drive positive change. Scottish Government previously funded these kinds of activities via the Workplace Equality Fund and other programmes, and we encourage it to do so again, particularly in the run-up to the Employment Rights Bill becoming law. Many employers are more open to receiving support if it will keep them 'legally compliant', which means there's an immediate opportunity to inform and influence employers on how to get flex right and promote its wider benefits while employers are listening.



These actions are achievable, affordable, and impactful. They don't require legislation - but they do require leadership.

By committing to these steps, the next Scottish Government can unlock the full potential of flexible working to support workers, strengthen businesses, and build a fairer, more prosperous Scotland.

flexibilityworks>

www.flexibilityworks.org

hello@flexibilityworks.org

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