

flexibilityworks>

FLEX 4 FOR LIFE 2024

Data insights on flexible working in Scotland

#FlexForLife

+ Employer guide to getting flex right

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#FlexForLife

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Getting the facts straight

True fact: flexible working continues to rise steadily in Scotland.

While recent media headlines have often focussed on high profile 'return to office' stories that suggest flexible working is contracting, our data tells a different story.

We've seen an increase in the number of flexible workers each year since we published our first annual *Flex for Life* research in 2021. More desk workers and frontline workers have flex compared to this time last year, and employers are very positive about the benefits flex brings to their organisations.

And we'll add (rather immodestly but accurately) that our *Flex for Life* research is the most comprehensive analysis of flexible working in Scotland. It's based on data from 1,016 Scottish workers, 262 Scottish employers and 216 Scottish adults who are unemployed and looking for work.

Our data evidence says flex is here to stay (and steadily grow further).

That's not to say flexible working in Scotland is all perfect. Our research reveals some common gaps and challenges that are still holding employers back from greater flex and the benefits this unlocks for people and businesses.

But let's not forget the pandemic was the biggest shake-up to the way we work in over a century, and while lockdown feels a long time ago, we're still in the 'test and learn' phase when it comes to our changed and more flexible ways of working.

For employers

This year, we've tailored our report more specifically to inform and support Scottish employers. If you're not an employer, don't worry. This isn't the cold shoulder and we're sure you'll still find our insights useful. But employers, this is for you. Whether your organisation is at the start of its flex journey, or you're well underway with just a few niggles to iron out, we hope this report will give you the insights and practical advice you need.

- Part 1 should give you a short, need-to-know overview on what's happening with flex in workplaces across Scotland.
- Part 2 is our data-driven guide on how to get flex right for your people, your organisation and your customers. This comprises our '7 steps to flex' to help you meet current challenges and plug gaps you may, or may not, be aware of that are holding your organisation back.
- Part 3 shares business stories where flex is working well.

If you've been putting off exploring greater flex, waiting to see what really sticks after the turbulence of the last few years, be in no doubt; flexible working is super sticky and it's here to stay.

It's time to get flex right.

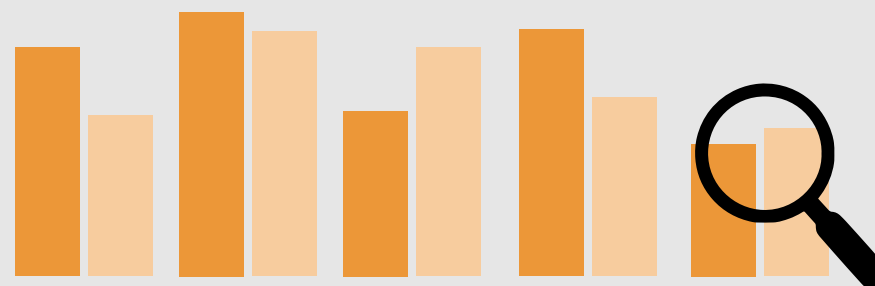
About our data

All figures, unless stated otherwise, were commissioned by Flexibility Works in the form of online surveys carried out by global research firm Panelbase between 6/11/23 and 20/11/23.

- **1016 Scottish workers** were surveyed, of whom 618 were 'frontline/on-site/customer-facing' workers, and 398 were not frontline workers. Our figures are representative across age, gender, industries, income, and those with children including single parent households.
- **262 Scottish employers** were surveyed, including CEOs, directors, owners and founders, senior HR professionals and senior managers. A total of 237 had at least some 'frontline/on-site/customer-facing' workers and 24 did not. The industries and sectors our employers came from closely matched our employee survey.
- **216 unemployed Scottish adults** who are looking for work were surveyed.

Our thanks go to Aaliyah Evans and Dr Joanna Wilson from the Q-Step Centre at **Manchester Metropolitan University** for additional data analysis.

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**



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.

A quick glance at our bubble chart on page 14 shows the variety of flex currently used by Scottish workers.

Flexible working can be around one, two or all of:



Where someone works



When someone works



How much someone works

It can be formal (in a contract) or informal (agreed verbally 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

Flexible working is when you have some choice and control over when, where and how much you work, to help you balance your work and homelife.

There are lots of different types of flexible working, for example:

- Working from home and hybrid working
- Part time hours
- Compressed hours (working your usual number of hours in fewer, longer days)
- Being able to change your start and finish times
- Being able to take time out in the day for personal reasons and make up the time later

For **frontline** workers, flexible working also includes things like:

- Being able to swap shifts
- Having an input to rotas
- Being able to make small adjustments to start and finish times

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 1

#FlexForLife

WHAT DOES **FLEX** LOOK LIKE IN SCOTLAND?



Who's got flex?

After a significant shift during the pandemic, flexible working continues to rise steadily in Scotland.



More than two thirds (67%) of all Scottish workers work flexibly – up from 61% last year. Pre-pandemic, 46% of workers said they worked flexibly.



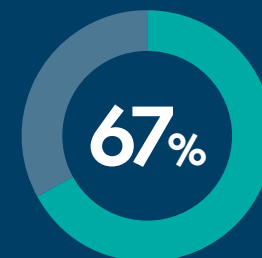
Currently a further 18% of workers in Scotland **don't work flexibly but would like to**, meaning 85% of workers in Scotland either have flex or would like flexible working.



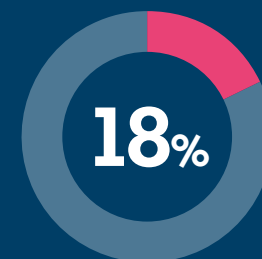
Desk-based workers (non-frontline) continue to **enjoy more flex** than their frontline counterparts, though frontline flex continues to rise too.



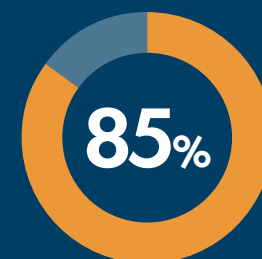
Salary is the biggest differentiator, with workers on higher salaries **much more likely** to work flexibly than workers on the lowest salaries.



of Scottish workers
work flexibly



don't work flexibly
but would like to



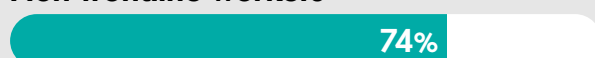
have or want flex

Workers with flex

Workers earning more than £50K



Non-frontline workers



Men



Single parents



Parents



Average



Workers with a disability or long-term health condition



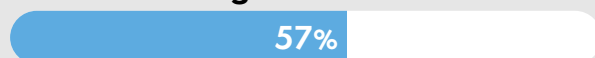
Women



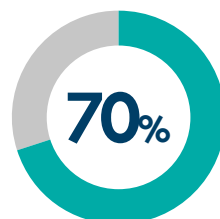
Frontline workers



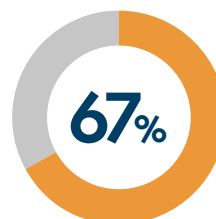
Workers earning less than £20K



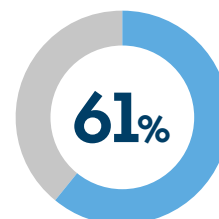
Workers with flex by sector



Private sector workers



Third sector workers



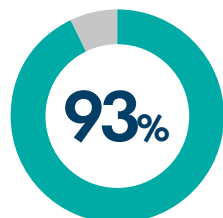
Public sector workers

It's worth noting that in our sample the private sector had fewer frontline workers than the public and third sectors, and this is likely reflected in the number of workers with flex.

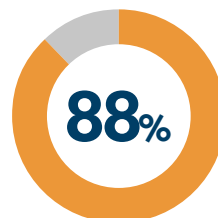
So what?

The demand for flex is huge. If you're an employer and you're not offering and exploring greater flex, you risk getting left behind as workers vote with their feet and move elsewhere.

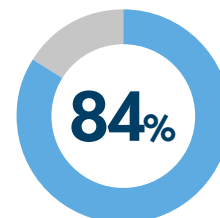
Industries with highest numbers of flexible workers



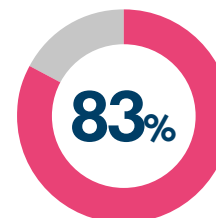
IT



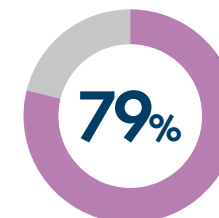
HR



Sales, business development and consultancy



Legal



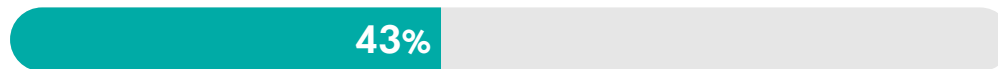
Engineering

Some of our industry sample sizes are relatively small. But we've included this data because it backs up existing research on industries where flex is higher than average.

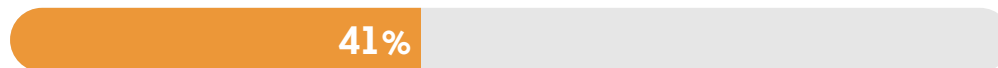
Who hasn't got flex, and who would like it?

The largest groups who don't work flex are:

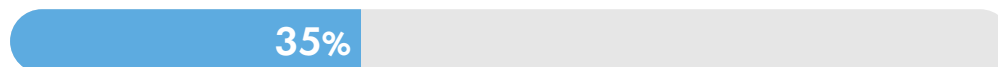
Women in low earning households*



People earning under £20K



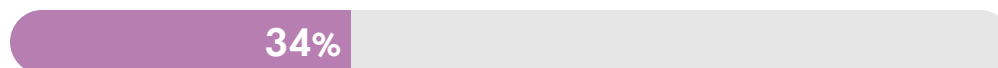
Frontline workers



Women

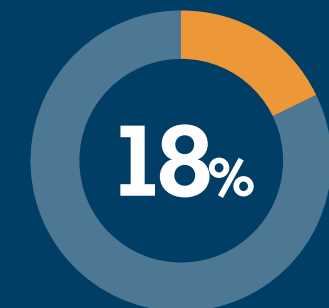
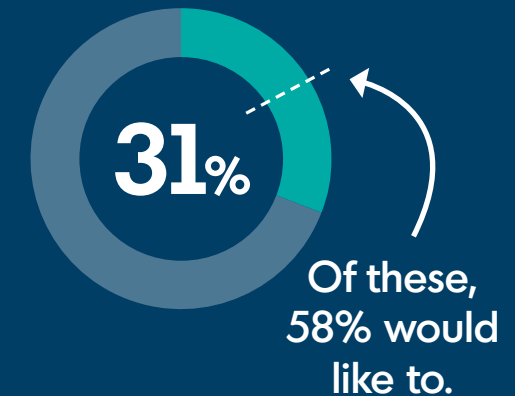


Workers with a disability or long-term health condition



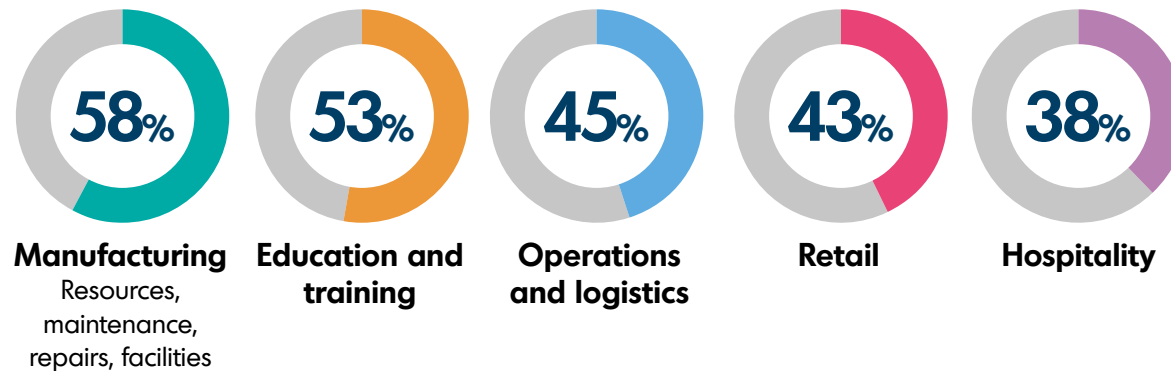
* Low earning households have a total annual household earned income [not including benefits] of £30,000 or less, with adults who live alone removed because of challenges identifying who qualified as 'low earning'.

Nearly a third of
Scottish workers
don't work flexibly.



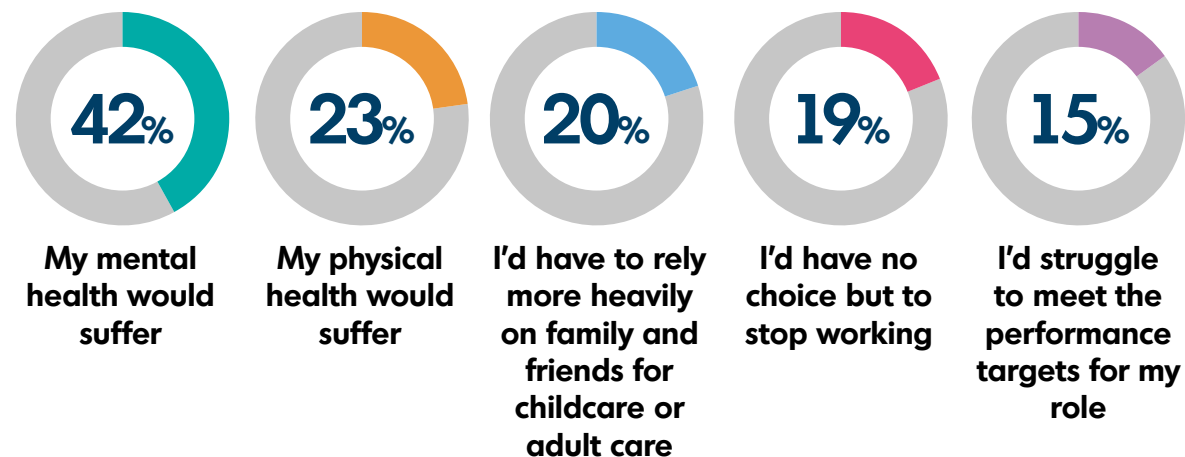
This equates to
18% of the Scottish
workforce who don't
currently work flex
but would like to.

Industries with highest numbers of workers without flex



Some of our industry sample sizes are small. But we've included them because they're in line with existing research showing these industries often struggle to create more flex.

5 biggest impacts of losing flex, according to flexible workers



So what?

You could be missing out on skilled and experienced workers by not offering greater flex to those who need it. If you have any interest in tackling inequality and creating a more diverse workforce for your organisation, these figures illustrate where the gaps might be that need your attention.

"I'd have no choice but to stop working"



say 30% of workers earning less than £20K



and 26% of mothers

Among workers who don't have flex, the following groups want it the most

18-24-year-olds



Single parents



Workers earning £40-50K



Mothers



Women



Frontline workers

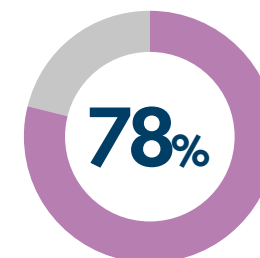


Average



Who would like flex?

Among people who don't currently work flexibly, it's perhaps not surprising that parents and mothers would like it more than average, or that frontline workers also feel its lack. But the desire for flex among 18-24-year-olds (who don't already have it) might surprise employers.



of 18-24-year-olds
who don't have flex,
want it

Why people want flex

The most common 'main reason' for people working flexibly, or wanting to, is childcare commitments, followed closely by general wellbeing. But the reasons are different across age bands and for different groups of workers.

1 in 5

18% workers with a **disability or long-term health condition** say their physical health is their main reason for flex.

1 in 7

14% of workers **aged 18-24** say mental health is their main reason for flex. The same number say it's looking after pets.

1 in 10

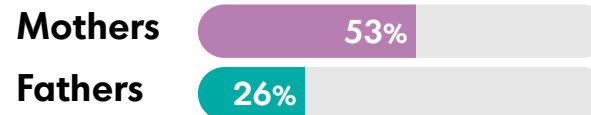
10% of workers **aged 45-54** say their main reason for flex is caring for an adult.

1 in 5

19% of workers **aged 55+** want flex to wind down to retirement.



Childcare is my main reason for flex



Top 5

main reasons workers have, or would like, flex



Childcare



Wellbeing



Greater control over work and productivity



Mental health



Pets

So what?

All kinds of workers need and want flex for all kinds of reasons. As an employer, you can get on the front foot by talking to all workers (not just parents) about their work pattern, and considering whether greater flex might be possible.

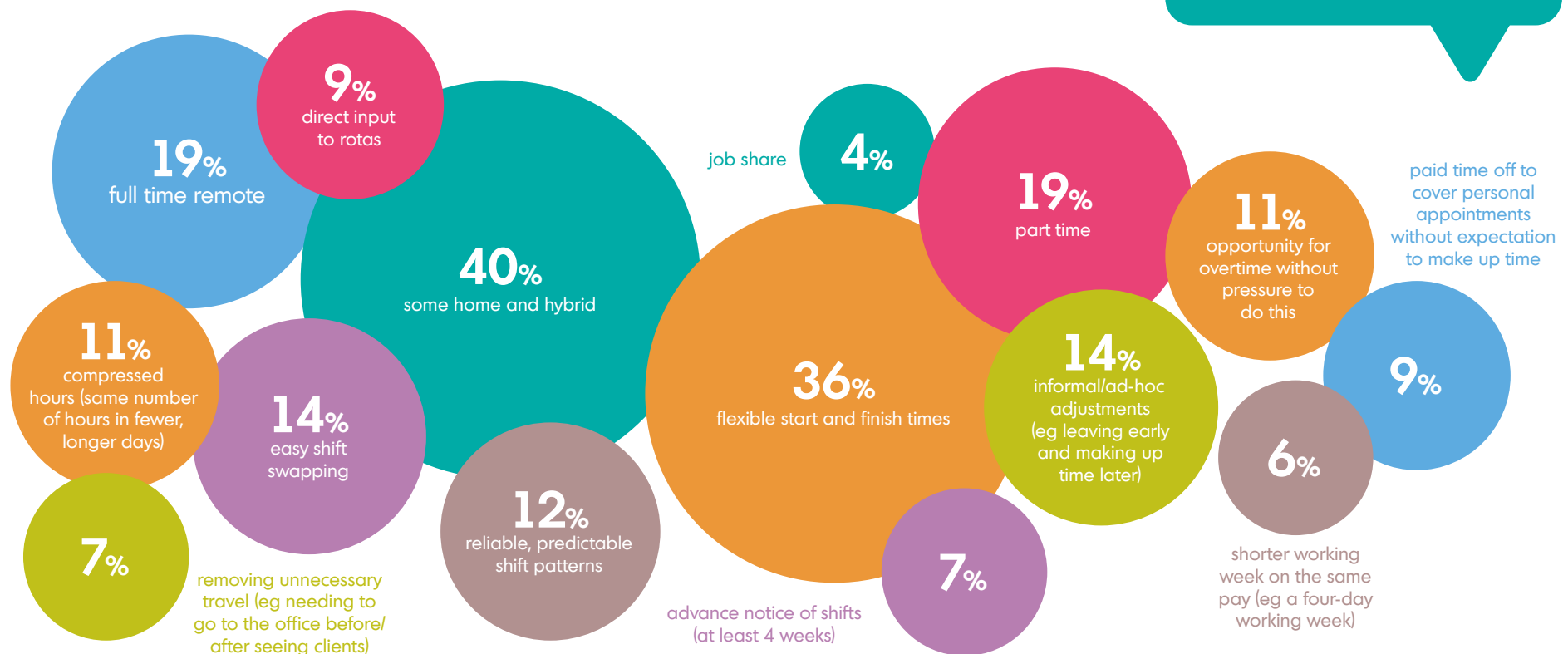
What sort of flex is being used?

Home and hybrid working, followed by flexible start and finish times, are the most common types of flexible working currently used in Scotland.

15 most common types of flex used by Scottish workers

So what?

If you're not offering and exploring all types of flex that are relevant to your organisation, this chart illustrates what your workers might secure elsewhere.



Business benefits of flex

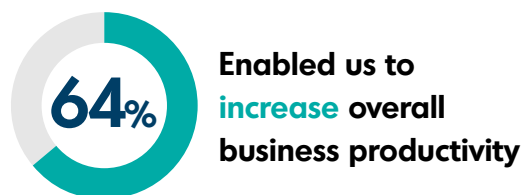


Just 4% of Scottish employers say flex has had a negative impact.

Productivity

Employers

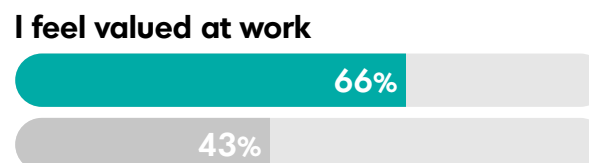
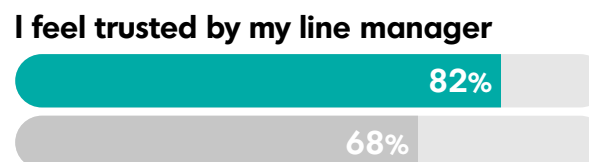
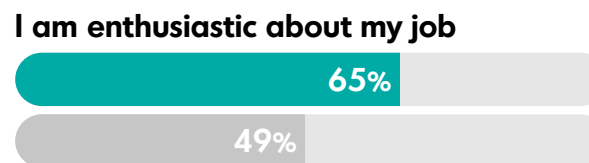
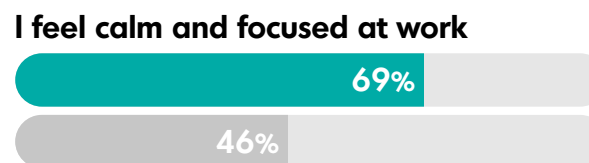
Scottish employers say flex has...



Workers

Workers say...

Flexible workers workers without flex



Workers agreed always or often.



24% of flexible workers say flex means they can take on more hours

Don't miss this

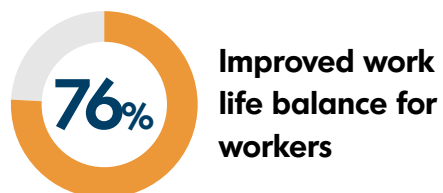


64% of employers say flex has enabled them to increase overall business productivity

Health and wellbeing

Employers

Employers say flex has...

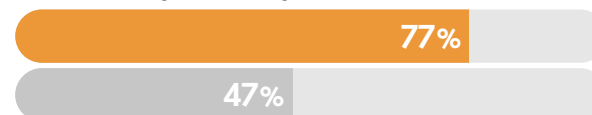


Workers

Workers say...

Flexible workers workers without flex

I am happy with my work life balance



I am rarely or never burned out by work



Don't miss this



77% of flexible workers say they are happy with their work life balance



Compared with **47%** of workers without flex

Don't miss this

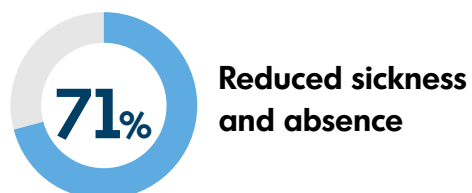


71% of employers say flex has reduced sickness and absence

Sickness and absence

Employers

Employers say flex has...



Workers

Workers say...

Flexible workers workers without flex

I have taken fewer than 5 days off sick in the last year



Recruitment

Employers

Employers say flex has...



Don't miss this



50% of workers say they feel 'stuck' in their role because they can't see the flex they need elsewhere to progress



Workers

Workers considering changing jobs say...

I feel 'stuck' in my role because I can't see the flex I need elsewhere to progress



The following are important factors in my job search:

Good work life balance



How much I get paid



Retention

Employers

Employers say flex has...

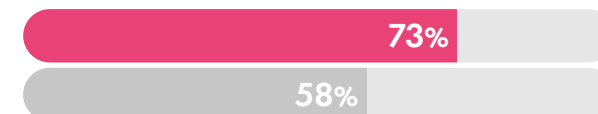


Workers

Workers say...

Flexible workers workers without flex

I would like to stay with my employer



Don't miss this



73% of workers with flex would like to stay with their employer, compared with 58% of workers without flex

Inclusion and diversity

Employers

Employers say flex has...



Inclusive companies are 1.7 times more likely to be innovation leaders

Source: *Why Diversity and Inclusion Has Become a Business Priority* – Josh Bersin



57% of employers say flex has helped us to have a more diverse workforce

Don't miss this

Who'd recommend their employer?



65% of flexible workers

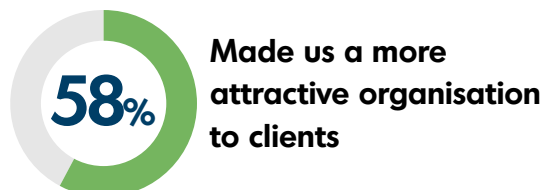
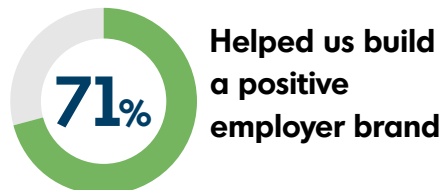


42% of workers without flex

Brand reputation

Employers

Employers say flex has...

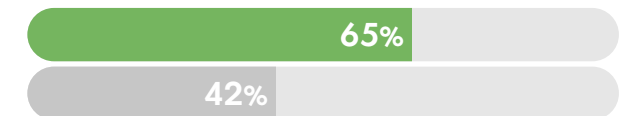


Workers

Workers say...

■ Flexible workers ■ workers without flex

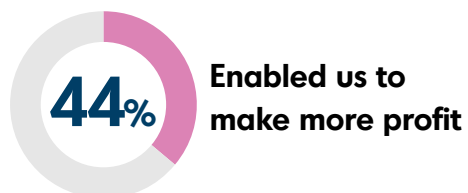
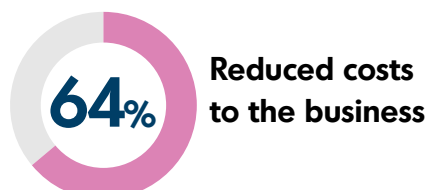
Workers would recommend their employer to others always or often



Financial improvements

Employers

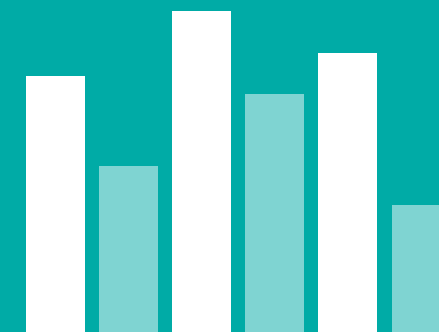
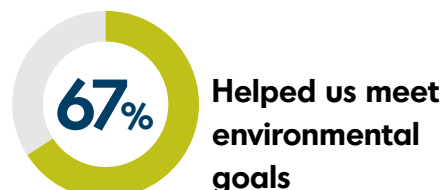
Employers say flex has...



Environment

Employers

Employers say flex has...



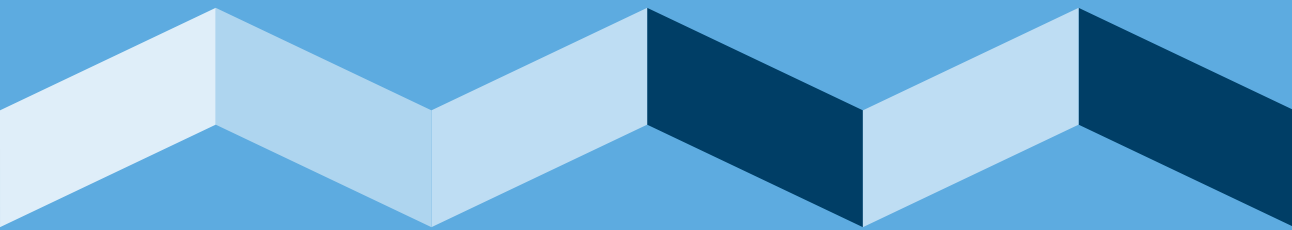
So what?

Well, we hope it's obvious. Workers and employers report many benefits from flexible working. It's in every employer's interest to get the best from their workforce and we think these figures clearly demonstrate how flex can make a positive impact.

Part 2

#FlexForLife

HOW TO GET **FLEX** RIGHT



7 steps to flex

If you're searching for the secret of flex success that truly unlocks benefits for your people and organisation, this is it.

It doesn't matter if your organisation is just starting its flex journey, or you're ready to iron out those final niggles, our top seven steps to flex will help you create a great flexible working culture.

We've compiled the steps based on our hands-on work with Scottish employers over the last decade, and the key is that you have to follow **all** the steps for flex to work as it should. What we tend to find, including in this latest research cohort, is that lots of employers are brilliant at some of the steps but not all of them. Cue niggles, challenges and frustration. We hope that by setting out our steps here, you can see the big picture including what you're doing well and where you might need to focus attention next.



Step 1

Senior leadership buy-in

Employer challenge:

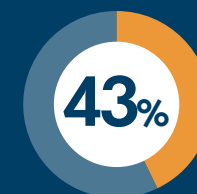
The most common challenge to greater flex raised by Scottish employers in our latest research cohort was opposition to flex from senior managers.

Why does this matter?

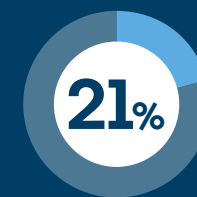
Trying to create greater flex without buy-in – and visible support from – senior leaders is extremely hard to say the least. Getting senior leaders on board is the foundation stone for successful flex, and is our first point for good reason. If you want to create more flex in your organisation, start by talking to your board and senior managers.

And if you're a senior leader already bought-in to flex, there's still work for you in persuading other senior peers of the benefits of greater flex, and in role modelling how you work flexibly to show all workers what sorts of things are 'acceptable'.

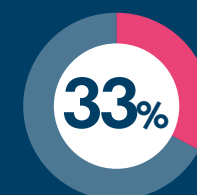
Opposition from senior managers makes it hard to make changes



Agree



Neither agree
nor disagree



Disagree

How to get it right



Create a compelling business case that everyone buys into

Flexible working isn't just 'doing what workers want'. It needs to balance against business needs. At the very least, flex should have no negative impact on business operations. But the reality is that flex usually delivers benefits for businesses as well as for people. We've got some great data in this report you're welcome to use to start your own business case for greater flex in your organisation.

Add evidence from your workplace too. What do your workers think? If some people already work flexibly, are they more positive? What do staff surveys and exit interviews tell you? Next, think about what your key organisational challenges are. Do you have a high sickness and absence rate? Do you have staff shortages, or 'hard to fill' vacancies? Would you like more diversity in senior roles? Could flex help address some of these? Gather all your data in one place, and share it widely.



Find out what competitors are doing

This could form another element of your business case. If you know competitors offer more flexible ways of working, your organisation is at risk of losing good staff (remember 85% of Scottish workers already work flexibly or would like to).

You can audit information on company websites about how they work, talk to partners and your networks for their insights, and check out websites such as Glassdoor for honest feedback on how other companies operate.



Role model flexible working from the top

When your senior managers ARE on board, you can pat yourselves on the back. But you're not finished. Having senior managers role model flexible working is a powerful way of showing all workers what sorts of things are acceptable. For example, if a senior manager leaves early to see their child in a school show, he or she should make this obvious in their diary and by saying goodbye as they leave. The same applies if they work hybrid, part time, or any other type of flex. If you're a senior manager yourself, encourage others to take the flexibility they might need at times, creating an environment where people feel safe to speak up.

Step 2

Communication and feedback

Employer challenge:

Some employers are worried that discussions about flex will raise expectations among workers they can't fulfil, and – we assume – these employers avoid exploring ideas with workers. But our data also shows employers are overly optimistic in assuming workers will ask for flex themselves.

Employers are worried asking staff about flex will raise expectations they can't fulfil.

39%

Workers that say they never get asked what they think of flexible working.

25%

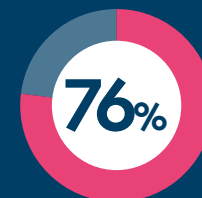
Who is comfortable asking for flex?



of all workers



of workers who don't currently work flex



of employers say staff are comfortable asking for flex

Why does this matter?

Communication is a two-way street when it comes to flexible working. Of course, employers need to explain what's allowed or encouraged, and what's not. But equally important is seeking feedback from workers on what changes might be possible – and would make the biggest difference. We know employers have concerns about asking staff for their opinions and ideas. Our data suggests employers do need to handle this carefully,

half of workers say that if their employer asked for their opinions on flex, they'd expect to get the flex they suggested. But before you panic, we'll add three quick points based on our many conversations with workers:

1. Workers are usually very realistic about what they ask for.
2. Most people ask for small changes, such as being able to start and finish slightly later, or to shift their hours around so they can attend a personal appointment without using leave.
3. People know their jobs best and if you're serious about being a flexible employer, you'll need their insight.

If flex feels like a taboo subject, the risk for employers is that workers are less happy and engaged, aren't able to produce their best work and potentially look for the flex they want (but are too scared to ask for) elsewhere.

How to get it right



**Gather feedback from workers
(without raising expectations
you can't fulfil)**

Workers can have brilliant ideas on how working patterns can be better and more efficient. They can also explain what sorts of changes would make the biggest difference to their lives. Most people only want relatively small amounts of flex, which some employers overlook, so talking to your staff could reveal some much easier wins for everyone.

To help you manage the conversation:

- Carry out a listening exercise, which could be an all-staff survey and/or focus groups. Or task line managers to discuss ways of working with their team, which is a much more informal route than a company-wide consultation.
- Frame the conversation. Make it clear you're exploring possible options but you're not able to make any promises.

- Explain what the process will be, what you will do with their comments and suggestions, and let people know when you will report back and update on any next steps.
- Remember, you can and should trial new ways of working for a fixed period to see how it works in practice. You don't need to commit to permanent change straight away.



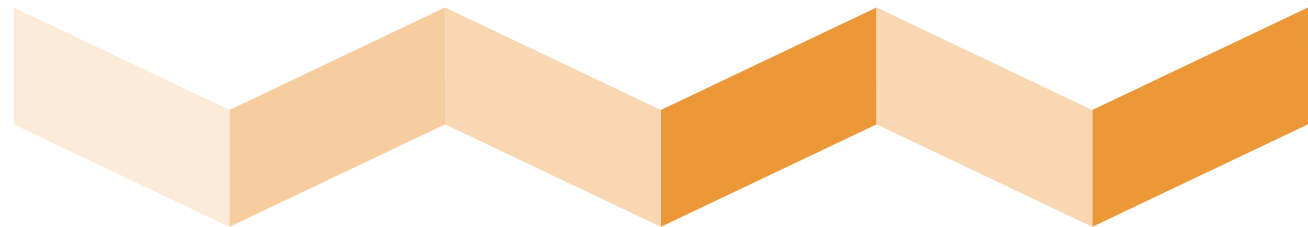
Communicate clearly what's available and what's not

You might have a fantastic offer on paper around flexible working. But it's no use unless people know about it. You can cascade information on what flex is available, and give guidance on what's not, via organisation-wide or team meetings and 1-1s. You can also use your intranet to draw attention to flexible ways of working, or showcase examples of staff already working flexibly via internal blogs and newsletters. You might get staff networks involved in helping promote flex, or highlight flex during relevant national campaign weeks.



Repeat – keep listening, keep explaining what's available (and what's not)

This isn't a 'one and done' situation. You have to keep on listening to staff, and keep on communicating what sorts of flex are available, and what the company's expectations are around ways of working. If you have an internal comms calendar, flexible working should be included regularly. But the simplest and most effective method is for managers to ask their direct reports how they are in 1-1s, and whether their work pattern is manageable. Discussing work patterns regularly in team meetings is also a good way to check how everyone in the team feels and ensure ways of working meet everyone's needs.



Step 3

Design flex in to all roles including frontline

Employer challenge:

A third of employers don't know how to create flex in frontline roles, and a similar proportion are struggling with how to make flex feel 'fair' across different roles (typically frontline and non-frontline).

Employers say:

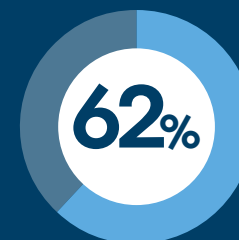
We can't offer flex across all roles and don't know how to make it fair

36%

We don't know how to create flex for frontline workers

33%

Workers without flex who'd like it



of frontline workers



of non-frontline workers

Workers **without flex** who think flex is possible in their role without impacting performance

Frontline

34%

Non-frontline

44%

Workers **with some existing flex** who think more flex is possible without impacting performance

Frontline

68%

Non-frontline

57%

Why does this matter?

Now that hybrid working is becoming more embedded for many desk-workers, employers are increasingly looking for ways to introduce greater choice and control for frontline workers. We know there are often fewer variables in frontline roles. But we'd argue some form of flex is possible in almost every role, and our data shows significant demand for more flex from frontline and non-frontline workers.

How to get it right



Listen to staff

Workers know their jobs better than anyone else. They will know what changes in work pattern are possible, practical and more efficient for the business. And they will know what will make the biggest difference to people's lives. For example, they'd know whether flexible start and finish times or staggered shifts with set start and finish times would work best on a production line.

Given the benefits flexible working can deliver for people and for businesses, it's well worth employers exploring what workers think is possible.



Be open and creative about different kinds of flex

Flexible working can look different in frontline roles. All flex is ultimately about giving workers more choice over when, where and how much they work. So while hybrid might be off the table for good reason, flex for frontline staff could include part time, or having an input to rotas, advanced notice of shifts, or – as one in seven frontline workers told us – being able to swap shifts easily. These are seemingly small changes but they can make a big difference. What's more, our data shows 63% of frontline workers are already working flexibly, proving that flex is possible in many frontline industries. On the next page, we've shared the types of flex that are most commonly used by frontline workers, and what types of flex are still in demand to help employers think about what else you could do.

Top 5 types of flex currently used by frontline workers

Flexible start and finish times

33%

Some working from home or hybrid

28%

Part time

24%

Easy shift swapping

24%

Reliable, predictable shift patterns

16%



Top 10 types of flex frontline workers would like more of in their current role

Flexible start and finish times

25%

Some hybrid/home working

22%

Shorter working week for same pay

20%

Full time remote working

16%

Compressed hours

16%

Part time hours

15%

Easy shift swapping

14%

Opportunity for overtime without pressure to do this

12%

Paid time off to cover personal appointments

9%

Reliable, predictable shift patterns

9%



Flexible start and finish times top the list for frontline workers



Trial new ways of working

Any change of working pattern can be done on a trial basis at first to test whether it works for people and for the organisation. Make sure you communicate clearly with staff on how long the trial period is, what you will be measuring, what information will be shared back with staff, and when that will be.

Step 4

Set clear parameters

Employer challenge:

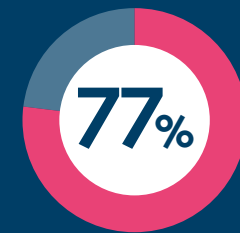
Almost a quarter of employers admit they don't have a framework or guidance for workers on flex, or they're not sure if they have. And nearly half of workers are unaware of any guidance.

Why does this matter?

Having a clear framework, or policy, showing what's possible and not possible with flexible working gives everyone more clarity and confidence. Workers feel more confident asking for flexibility if they know it's available and they're entitled to it. While managers feel more confident talking to people in their team about how they can work, and what expectations or red lines exist.

Our data shows a gap between employer and worker perceptions on whether flexible working policies or frameworks exist. This suggests some employers need to create a framework and others need to communicate an existing policy or framework much better.

My organisation has a clear framework, or guidance, showing what's possible and not possible with flexible working



of employers



of workers

How to get it right



Create a framework, policy or guidance

You need to capture clearly, and in one place, what sorts of flexible working are available, including for different types of roles. In addition, your summary should include boundaries. Your policy, framework or guidance document (whatever you choose to call it) should also set out how people can request flexible working, formally or informally. If you have a document already, don't forget, you might need to update it in line with the new flexible working law that's coming into force in April 2024.



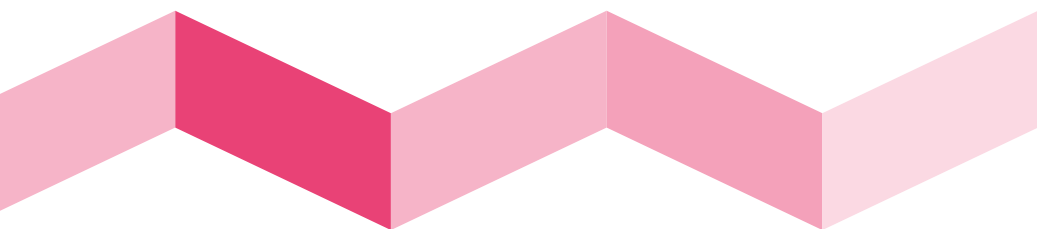
Purpose not prescription

We strongly recommend that your framework, policy or guidance is clear but not overly prescriptive. We know that will feel counter-intuitive to some people. But what we find works best is when managers have a broad framework to work within but retain autonomy to make decisions and create solutions that work best for their team. For example, if your organisation works hybrid, you can give guidance on the purpose of office working, such as enhancing team relationships with in-person team meetings, or creating learning opportunities for younger and less experienced staff. But ultimately, it's down to the team and the manager as to when exactly the team works in the office.



Communicate (again)

Yes, this old chestnut. Our data suggests about one in five employers have some kind of policy around flex that workers are unaware of. Getting your policy or framework down is a great starting point but if you don't share what's in it with managers and wider teams, you won't benefit from the clarity and confidence it can bring to your organisation. You could run a training session with your managers and ask them to share the policy with their teams. Or you could hold a 'town hall' meeting for all staff to explain what's in the policy. Or write an article for your intranet. You will need to keep on communicating what's in your policy, so people don't forget.



Step 5

Flex your job adverts

Employer challenge:

More than eight in ten workers have flex or would like it, yet just one in three job adverts say flex is available. This might not feel like a challenge to all employers, but it is certainly a significant opportunity for many.

What's more, a new law on flexible working – the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 comes into force in April 2024, which makes flex more important than ever during recruitment. The new law will make it easier for people to ask for flex, including a legal right to ask for it on 'day one' with a new employer, doing away with the previous need to have been with an employer for 26 weeks first.



85% of Scottish workers have or would like flexible working



33% of Scottish job adverts mention flex
(according to [Timewise](#))



Day one right to request flex
comes into force in April 2024

How important is flexible working for people currently considering changing jobs?

Scottish workers considering changing jobs

29%

They say the following are important factors in their job search:

Good work life balance

63%

Pay

61%

Flexible working

37%



62% of mothers considering changing jobs say flex is important.

Important factors for unemployed adults looking for work



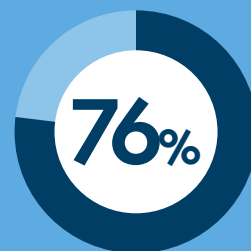
Flexible working

65%

Pay

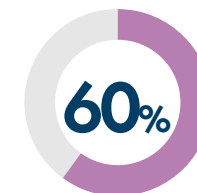
66%

Don't miss this

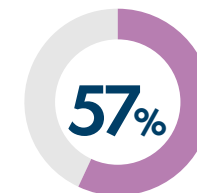


of unemployed adults looking for work have had to turn down a previous job offer because it lacked flexible working.

Employers say flex has...



Increased the quality and quantity of candidates applying for roles



Helped us have a more diverse workforce



Helped us reduce staff shortages



Stuck in a rut

Half of workers currently considering changing jobs say they feel 'stuck' in their role because they can't see the flex they need elsewhere to progress.

No flex, no application

Among workers currently thinking of changing jobs, almost one in six (16%) won't apply for a role if flex isn't mentioned in the job advert. This is higher for specific groups:



Our sample sizes are small here. But our data backs up existing research on who is put off applying for roles if flex is not mentioned.

Why does this matter?

Employers that are on the front foot with flex visible in job adverts and ready to talk about flex during interviews, can benefit from reaching and recruiting better quality and more diverse candidates. Employers on the back foot when it comes to flex and recruitment will put some candidates off applying, find themselves unprepared and unsure answering questions during interviews and they will likely find it harder to fill vacancies. While the new flex law giving workers a 'day one' right to flex stops short of requiring employers to specify flex in job adverts, it's less disruptive for employers and more helpful for new recruits to discuss flex before 'day one'.

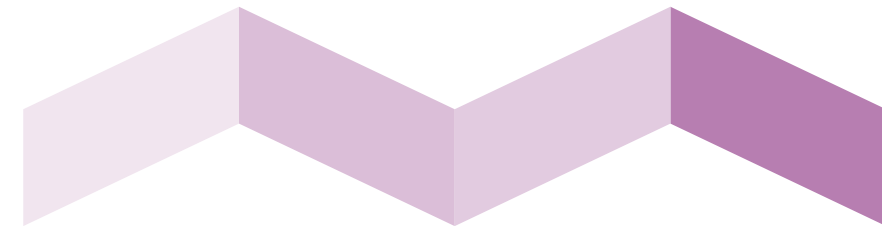


How to get it right



Consider the flex that's possible in roles before you advertise

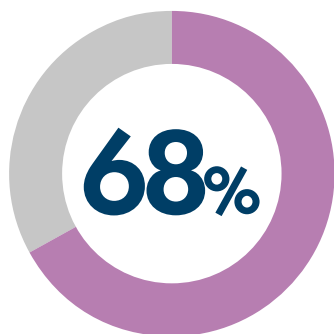
Before you advertise for a new role, think about whether it can be done more flexibly. Is all of the role tied to a set location, or set times? If not, could some tasks be done from home, or carried out at slightly different hours? Would the role work as a job share? Or as a part time role? Etc.





Make flex visible

Make flex clear in job adverts, on your website and on your social media channels. Best practice is to be as specific as possible in job adverts, such as stating the role could be hybrid, or that there is some flex over start and finish times. But at the least, you can add a standard sentence saying you're open to flexible working, which might make the difference in whether someone who needs flex applies for the role or not.



of unemployed adults looking for work say it's been difficult to get information about flexible working for most jobs they've considered



Discuss flex in interview

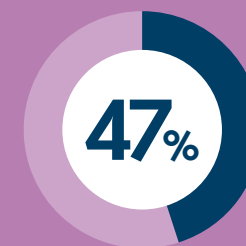
Too many employers think that candidates will simply ask for any flex they need during an interview. But we know lots of workers won't, especially if they're not already working flexibly, they're a woman, have a disability or long-term health condition or they're on a low salary. The business benefit of discussing flex at interview is that you can recruit better and more diverse candidates. By being on the front foot and getting everything agreed in advance, both the employer and new worker can feel more confident about what's expected too.



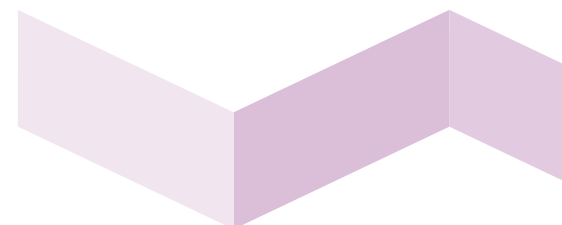
Who's not comfortable asking for flex?



of all workers



of all workers who don't currently work flex

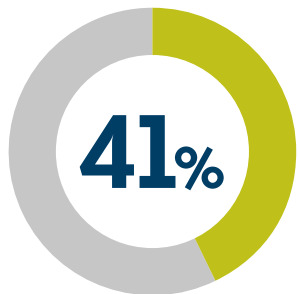


Step 6

Support managers

Employer challenge:

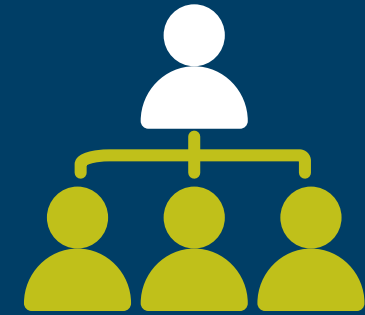
Many employers recognise line managers are dealing with specific challenges around flexible working, or in some cases, that the managers themselves are the challenge. Yet four in ten employers aren't providing any support for their managers to help them manage flexible workers.



of employers don't support managers to manage flexible workers (or don't know if they do)

Why does this matter?

Line managers play a crucial role in how people feel about their job. Whatever your company policies are, it's your line managers who make them a day-to-day reality for your staff and part of your working culture. When it comes to flexible working, we know lots has changed since the pandemic in policy and in practice, and it often falls to line managers to clarify the new guidance and lead by example, as well as managing people who work in different ways, such as remotely.



Employers say...

Line managers who are opposed to flex are holding back flex

37%

Managers are struggling to get people into the office as much as they'd like

33%

Managers are struggling to have conversations with workers about flex

30%

But as our research shows, if you're not training and supporting your managers, then on a practical level they might not know how to create the right balance of in-person and remote work for the whole team, or put together a rota that takes people's preferences into account. Likewise, if they've never seen the business case for flex, they might not understand how flex is good for business as well as people.

How to get it right



Get your managers on board with flex

More than a third of employers say resistance to flex from line managers is holding them back from creating greater flex across the organisation. Help your managers understand the benefits of flex by sharing your business case on why flex is good for people and your organisation. Make sure they know flex isn't just for parents and that all kinds of people want or need flex for all kinds of reasons.



Practical support and training

For flexible working to be a success, managers need to be confident in many tasks. These include knowing how best to communicate and motivate teams that are not always together in person at the same time, how to proactively begin conversations about work life balance, how to set clear objectives, which is crucial for assessing performance, and how to have conversations when performance or behaviours are not acceptable. Also being creative and proactive when it comes to flex and job design and recruitment. These ways of working aren't instinctive to everyone, and many managers need support and training to help them see the possibilities and feel confident in discussing them with their teams.

Offering training and support for managers pays dividends for your organisation, especially in terms of retaining good workers. For example, if a manager suggests two part time workers apply for a promotion as a job share, this could retain two skilled and experienced

members of staff and bring two minds and perspectives to the more senior role. Remember we know lots of people (especially women) don't feel comfortable asking for flex, so proactive, supportive managers can help you keep great people and create a more diverse workforce.



Provide managers with easy-to-use guidance and checklists

Alongside formal training, managers benefit from having clear written guides and checklists to help them with day-to-day tasks. For example, you might create a template for 1-1s, which includes wellbeing questions and asking about working patterns. Or you might create a checklist for managers discussing flexible working and dealing with requests from their team. Or, you might create a guidance document on how managers can have a supportive conversation with someone who doesn't want to come into the office.

Step 7

Measure the impact of flex

Employer challenge:

Employers rightly want to review and update guidance on how people can work. But not enough are recording and analysing what's happening in their workplace in order to make informed decisions.

Why does this matter?

Let's not forget, the pandemic was the biggest shakeup of working patterns in over a century and despite how long ago lockdown feels, we're still in the early 'test and learn' phase of our new ways of working. It makes sense to monitor and assess changes to find evidence of what works, and also what doesn't.

But our data shows the majority of employers are not recording and analysing what's happening. This means if some senior managers feel workers should be back in the office full time, there's no hard data on where people are actually working, and no one has cross checked this with organisational KPIs to see if targets are still being met, whether sickness absence has reduced, or what staff think about it. There's no evidence on which to make an informed decision.



7 in 10

employers are not recording who's working flexibly



6 in 10

employers are not monitoring progression for flexible workers

In addition, employers have a duty to ensure they don't create new inequalities for staff. For example, we know part time workers are less likely to be promoted than full time colleagues, and now that many more people are working flexibly there's a legitimate concern we may inadvertently create a two-tier workforce with people who can work full time and on-site doing well, getting great experience and promotions, and those who work differently not able to progress. If you don't monitor this, you won't know.

How to get it right



Agree how you will evaluate flex and create a flex scorecard

Discuss internally what you want to monitor. We recommend creating a 'flex scorecard' covering three key areas. The first is business metrics, such as productivity, financial indicators and customer feedback. The second is staff satisfaction and wellbeing, which includes insights from staff surveys and exit interviews. The third is workforce measures, such as absenteeism rates, retention and demographics on who is working flexibly.



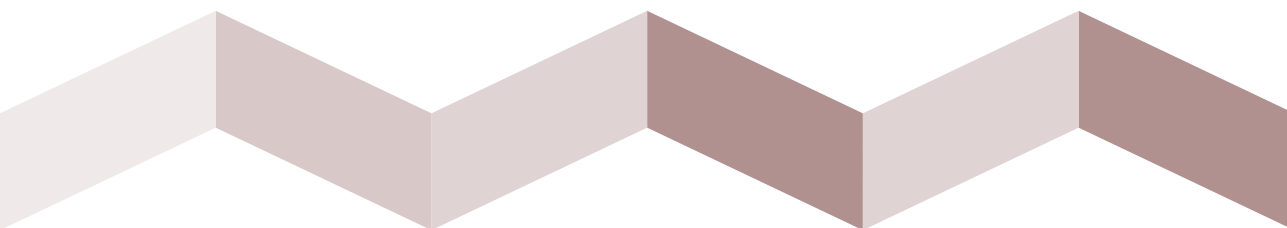
Ensure you have the tools and systems in place to measure impact

Once you know what you want to monitor, you'll need to make sure you are able to record and share the data. Does your HR system automatically capture some of your data? Do you need to create a staff survey, or run one more regularly? Do you need to create a report or dashboard to share the data in an easy-to-understand format? How will you circulate this?



Analyse the data and use it to make informed decisions

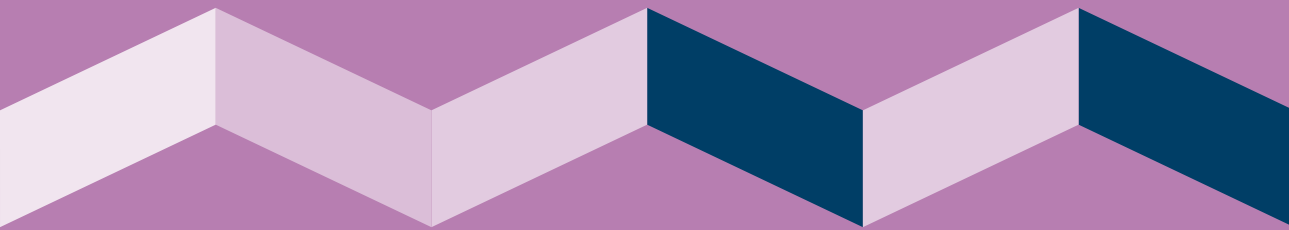
Has a switch to a new hybrid model affected KPIs or staff satisfaction? Is recruitment more effective if you mention flexible working? Make sure you analyse the data you've captured so you can make evidence-based decisions.



Part 3

#FlexForLife

FINAL INSPIRATION



What's next for flex?

We are still in the 'test and learn' phase for many forms of flexible working, following the pandemic shakeup of traditional working patterns. Policy and practice is, rightly, still being tweaked. But the overall trend remains a steady rise in flex.

This is our fourth annual *Flex for Life* research report, and the number of people in Scotland working flexibly has increased each year. What's more, our latest data from employers and workers suggests this trend for steadily increasing flex is likely to continue, with most people believing that flex in their organisation will stay the same or increase over the next 12 months.

The overwhelming majority of Scottish workers want flexibility, and most Scottish employers say flex benefits their organisation too. If your organisation has been holding back on embracing greater flex, waiting to see which direction the prevailing winds blow, we hope our data evidence demonstrates irrefutably that flex is here now, and will be our future too.

If you want to explore more flex but still don't quite know where to start, or you have a particular challenge this report alone can't fix, please get in touch via hello@flexibilityworks.org or 0141 378 8330. We'll be happy to help.

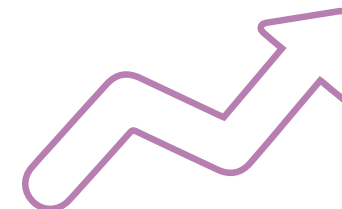
Who expects flex to stay the same or increase?



85% of workers



91% of employers



Business story

Design your day at Young Scot



Charity Young Scot is best known for its entitlement card giving discounts and free bus travel to young people in Scotland. Its team of 40 office-based staff also provides information, support and citizenship opportunities to young people.

What does flex look like?

- 70% of workers have a formal flex arrangement, such as part time hours, phased retirement, or compressed hours.

"We are a wellbeing focussed employer because this enables people to do their best work."

Kirsten Urquhart, Chief Executive

- All staff can work remotely though teams work 'intentional' (core) days in the office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Regular all staff meetings take place in-person.
- **Staff are encouraged to 'design your day', eg longer lunch breaks in winter so people get outside in daylight hours, or adjusting working hours around other commitments such as the school run.**
- A reduced/four-day week is under consideration.

Challenges

- An attempt to ensure flexible workers weren't all off on the same day created problems for scheduling full staff engagements, so core 'intentional' office days were introduced Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Impact

- Good work life balance for staff creates an efficient, highly productive workforce for Young Scot.
- Large numbers of candidates apply for roles in part because flex is clear in job adverts. Some roles attract up to 100 applicants.
- Hybrid working minimises disruption from bad weather and transport strikes, and saves money because desk space isn't needed for everyone at the same time.
- Reduced sickness and absence.

Business story

Flex at McAllister Litho Glasgow's print factory

Print firm McAllister Litho Glasgow (MLG) operates its print works from 7am to 7pm. Of its 40 members of staff, 33 are frontline workers who operate factory equipment and cannot work from home.

What does flex look like?

- Factory staff work full time, either 36 or 40 hours a week. Most people choose compressed hours, such as three 12-hour shifts, though some people choose more shorter shifts.
- Factory staff can also swap shifts, make small adjustments to hours, or use some annual leave, if something unexpected comes up outside of work.
- Office staff can work from home.

Challenges

- Occasionally people don't like their shift patterns and don't speak up because they think they're doing the right thing to help the business. Janette McAllister, MLG's Managing Director, says she and other senior leaders have to keep reminding and encouraging staff to speak up.

Impact

- Happier and more satisfied workforce.
- Ongoing loyalty and hard work from staff.
- Best service for clients.



The Print People!

"We can't give flexibility on where most of our team members work but we can give flexibility on when they work their hours. So long as we've got the right equipment free for when someone wants to work, that's fine with us.

"We're only as good as the people who work for us. Without them we couldn't deliver for our clients so being flexible just makes good business sense as well as being the right thing to do."

Janette McAllister
Managing Director

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 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



Nikki Slowey



Lisa Gallagher

and new ways of working in Scotland, by sharing advice, insight and best practice, which improves business success, employee engagement and wellbeing.

An important strand of our work includes research and projects with lower income workers and unemployed adults looking for work, as we explore and evidence how flexible working can play a role in reducing poverty in Scotland.

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:



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

Contact us on:

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E: hello@flexibilityworks.org

W: www.flexibilityworks.org



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