

CIPD



Report  
June 2025

# Working Lives

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# Scotland 2025

### **About the CIPD in Scotland**

The CIPD has been championing better work and working lives for over 100 years. We help organisations thrive by focusing on their people, supporting our economies and societies.

As the career partner to around 11,000 members in Scotland, we sit at the heart of a proud, growing community of practitioners, partners, policy-makers and thought leaders in the world of work, committed to making Scotland a better place to work.

We work with the Scottish Government, its agencies and several academic, business and voluntary partners on a broad range of public policy issues, with a particular focus on fair work, skills and productivity. We are key partners on multiple working groups, and through our Public Policy Forum, we both inform and deliver changes in policy.

## Report

# Working Lives Scotland 2025

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# Foreword

This is the sixth CIPD *Working Lives Scotland* report, which continues to provide significant and valuable insight into workers' experiences of fair work as well as how workplaces in Scotland are progressing on their fair work journey. What happens in our workplaces is vital, not just to our economy but to the wellbeing of our society, the lives we lead, our health, the quality of our family life and our scope to participate in community life.

This annual survey helps build the evidence landscape on the fairness of work, continuing to tell the story of changing conditions of work and the factors influencing it. The Fair Work Convention recognises CIPD Scotland's continuing support for fair work and its willingness to invest in data gathering that aids the development of evidence-based policy interventions.

It is well known that job satisfaction and work engagement have a strong relationship with and often directly impact physical and mental health and wellbeing. This, in turn, can affect individual and organisational performance. Yet, consistent with the 2024 data, the survey found a quarter of Scottish employees saying work has a negative impact on their mental or physical health, showing there is still progress to be made in this area. The report also shows that high workloads, long commuting times and caring responsibilities have a negative impact on work-life balance. Home and hybrid working patterns are unchanged from last year, but a gap remains between ways of working and preferences – there is significant unmet demand for some flexible working options, primarily the four-day week, compressed hours and flexi-time. Employee voice scores and manager ratings are improving, but nearly a fifth of all Scottish employees report no access to any voice channels, including one-to-one meetings with managers or team meetings, a concerning finding that has been consistent over recent years.

Fair work offers all individuals an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect and is increasingly recognised as a key driver for business success and broader economic prosperity. Improving fair work balances the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers and generates benefits for individuals, organisations and society.

Significant changes to employment law are currently being legislated for by the UK Government that will help with the journey towards fair work. Minimum standards and their enforcement are necessary and provide a solid and secure foundation to progress fair work, but are perhaps not sufficient. In the coming year, employers should be supported to respond positively to the new regulations created by the Employment Rights Bill. This is also an opportunity to raise awareness of the benefits that fair work and positive industrial relations can bring to businesses to support positive and consistent outcomes for employers and workers and help employers build strong and resilient businesses for the future.



*Patricia Findlay*

**Patricia Findlay**  
Co-Chair, Fair  
Work Convention



*Mary Alexander*

**Mary Alexander**  
Co-Chair, Fair  
Work Convention

# Key findings

Our *Working Lives Scotland* report is now in its sixth year – spanning from just before, during the height of, to after the pandemic. In the absence of national statistics, it is unique in its analysis of Scottish job quality changes and continuity over time. It supports a broader picture of job quality in the UK, provided by the CIPD's *Good Work Index* research.

Alongside standing job quality measures we report on every year as well as the underlying and persistent differences by occupation, sector, income, gender, age or disability, there are several other themes we are focusing on this year.

## **Drivers and outcomes of ill health at work**

- 26% of Scottish employees (equating to around 690,000) say that work has a negative impact on their mental health and 24% say it has a negative impact on their physical health.
- High workloads, stress, exhaustion as well as poor workplace relationships and work–life balance are associated with negative impacts on health.
- Those who report negative impacts on mental health also report poorer job satisfaction, a higher likelihood to quit and are less likely to recommend their employer or go above and beyond at work.

## **Impact of automation by AI**

- 12% of Scottish employees had some tasks automated by AI at work. These were mostly described as repetitive tasks.
- A significant majority (72%) have said that AI automation has improved their performance at work.
- Overall, 30% of all employees think that there is a great deal/fair amount of potential to automate their tasks in the future.

## **Work–life balance challenges and negative impacts of commuting time**

- High workloads, long commuting times and caring responsibilities have a negative impact on work–life balance.
- Over a fifth (22%) of Scottish employees find it hard to relax in their personal time due to their job.
- There is a linear relationship between the length of commute and a range of negative outcomes, with impacts on job satisfaction, likelihood to quit and employee health.

## **Hybrid working stabilising, but flexible working gaps remain**

- Home and hybrid working patterns are unchanged from last year, but a gap remains between ways of working and preferences – a higher proportion of employees would like to work hybrid.
- Rates of flexible working remain higher than pre-pandemic, with 76% saying this has had a positive impact on their quality of life.
- There is significant unmet demand for some flexible working options, primarily the four-day week, compressed hours and flexi-time.

### **Employee voice scores and manager ratings improving**

- Our employee voice scores have improved for the first time in two years, as have manager ratings overall.
- Consistently, nearly a fifth (19%) of all Scottish employees report no access to any voice channels, including one-to-one meetings with managers and team meetings.
- Almost a quarter (24%) of Scottish employees are members of a trade union or staff association. A fifth (20%) of all employees say management is in favour of trade union membership, with the same proportion saying the opposite.

## Introduction

The CIPD's purpose is to champion better work and working lives, putting job quality at the heart of our aims. Our research seeks to influence policy and practice by highlighting the links between good work and individual wellbeing, organisational productivity and, in consequence, economic growth.

This is our sixth *Working Lives Scotland* report. It continues to provide insight to policy-makers, employers and people professionals and to show gaps and trade-offs around several aspects of job quality, with additional challenges for various employee groups. Understanding these differences is the first step to making jobs better for all.

As in previous reports, we reframed the CIPD's seven dimensions of 'good work' around Scotland's five fair work dimensions – respect, security, opportunity, fulfilment and effective voice.

In the CIPD's view, good work:

- is fairly rewarded
- gives people the means to make a living securely
- gives opportunities to develop skills and a career and ideally gives a sense of fulfilment
- provides a supportive environment with constructive relationships
- allows for work–life balance
- is physically and mentally healthy for people
- gives employees the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives
- should be accessible to all.

All of these dimensions are present in the [Fair Work Framework](#) and are highlighted throughout this report. Ultimately, any job quality framework seeks the same outcome – to make work fairer and better for all employees.

Significant changes to employment law in Great Britain are currently being legislated for by the UK Government. Any impact of these changes on job quality won't be seen until the 2026 or 2027 reports. Both the UK and Scottish governments are also increasing their focus on economic inactivity, in particular supporting those with long-term ill health back into work. However, ensuring people don't drop out of work in the first place needs to be a part of the solution too.

A significant minority of employees in Scotland continue to report their work has a negative effect on their mental health, equating to about 690,000 workers in Scotland. It is these workers who are particularly likely to be at risk of falling out of employment. This report highlights some of the factors associated with work that are bad for people's health and provides pointers for policy-makers and employers on how to address these.

# 1 Respect

This chapter looks at job quality aspects like health and wellbeing at work, interpersonal relationships and relationships with managers. It also examines issues in relation to work–life balance and commuting time.

## Key findings

- 26% of Scottish employees (equating to around 690,000) say that work has a negative impact on their mental health and 24% say it has a negative impact on their physical health.
- High workloads, stress, exhaustion as well as poor workplace relationships and work–life balance are associated with negative impacts on health.
- Those who report negative impacts on mental health also report poorer job satisfaction, a higher likelihood to quit and are less likely to recommend their employer or go above and beyond at work.

## Mental and physical health at work

Our survey asked employees questions about physical and mental health, the impact of work, as well as whether they had experienced specific physical or mental health problems. Overall in 2025, 62% of employees described their mental health as good, with 59% describing their physical health as good – virtually unchanged over the last six years.

When it comes to how work impacts on health, 26% of employees said their work impacts negatively or very negatively on their mental health, with 24% reporting the same for their physical health. These numbers have also stayed consistent throughout our previous surveys. Looking at different groups of employees, disabled employees were more likely to say that work has a negative impact on their mental (32%) and physical (35%) health. We explore the drivers and outcomes of ill health in the next section.

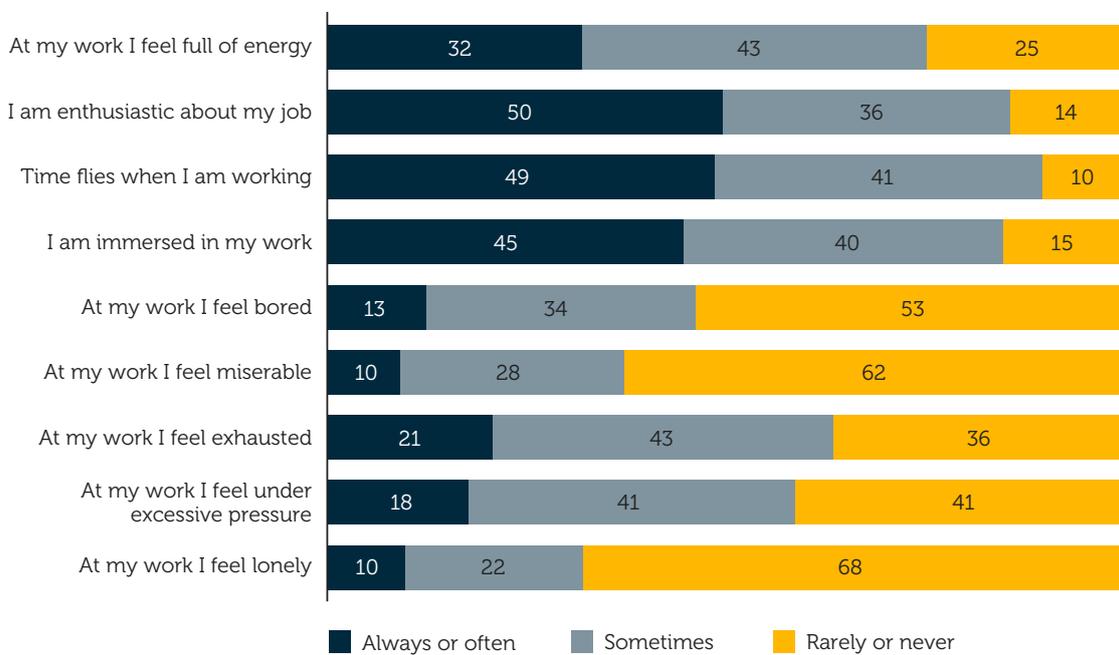
Just under half (48%) of employees have experienced some form of physical health condition, while 44% have experienced a mental health condition over the last 12 months. As in previous reports, the most common reported conditions were:

- backache or other bone, joint or muscle problems (33%)
- sleep problems (28%)
- anxiety (28%)
- depression (16%).

Reported COVID-19 has continued to drop – from 30% in 2023, to 16% in 2024 and 6% in 2025.

In addition to reporting physical and mental health conditions, the survey also looked at the subjective feelings workers have at work (Figure 1). These can be a good indication of the impact work has on individuals’ mental health in particular.

**Figure 1: How workers feel at work (%)**



There are some clear associations between occupations and management level across these indicators. For example, a significantly higher proportion of senior managers reported higher stress levels – 26% always or often felt under excessive pressure, compared with those without management responsibilities (14%).

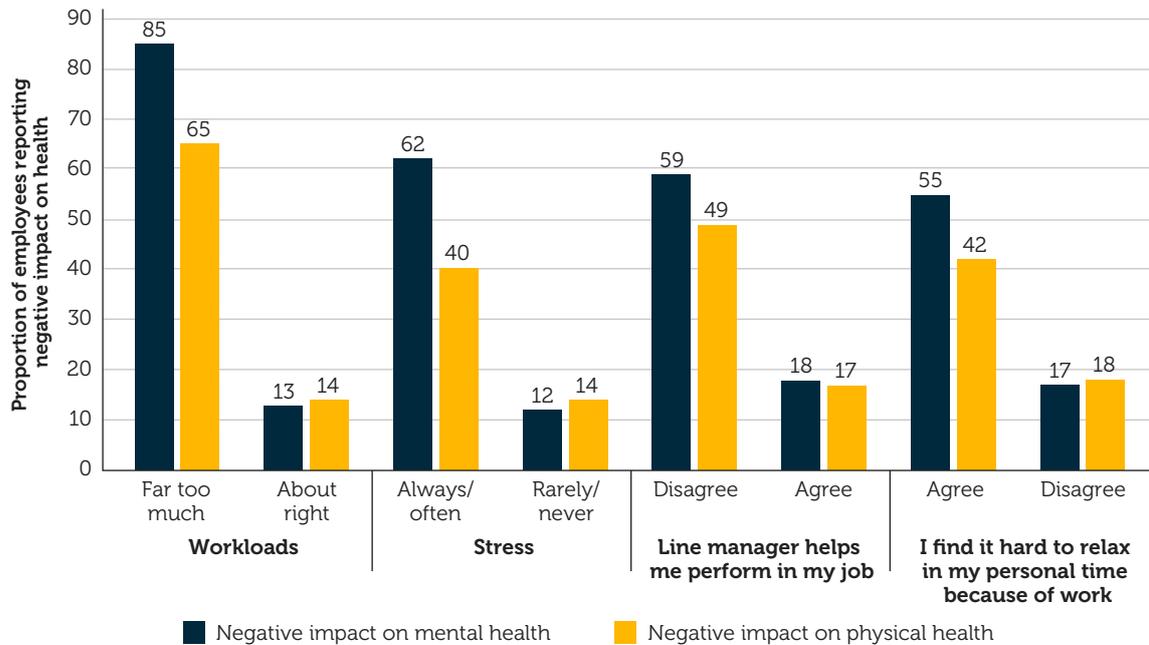
**Drivers and outcomes of ill health at work**

The CIPD’s previous job quality research has shown health and wellbeing as having the strongest relationship with job satisfaction and job enthusiasm out of all job quality dimensions. In addition to its most direct impact on wellbeing, good mental and physical health can therefore impact individual and, by extension, organisational performance.

Given the recent additional focus on economic inactivity, in particular inactivity due to long-term sickness, understanding the drivers of ill health at work is an important piece of the puzzle for policy-makers in Scotland and the UK as a whole. Based on our survey, around 690,000 workers in Scotland say work has a negative impact on their mental health. It is these workers who are particularly likely to be at risk of falling out of employment into economic inactivity.

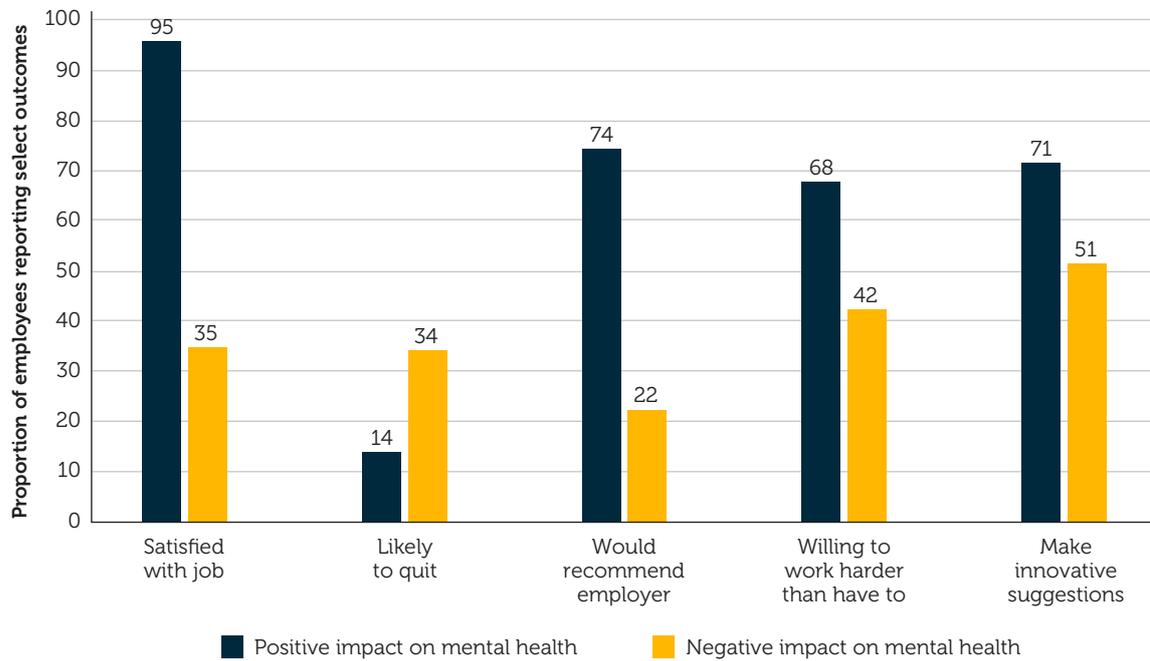
Figure 2 summarises our findings. It clearly shows the impact of high workloads, stress and exhaustion on both mental and physical health. In addition to these, we also find associations between poor work–life balance and commuting time. While the Scottish sample is too small, UK data also suggests poor relationships with colleagues and managers having an impact. A supportive organisational climate (or lack thereof) that encourages staff to openly talk about mental health also has a significant impact.

**Figure 2: Drivers of negative impacts of work on health (%)**



The impact of ill health at work can be individual as well as organisational. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between work that negatively impacts mental health and a range of metrics. Compared with answers given by those who report a positive impact on mental health, we see that those who report negative impacts are more likely to quit, less likely to recommend their employer and have lower job satisfaction as well as adaptive performance.

**Figure 3: Negative impact of work on mental health and poor outcomes (%)**



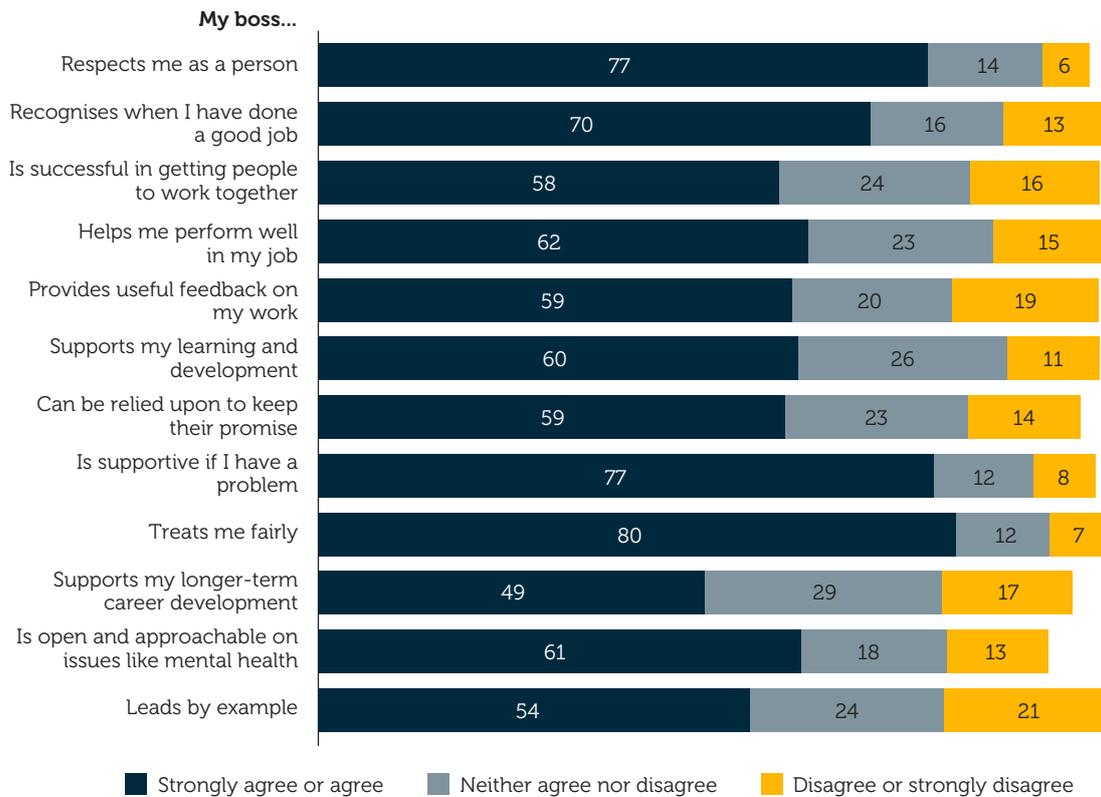
### Relationships at work

Research shows that good relationships at work improve the way organisations function, with bad relationships negatively affecting performance. Relationships at work matter to individuals’ health and wellbeing, to their motivation, commitment and performance, and to organisational functioning – directly through impact on performance and indirectly through trust and engagement.

In line with our survey series, employee views on relationships at work were overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority reported very good or good relationships with their colleagues, managers, the staff they manage and customers/clients.

In addition to the quality of relationships in the workplace, the survey included questions that focus specifically on the relationship with managers (Figure 4). Managers rated largely positively across all the questions, with the exception of career development.

**Figure 4: Relationships with managers (%)**



Note: Does not add up to 100% because of N/A answers.

There are some interesting differences that can be drawn out across relationships as well as manager ratings. In line with our previous reports, we see that those who work from home full-time report poorer relationships with their colleagues compared with those who don't work from home at all. Conversely, homeworkers' manager ratings are considerably higher, underlining the importance of line management to enabling flexible working as well as highlighting occupational and industry differences.

In addition, we found disabled employees reporting poorer relationships with managers, which is corroborated by some of their manager ratings too. For example, while 63% of those with no disabilities say their manager is open and approachable on issues like mental health, only 51% of disabled employees agree.

Positive workplace relationships as well as manager ratings are again associated with better job satisfaction, higher task performance (eg achieving the objectives of the job) and contextual performance (eg helping colleagues or making innovative suggestions). We also found that those reporting poor relationships and negative manager ratings are considerably more likely to quit and less likely to recommend their employer.

It is worth pointing out that our UK-wide *CIPD Good Work Index* found an uptick in manager ratings, as well as improvements in managers' reported time and training to manage staff. Similar changes are seen in Scotland too, but the smaller sample sizes mean these differences are statistically significant only across a few of the dimensions.

### **Workplace conflict**

Workplace conflict was one of the focus areas in last year's *Good Work Index* and *Working Lives Scotland* reports. There are virtually no differences in the 2025 findings, with similar incidences, differences and resolutions reported.

Overall, we found that 28% of employees personally experienced some type of workplace conflict, with the highest incidences being:

- undermined and/or humiliated in a job (15%)
- shouted at or in a very heated argument (11%)
- verbally abused or insulted (10%)
- discriminatory behaviour because of a protected characteristic (4%).

Incidence of conflict is again considerably higher for women (32% experienced some conflict, compared with only 22% of men) and for employees who report workloads that are too high (41% of these have experienced conflict). Conversely, only 5% of those who fully work from home experienced conflict, compared with 21% of those who mostly work from home and 33% of those who don't work from home at all.

We again found strong negative associations with job satisfaction, wellbeing – especially the impact of work on health – as well as associations with task and contextual performance (going above and beyond).

Those who experienced conflict were also asked about how they dealt with it:

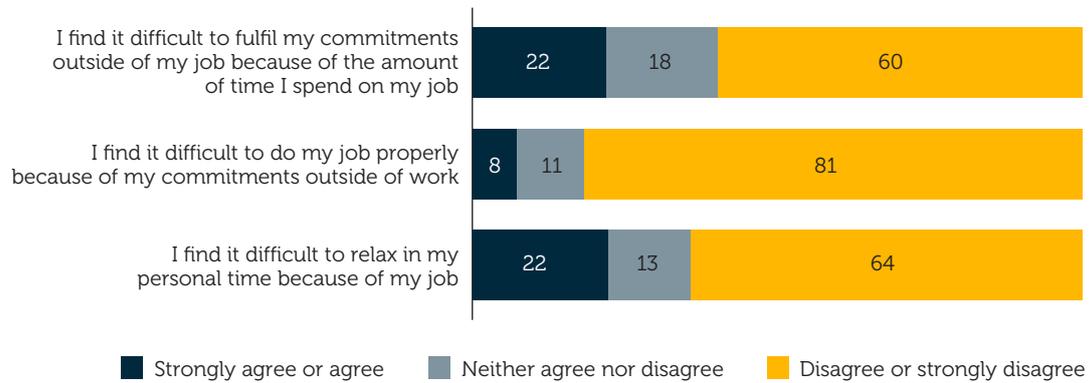
- I just let it go (41%)
- discussion with my manager and/or HR (30%)
- informal discussion with the other person (27%)
- discussion with someone outside of work (eg family, friend) (22%)
- I decided to look for a new job or left (11%).

Lastly, there again was a relatively even split in answers as to whether the matter had been resolved. Some 28% felt it was fully resolved, 42% partly and 31% felt it was not resolved.

### **Work–life balance and commuting time**

The lines between our working and personal lives, and the right balance between the two, are crucial to our wellbeing. Our survey explored three different dimensions of work–life balance (Figure 5). These have stayed relatively constant throughout our series.

**Figure 5: Work–life balance (%)**



Unsurprisingly, factors like high workloads (linked to occupations and management responsibilities) impact answers to these questions. Nearly half (46%) of those who say their workloads are too high find it hard to relax in their personal time and another 40% find it hard to fulfil commitments outside of their job. Of those with management responsibilities, 29% found it hard to relax, compared with only 17% of those without any management responsibilities.

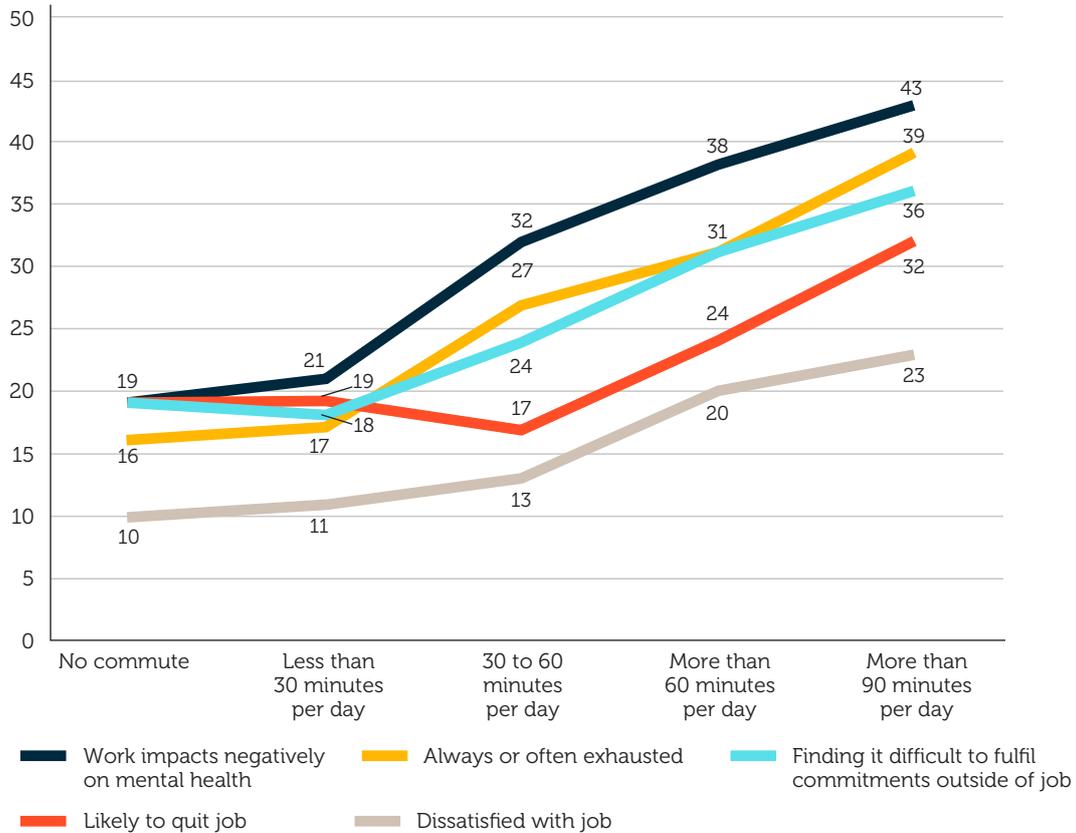
As in previous years, caring responsibilities are a significant factor. Of those caring for children, 16% say they find it difficult to do their job properly, compared with just 4% of those with no caring responsibilities.

In this year’s report, we took a closer look at commuting time, which significantly impacts work–life balance. Overall, we found that most Scottish employees commute three or more days per week (63%), with another 16% commuting one to two days a week. Some 7% commute less than one day per week and 10% don’t commute at all. The median commuting time was 40 minutes per day. The main methods were:

- drive in a car (58%)
- public transport (22%)
- walk or cycle (17%).

Besides the impact on work–life balance, we found a linear relationship between the length of commute and a range of negative outcomes. We see impacts on job satisfaction, likelihood to quit and employee health.

Figure 6: Commute time and negative outcomes (%)



## 2

# Security

Employee pay, benefits and contractual arrangements are crucial elements of fair work. Security and stability in employment, in addition to a predictable income, are important aspects of job quality that impact on individuals' and their families' quality of life. In addition, subjective measures around work – like pay satisfaction or work centrality – are useful indicators of employee enthusiasm.

### Key findings

- The main reasons for changing jobs are better pay/benefits (30%), work–life balance (26%), job satisfaction (19%) and unhappiness with leadership or management (18%).
- 16% of Scottish employees have lost sleep due to worrying about money, 14% had health problems and 11% found it hard to concentrate at work.
- Only a small proportion (12%) have had tasks automated by AI. The vast majority of these (72%) say it has improved their performance at work.

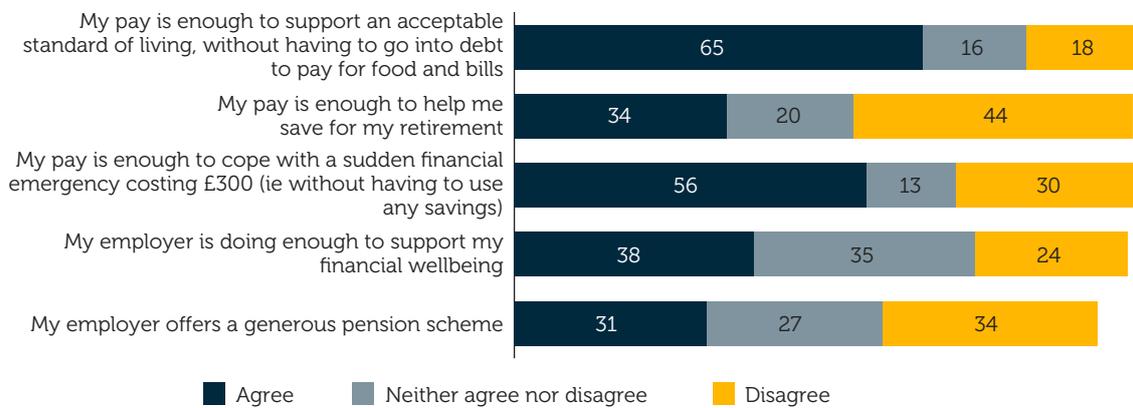
### Pay, benefits and financial wellbeing

Consistent with previous *Working Lives Scotland* reports, both life and job satisfaction are lowest for those earning under £20,000 per year compared with those on higher income bands. It is, however, important to note that while there is good correlation between income and job satisfaction, some highly paid jobs consistently exhibit several negative qualities, for example around workload, work–life balance and stress, as highlighted throughout this report.

Despite the falls in inflation, employees continue to struggle with the cost of living. We have reintroduced financial wellbeing questions into this year’s survey, with the results summarised in Figure 7. Employees on higher incomes and public sector employees tend to respond more positively to these questions. On pensions in particular, 65% of public sector employees think their pension is generous, compared with only 24% of private sector employees.

Financial worries impacted employees’ health and wellbeing as well as their performance at work. Sixteen per cent of Scottish employees have lost sleep due to worrying about money, 14% had health problems and 11% found it hard to concentrate at work.

**Figure 7: Financial wellbeing (%)**

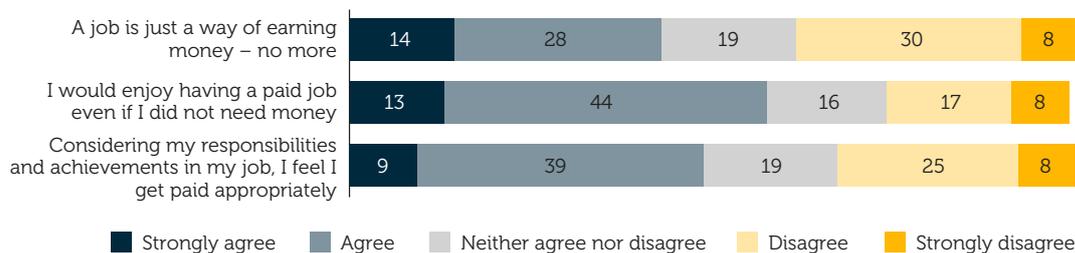


Note: Does not add up to 100% because of ‘don’t know’ answers.

### Subjective measures of pay

In addition to objective measures of pay, *Working Lives Scotland* looks at subjective measures of pay and ‘work centrality’ – what role work plays in employees’ lives (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Subjective measures of pay and work centrality (%)**



Note: Does not add up to 100% because of ‘don’t know’ answers.

We again found a positive correlation between pay satisfaction and reported income levels – those on higher incomes are more likely to feel they are paid appropriately, rising to 71% for those earning above £60,000 per year. Those with workloads that are too high are much less likely to be satisfied – 48% disagree, compared with only 25% who describe their workloads as ‘about right’. Lastly, we also find those who feel overqualified for their jobs report poorer pay satisfaction.

Our two work centrality questions measure the relative importance of work in our lives. These have barely changed since the inception of this survey. But there remain interesting differences across employee groups. On whether a job is just a way of earning money, we found higher than average disagreement from older workers aged 55+ (46%), as well as those working in the voluntary sector (58%). Responses from public sector workers that we highlighted in 2024 have reverted back to their series averages, suggesting last year’s drops may have been an outlier in data.

### **Job security**

Two of the core survey questions are around the likelihood to quit and the likelihood to lose one’s job. Nearly a fifth (19%) said they were likely to quit their jobs. There remains a strong link to job satisfaction, with 40% of those dissatisfied saying they would likely quit, compared with only 14% of those satisfied.

As highlighted throughout the report, those with poorer job quality dimensions think about quitting more – for example, 25% of those who said their workloads were too high said they were likely to quit, as did 34% of those who said their work impacted negatively on their mental health.

Employees continue to feel relatively secure in their jobs, with 61% of employees saying it was unlikely they would lose their job in the next 12 months. The findings again show that public sector employees feel more secure in their jobs (73% unlikely to lose job), as well as those with longer tenures.

In addition to the two core job security questions, we also measure employees’ confidence in the labour market – asking about the difficulty of finding a job as good as the one they currently have. This measure has stayed virtually the same post-pandemic, with 30% of employees in 2025 saying they would find an equivalent job easily. Public and voluntary sector employees were more likely to say it would be difficult to find an equivalent job, as were those with longer tenures.

Looking at job moves, 66% of respondents worked in another organisation before their current job. Their reasons for changing jobs provide an insight into what employers should prioritise when it comes to recruitment and retention. The key reasons were:

- better pay/benefits (30%)
- better work–life balance (26%)
- to increase job satisfaction (19%)
- being unhappy with leadership of senior management (18%).

### **Underemployment and overwork**

In addition to the objective measure of hours worked, the survey asked employees how many hours they would like to work, while “taking into account the need to earn a living”. This gives an indication of underemployment and overwork, which are elements of job quality. Just like most aspects of job quality, they differ by occupation, with the lowest-paid occupations most likely to report underemployment too.

Underemployment, where employees aren’t working as much as they would like, is a source of insecurity in the labour market. Our results show that 85% of people work at least as much as they would like to, with around 16% saying they would like to work more hours than they currently do – virtually unchanged over the years.

On the other end of the scale, we can estimate overwork by measuring the difference between reported usual hours of work and preferred hours of work. The survey found that only 26% of employees work at least the hours they would like to, with 58% reporting some levels of overwork, which is much more common than underemployment.

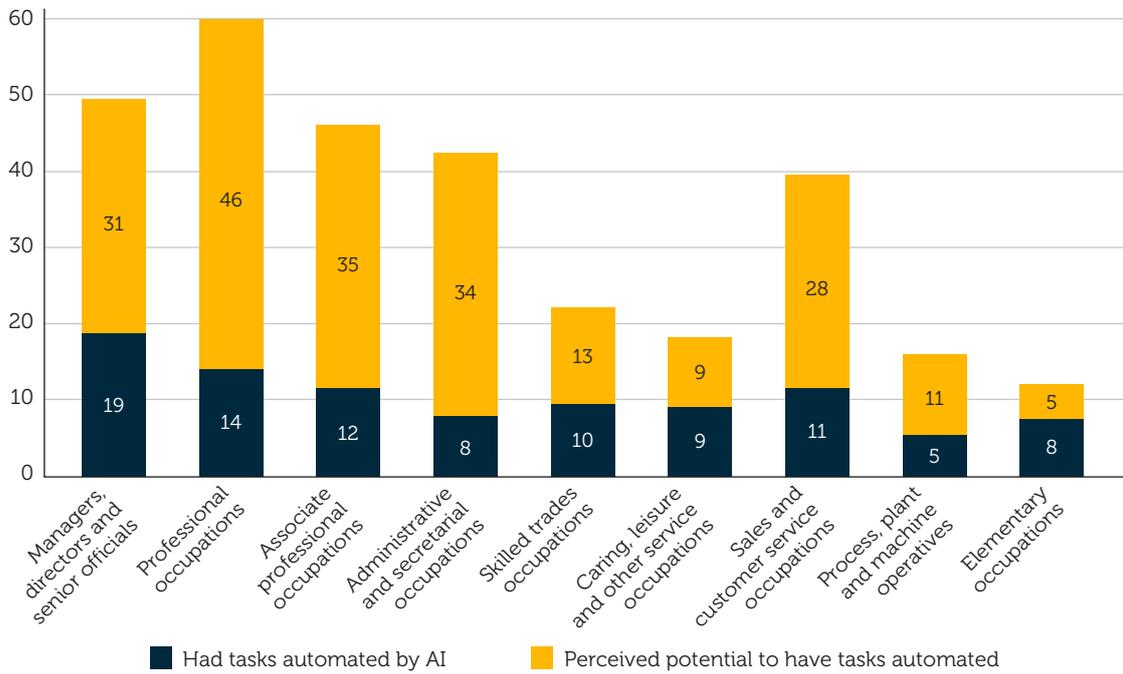
Both underemployment and overwork are associated with negative outcomes. We find a higher likelihood to quit (stronger for underemployment), lower likelihood to recommend one’s employer, poorer work–life balance (especially for overwork) and worse impacts on mental and physical health (stronger for overwork). We also see similar levels of dissatisfaction with jobs – 15% (underemployment) and 16% (overwork), compared with only 5% for those who work the hours they want to.

### **Automation and AI at work**

Given the increased interest in automation – in particular through artificial intelligence (AI) – and its impact on the labour market, this year’s *Working Lives Scotland* included questions on this topic. Overall, we find that only 12% of Scottish employees had tasks they perform automated by AI, with more automation across higher occupational and socioeconomic classes. Those who had tasks automated were most likely to describe the tasks as repetitive (68%).

Positively, out of those who had tasks automated, the vast majority (72%) report that this has improved their performance at work, with only 7% saying it has worsened it. Looking ahead, 30% of Scottish employees think there is a great deal/fair amount of potential to use AI to automate tasks they perform, with the same occupational and socioeconomic differences.

Figure 9: Current and potential automation by AI across occupations (%)



# 3

## Opportunity

Equal opportunities regardless of race, age, gender or disability are key to fair work. Furthermore, skills development and career advancement opportunities are both important job quality elements. While this survey doesn't provide insight around issues like recruitment, it does allow us to expose some differences in opportunities available to different groups of employees.

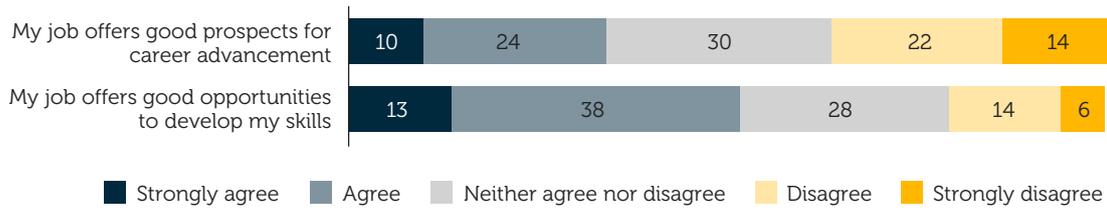
### Key findings

- Around a third (34%) of employees believe their job offers good prospects for career advancement, while 51% feel their job offers good opportunities to develop their skills.
- Rates of flexible working remain higher than pre-pandemic, with 76% saying this has had a positive impact on their quality of life.
- There is significant unmet demand for some flexible working options, primarily the four-day week, compressed hours and flexi-time.

### Personal and career development

The importance of skills development to individual wellbeing, organisational productivity and the country’s economy as a whole is well researched. Personal and career development opportunities form an important part of future job prospects, while being increasingly important for employers, in recruitment as well as in retention. Figure 10 summarises the answers received across the two questions we asked.

**Figure 10: Personal and career development (%)**



Note: Does not add up to 100% because of ‘don’t know’ answers.

We again found a positive relationship between rising incomes and reported opportunities for both skills development and career advancement. Of those earning more than £60,000 per year, 70% reported good skills development opportunities and 64% reported good career advancement options. This compares with only 43% and 26% respectively for those earning less than £20,000.

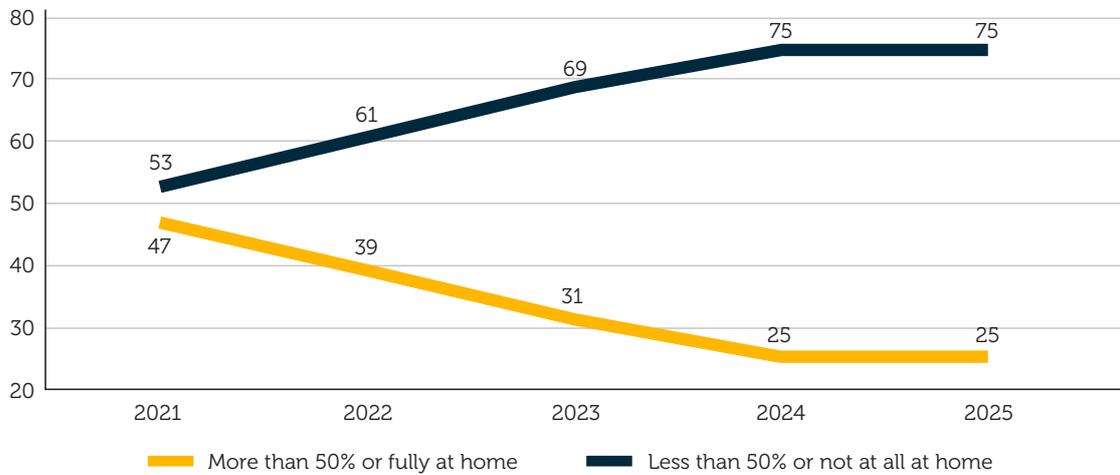
These differences are linked to occupational classes, with a persistent lack of skills development and perceived career progression pathways for those in lower-paid occupations. This is also reflected in sectoral differences, with public sector employees responding considerably more positively than private sector employees.

### Flexible working

The most obvious impact of the pandemic has been the increase in home and hybrid working across Scotland and the UK as a whole. We continue to see nearly half of all employees (49%) work at least some of the time from home, although these differ considerably across occupations and industries.

Last year’s report highlighted the slow drift away from homeworking after the pandemic. This has seemingly stabilised in this year’s survey. As in 2024, however, future home and hybrid working preferences did not change – opening a gap between preferences (12% want to work from home fully) and working patterns (only 7% do).

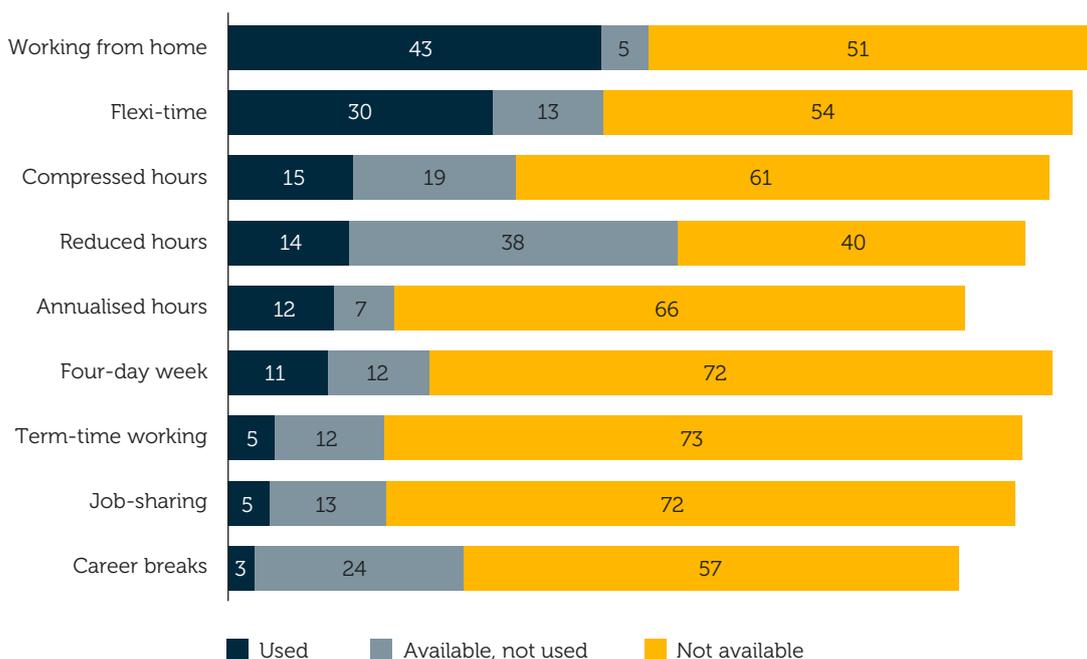
**Figure 11: Home and hybrid working since 2021 (%)**



Meanwhile, 33% of Scottish employees said they are in jobs where they can't work from home at all. Another 12% said they did not want to work from home at all. Combined, that's nearly half (45%) of all Scottish employees for whom the benefits of flexibility can only be unlocked by looking beyond homeworking. This is crucial not only from an individual wellbeing perspective, but also from an organisational inclusion and fairness point of view.

Overall, we found that while 53% of Scottish employees worked flexibly before the pandemic, this number has now increased to 63%, or 70% if you include more types of flexible working. That being said, Figure 12 shows considerable gaps in the availability of different flexible working options.

**Figure 12: Availability of flexible working (%)**



Note: Does not add up to 100% because of 'don't know' answers.

We found some clear differences between sectors, industries and occupations, with much better availability in the public sector, larger organisations and higher occupational classes. Some forms of flexible working are more prevalent in specific industries, for example the use of annualised hours or a higher prevalence of the four-day week in smaller organisations.

Those who don't have availability of at least one of these options were also asked a follow-up question to select a flexible working option they would like to use if it were available in their role. While 32% said they would not use any, the top three arrangements were unsurprisingly those with the least likely impact on income:

- four-day week (45%)
- compressed hours (26%)
- flexi-time (21%).

We also asked about the perceived impact of flexible working on employees' quality of life and career prospects. An overwhelming majority (76%) believed that flexible working had a positive impact on their quality of life, with only 4% reporting a negative impact.

The majority of respondents (58%) did not think there was an impact on career prospects, with 29% saying flexible working had a positive impact and 8% saying it had a negative impact. Notably, the proportion of employees who reported a positive impact has increased from 18% the last time we asked this question, in 2022, suggesting a shift in employee attitudes towards flexible working and careers.

Informal flexibility – without a change in employment contracts – can also enable greater control over the way work interacts with the rest of our lives. The survey found that over two-thirds of all employees report good informal flexibility in their jobs, with 69% saying they would find it easy to take time off for personal or family matters.

There is a direct correlation with occupations and income – employees in higher-paid occupations reported more informal flexibility. We also find those with longer tenures report better informal flexibility, with 73% of those with more than 10 years in their current organisation finding it easy, compared with 59% of those with less than two years.

## 4 Fulfilment

The intrinsic features of a job, how it is designed, the complexity of tasks involved and the control an employee has over them as well as how it matches one's skillset are crucial to job quality. The [Fair Work Framework](#) calls this 'fulfilment'. For many of its aspects, official data is not collected, and this chapter provides a unique annual insight into these areas.

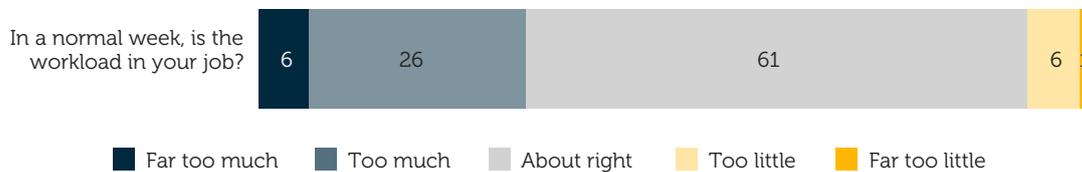
### Key findings

- Nearly a third (32%) of all employees report their workload as too heavy in a normal week. Lack of adequate work resources (training, equipment, space) contributes to high workloads.
- Public and voluntary sector employees are significantly more likely to feel their jobs are meaningful.
- Over a third of employees (35%) educated to undergraduate degree level feel they are overqualified for their job. Overqualification is worst in lower occupational classes.

### Workload and adequate work resources

When examining job quality, the intensity of work (how hard someone has to work to complete their tasks in a given time period) is just as important as the length of time spent at work (amount of working hours). Our survey asked employees to rate their workload in a normal week (Figure 13). Over a third (32%) of employees say their workload is high.

**Figure 13: Workload (%)**

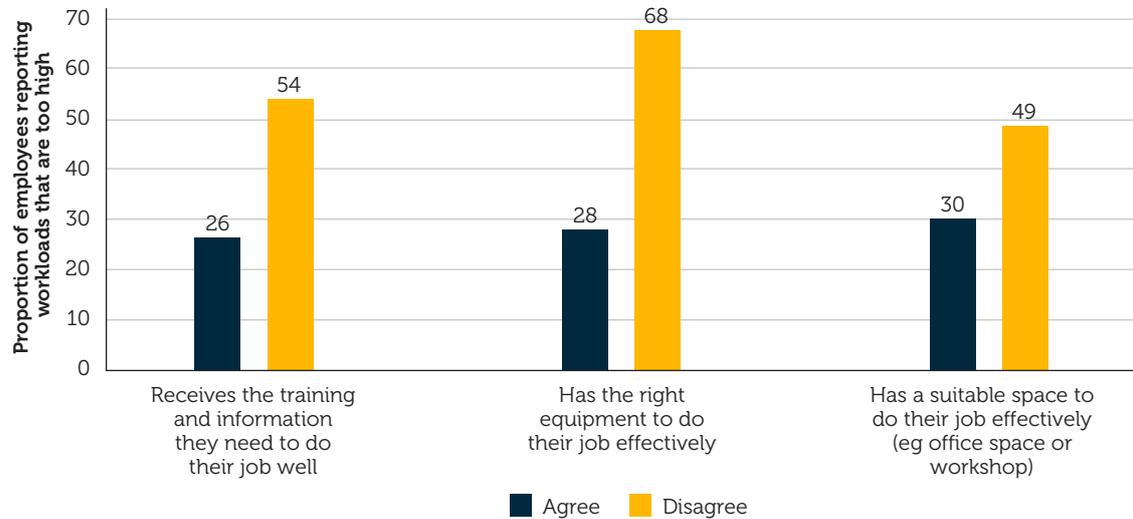


Workload varies considerably across occupational classes, but our survey shows that it is not aligned with income. In other words, those in lower-paid occupational classes (eg sales and customer services) are just as likely to report high workloads as those in higher-paid occupations (eg 'professional occupations') and it is job design and access to adequate resources that is to blame.

This year's data again shows that 39% of senior or other managers are reporting too much workload, compared with 21% of board-level managers and 30% for those without management responsibility. People management is crucial to unlocking fair work, and we continue to find gaps in the level of training and amount of time managers say they have to manage their staff well. A fifth (20%) of those with management responsibilities disagreed that they receive the training and information they need to manage staff well. In addition, 21% said they don't have the time they need to manage staff.

We also see a relationship between access to adequate work resources and workloads. Those who say they don't receive adequate training, the right equipment or a suitable space all report much higher workloads than those who report good access to adequate resources. The lack of adequate resources is a contributor to high workloads and, consequently, job dissatisfaction.

**Figure 14: Access to adequate work resources and workload (%)**

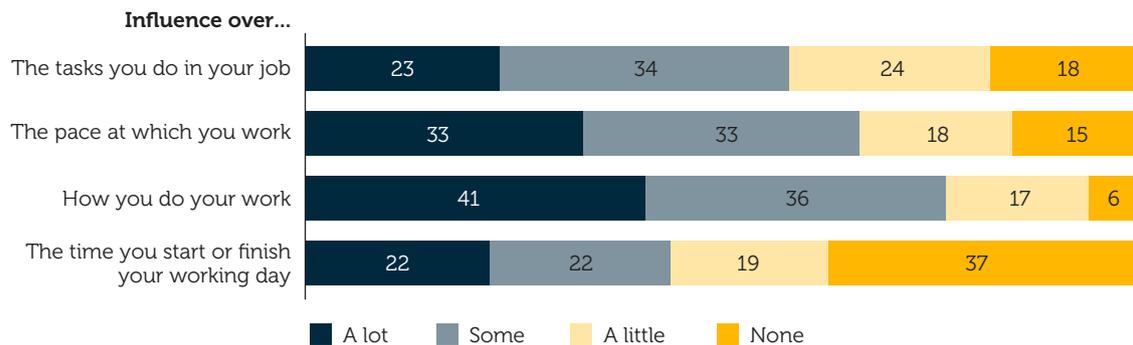


**Job autonomy and complexity**

Providing more job autonomy can enable employees to cope with greater work demands, boosts productivity and has a positive impact on the wellbeing of employees. Our survey measures employees’ control over the start or finish time of their day, how they do their work, the pace at which they work and the tasks in their job.

Figure 15 summarises the findings in relation to job autonomy. The fact that none of these meaningfully changed during the pandemic and afterwards underlines how persistent job design is. Employees continue to have less autonomy when it comes to starting and finishing their working day compared with the other aspects of autonomy measured.

**Figure 15: Job autonomy at work (%)**



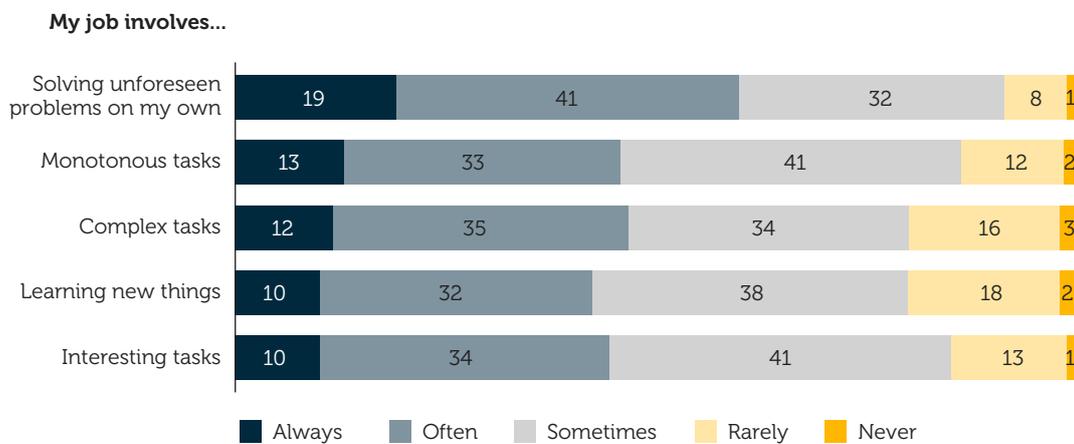
Note: Does not add up to 100% because of 'don't know' answers.

In line with previous *Working Lives Scotland* reports, we see a clear relationship between occupations, income bands or management levels and job autonomy. Those on the highest incomes report significantly more autonomy across all four dimensions. Given the nature of such jobs, those working hybrid or fully from home also reported better job autonomy, especially on the question around working hours.

Linked to job autonomy is the issue of job complexity. This looks at the nature of an employee’s job and whether it involves interesting or monotonous tasks as well as problem-solving (Figure 16). These findings have also remained consistent over the last five years. As with job autonomy, the main differences sit with income and occupation, with those on higher incomes reporting higher job complexity.

Both job autonomy and job complexity (albeit to a lesser extent) are linked to a range of outcomes, including higher job satisfaction, lower likelihood to quit, higher discretionary effort and willingness to recommend employer.

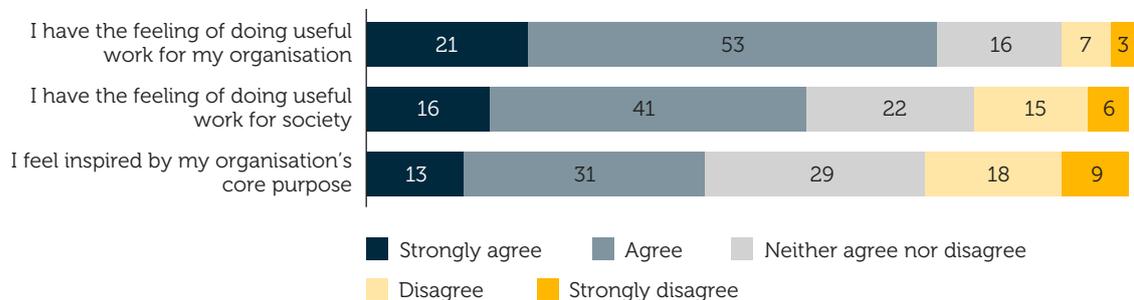
**Figure 16: Job complexity (%)**



### Meaningful work

The perceived meaningfulness of work is an important element of job quality that can be used as an effective recruitment and retention tool, while also linking to individual performance. We asked whether employees feel they make a useful contribution through their work – be it to the organisation or to society as a whole (Figure 17).

**Figure 17: Feelings on meaningfulness of work (%)**



As in previous years, we found considerable differences across the questions by work sector. We know from discussions with members that meaningfulness of work is a powerful tool in public and voluntary sector roles, which can exhibit poorer job quality dimensions elsewhere (eg workloads).

We again see a very strong correlation with job and life satisfaction across all three questions. Those in meaningful jobs also reported better performance, particularly contextual performance that requires discretionary effort, as well as a lower likelihood to quit their jobs and a higher willingness to recommend their employer. So a sense of meaning and purpose can therefore impact organisational performance too.

Looking closer at the purpose question, we find some interesting differences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, board-level managers are more likely to feel inspired by their organisation's purpose (71%) compared with senior/other management (49%) and those without any management responsibility (36%).

Those who report negative job quality dimensions are more likely to disagree with the statement. For example, 51% of those who say work has a negative impact on their mental health disagree, compared with only 11% of those who say work has a positive effect. Similar proportions can be found for stress, exhaustion or workloads (38% of those with 'too high' workloads disagree, compared with 19% of those whose workloads are 'about right').

We find correlations with several outcomes – those who agree with the statement are more likely to be satisfied with their job (90%, compared with only 43% of those who disagree with the statement), less likely to want to quit (13%, compared with 30% of those who disagree) and more likely to recommend their employer (74%, compared with only 26% of those who disagree).

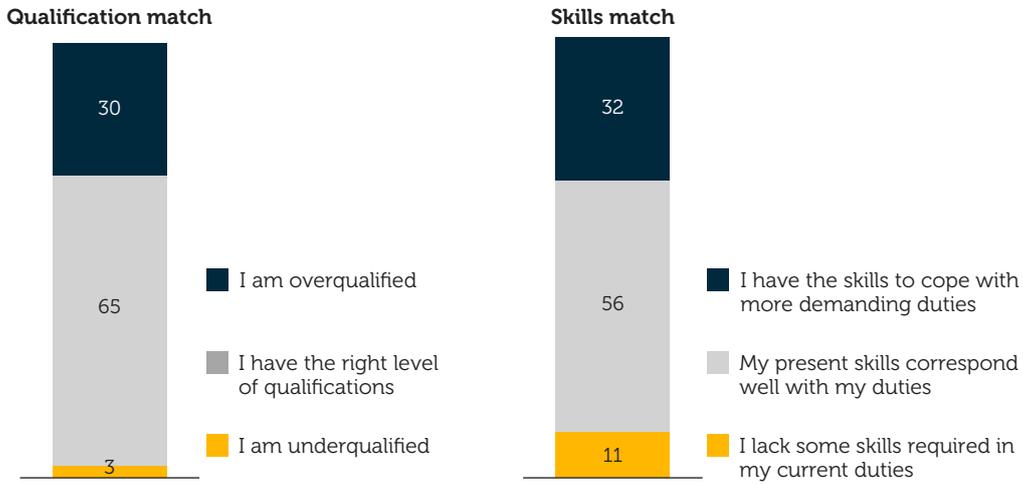
### **Skills and qualification match**

Skills and labour shortages continue to affect most sectors of the economy, with a combination of factors driving this. A mismatch between the labour market and skills development systems can be seen in levels of overqualification and skills mismatches across the economy. The CIPD's [report](#) on overqualification has led to a series of discussions on a policy level, centred around careers advice and work-based learning.

That report showed that the opportunity to use one's skills and qualifications to their full extent is also a crucial element of individuals' fair work. Skills mismatches and overqualification do not just point to inefficiencies in the labour market but have an impact on performance as well as individual wellbeing.

We measure skills and qualification matches by asking employees whether they feel they have the right qualifications for their job and whether they have the skills to cope with their current duties (Figure 18).

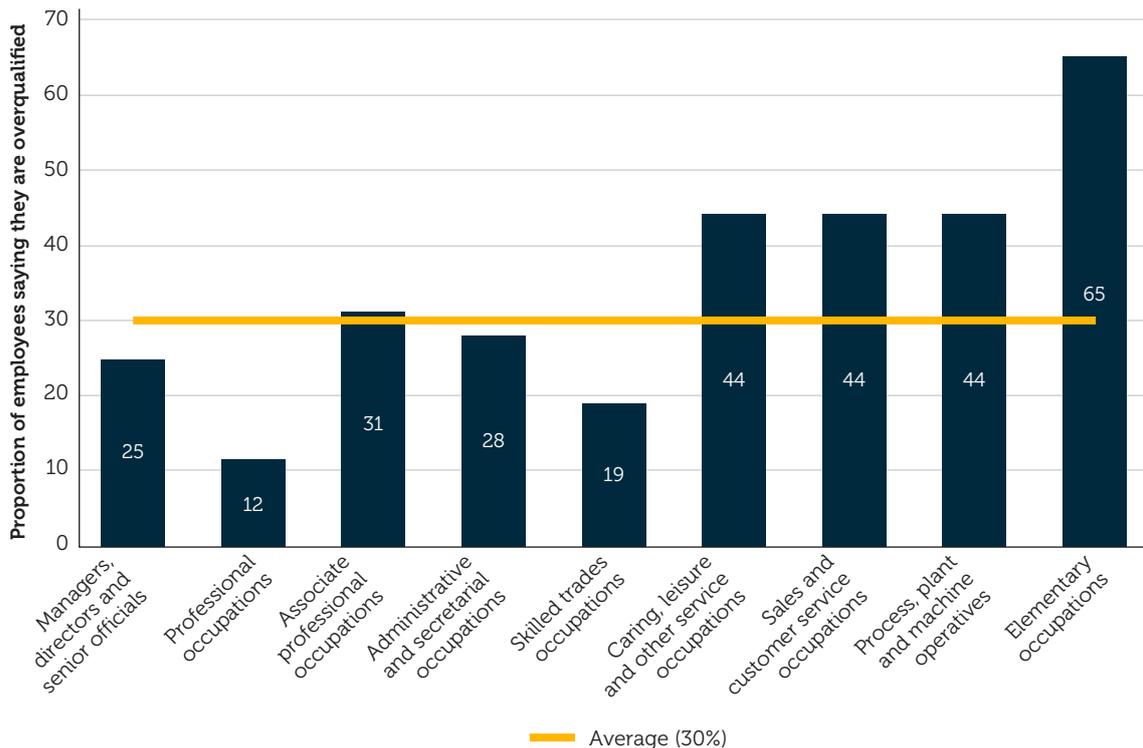
Figure 18: Qualification and skills matching (%)



Note: Does not add up to 100% because of 'don't know' answers.

The incidence of overqualification differs according to qualification levels, occupations and, in consequence, by income too. Of those educated below graduate level, 26% feel overqualified, compared with 35% for those educated to undergraduate level and 29% to postgraduate level, although these differences are within margins of error this year. Where we do have a large enough sample, we see that retail and hospitality reported some of the highest overqualification rates. The occupational breakdown in Figure 19 also shows that it's the lowest-paid occupational classes that have a higher prevalence of overqualification.

Figure 19: Overqualification across occupational groups (%)



# 5 Effective voice

Having an effective voice at work means employees can push for change, are able to express concerns and provide feedback. This includes having access to a range of voice channels, and also their effectiveness and the openness of managers to feedback.

### Key findings

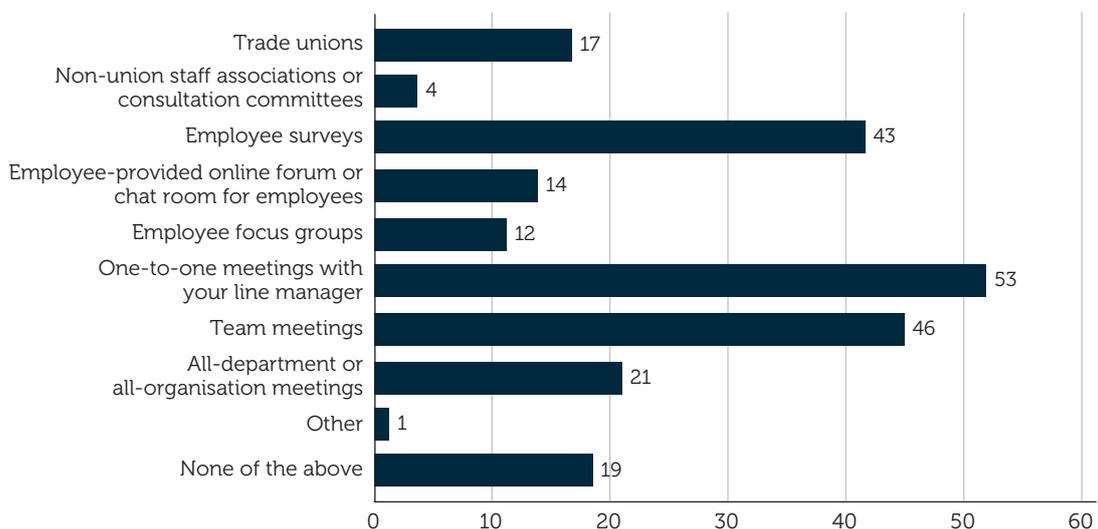
- 19% of employees say they have no voice channel at all at work. The availability of voice channels is considerably better in large organisations and the public sector.
- Almost a quarter (24%) of Scottish employees are members of a trade union or staff association. A fifth (20%) of all employees say management is in favour of trade union membership, with the same proportion saying the opposite.
- We see considerable improvements in voice scores (managerial openness) compared with two years ago.

### Voice channels

Every year we ask employees to tell us about the availability of a range of voice channels in their workplaces, which have remained steady across the series. Figure 20 shows that – as in all our *Working Lives Scotland* reports – the most common voice channels are one-to-one meetings with managers and team meetings, available to 53% and 46% of employees respectively. Some 17% of employees reported the availability of a trade union in their workplace.

A stubbornly high 19% of employees said they have no voice channel at all. We again see a link to organisation size, with 26% of all employees working in SMEs (2–249 employees) saying they had no voice channel at all, compared with 10% of those in organisations with 250+ employees.

**Figure 20: Voice channels available to workers (%)**



All of the channels examined have better availability in the public sector, partly due to organisational size. The biggest differences in availability of the individual types of channel are observed in trade union channels (55% public sector v 9% private sector), employee surveys (68% public v 37% private) and one-to-one manager meetings (67% public v 50% private).

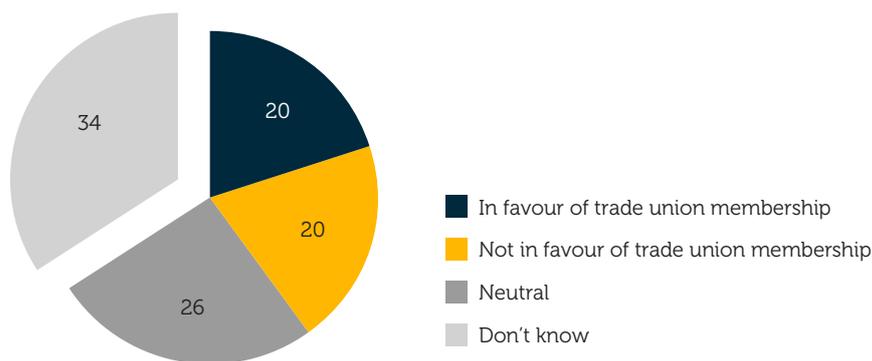
Given the new UK Government’s focus on trade union rights, we included added questions to allow for further analysis. Overall, we found that 24% of Scottish employees are members of a trade union or staff association. There were similar differences as above by organisation size and sector – 17% of private sector employees are members, compared with 58% of public and 29% of voluntary sector employees.

Those who are not trade union members were also asked to select a reason for why they are not – 23% could not select a reason, but the most common responses were:

- there is no union or staff association at my workplace (40%)
- there is no union or staff association for the type of work I do (14%)
- being in a union or staff association would not bring me any advantages (11%)
- it costs too much (10%)
- I disagree with them in principle (9%).

Finally, the survey asked all respondents who were not self-employed to describe management’s attitude towards trade union membership among employees (Figure 21). Sample sizes don’t allow us to highlight industrial differences in Scotland, but it is notable that the proportion of employees responding ‘don’t know’ is considerably higher in small organisations – 42% in SMEs and 50% in microbusinesses.

**Figure 21: Management attitudes to trade union membership (%)**

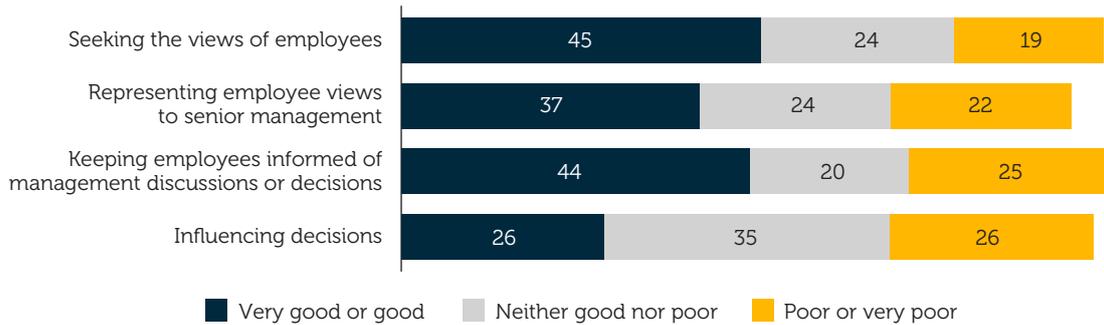


**Employee rating of their representatives**

For those employees who report having an employee representative at work – around a fifth in the survey – their representatives’ performance is crucial to the effectiveness of their voice. The vast majority of employee representatives will be trade unions, but the survey also included representatives who work independently from trade unions.

The majority of employees rated their representatives relatively well (Figure 22). As in previous years, we found a gap between consultation and affecting change, with the lowest ratings for the question around influencing decisions. Combining all questions into an index, we found that representative ratings have increased for the first time since 2022.

**Figure 22: Employee ratings of their representatives (%)**

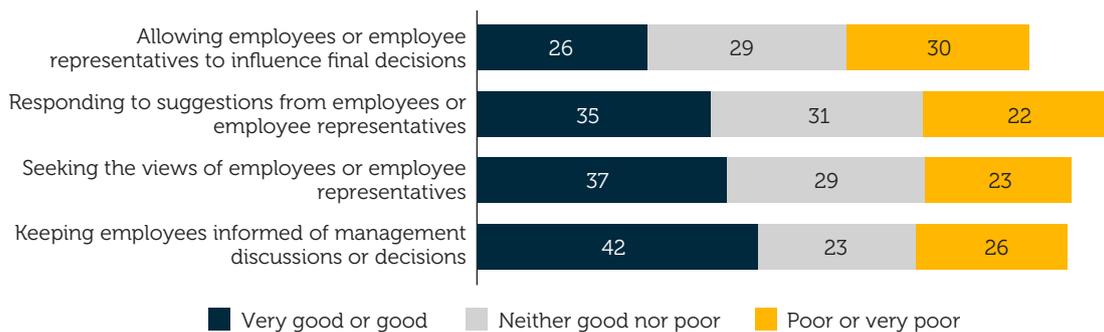


Note: Does not add to 100% because of 'don't know' answers.

### Managerial openness

For all employees in our survey (excluding the self-employed), we also measured what we call 'managerial openness' to gauge voice effectiveness. Employees were asked to rate their manager's performance across four different questions (Figure 23). Similar to representative ratings, the biggest gap is around affecting change, with only 26% of employees rating their manager as good at influencing final decisions.

**Figure 23: Employee ratings of their managers (%)**

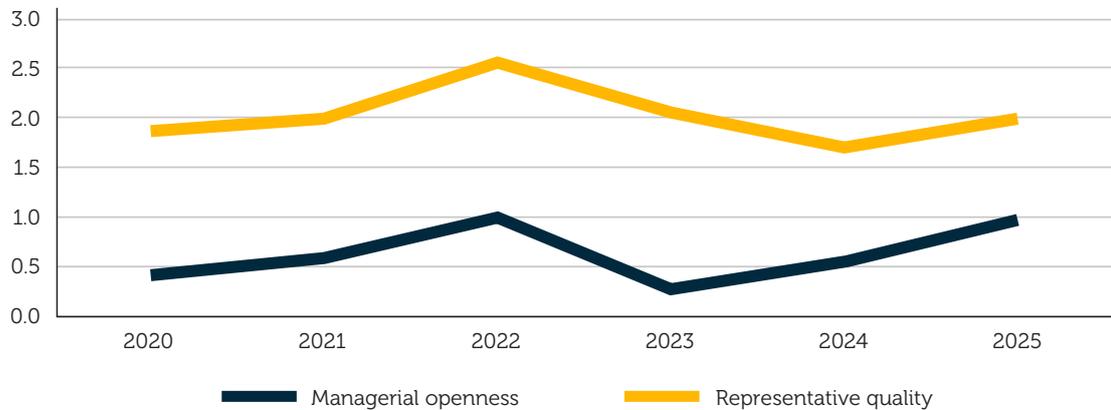


Note: Does not add to 100% because of 'don't know' answers.

Last year's negative findings around public sector employee voice scores were not repeated in the 2025 data. In fact, the public sector index is now at its highest in our series, albeit with high margins for error due to the sample sizes. It may be that there has been a considerable change in mood across the sector, but it is probably more likely that last year's dataset was an outlier, despite the findings being corroborated by discussions with members.

Overall managerial scores, however, are comparable with the 2022 post-pandemic highs. Both representative and managerial voice indices across our reports are summarised in Figure 24.

Figure 24: Managerial openness and representative ratings over time



## 6

## Conclusions and recommendations

The purpose of our *Working Lives Scotland* series is to highlight the inequalities and trade-offs between elements of fair work. The findings and conclusions inform policy-makers, employers and HR practitioners who want to improve job quality across Scottish workplaces.

Our evidence, in addition to a [range of academic research](#), consistently shows that improving work for employees does not only impact their own wellbeing, but also their job satisfaction and performance, while supporting retention and recruitment. This in turn boosts organisational productivity and the country's economy as a whole. Understanding these relationships is the first step towards improving job quality.

### Respect

The impact of poor health on the labour market is of increasing importance to policy-makers across the UK, primarily its relationship to economic inactivity. Preventing those in work from dropping out of the labour market, however, is just as important. With around a quarter of employees reporting negative impacts on mental and physical health, addressing the underlying issues should be an organisational and policy priority.

Workplace relationships are overwhelmingly positive but challenges remain, in particular for remote workers and their relationships with colleagues. The significant impact of long commutes highlighted in this report should also be kept in mind.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Make employee health and wellbeing an organisational priority, including a focus on management training to allow honest conversations around mental, physical, social or financial wellbeing.
- ✓ Ensure that managers know how to manage hybrid teams, with a focus on fostering positive team relationships.
- ✓ Make sure to consider commuting time as part of discussions with employees over ways of working.

### Security

Job security as well as job and life satisfaction are high, but the importance of broader financial wellbeing remains. Despite falls in inflation, we find persistent cost-of-living challenges, with only around half of all employees saying they can keep up with their bills without any difficulties. Money worries have a tangible impact on wellbeing as well as performance at work.

Underemployment and overwork rates are not meaningfully shifting and differ significantly across occupations. These differences are also evident in the use of AI at work, as well as its potential use in the future.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Review your financial wellbeing policy and benefits packages to make sure those who need it most are supported.
- ✓ Train managers to have conversations around financial wellbeing and ensure they know how to signpost resources.
- ✓ Explore the opportunities for automation by AI across the organisation, ensuring it improves employee performance by augmenting roles.

### Opportunity

While nearly half of all Scottish employees are either unable or do not want to work from home at all, it is crucial that flexibility extends beyond remote working. There are considerable gaps in the availability of other flexible working options and clear unmet demand from employees too.

Gaps in skills development and career advancement opportunities, primarily for those on lowest incomes and occupational classes, remain – despite evidence of their importance to individual wellbeing, organisational performance and the economy as a whole.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Be willing to experiment with different patterns of work to ensure your employees have access to a broad range of flexible working arrangements.
- ✓ For those who can and want to work from home, make sure good reasoning and evidence underpins your hybrid policy to minimise discontent.
- ✓ Boost skills development and career progression in your organisation by addressing gaps – in scale, type and quality – in training.

### Fulfilment

Job autonomy and complexity differ considerably across occupations and have stayed unchanged throughout our series. Given the relationship between job design and outcomes, this should be higher on employer agendas.

Workloads remain too high for nearly a third of all employees, with considerable negative impacts on outcomes. Lack of training and resources contributes to workloads that are too high, which is something employers should address.

The meaningfulness of jobs remains an aspect of job quality where public and voluntary sector workers continue to do significantly better, providing a unique retention and recruitment tool. We still see high levels of skills and qualification mismatches, which act as a brake on productivity, but also impact individual wellbeing.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Regularly examine job design across roles and explore how job autonomy and complexity could be boosted.
- ✓ Understand the drivers and impacts of high workloads and take steps to minimise unsustainable workloads.
- ✓ Ensure managers themselves are trained regularly, and that they have both the skills and time to manage their staff.

### Effective voice

Access to voice channels has remained relatively stable across all six *Working Lives Scotland* reports. Concerningly, a persistent fifth of all employees report a lack of voice channels at work at all – with even bigger gaps for employees in the smallest of organisations – something that can be easily addressed without financial investment. There are signs of voice quality improving, but this requires continuous effort from employers, managers and representatives.

Given the UK Government's aim to improve trade union membership and access, employers need to start thinking about the implications, regardless of organisation size. A considerable proportion (20%) of employees feel that management is not in favour of trade union membership, which may cause tensions in the future.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Look at the full range of voice channel options and ensure your employees have access and use the best channels for your organisation.
- ✓ Actively engage your employees more often and in the right way, while ensuring managers are trained to have regular meaningful conversations.
- ✓ Consider how upcoming changes to trade union legislation may impact your organisation, and prepare for constructive dialogue.

# 7

## Appendix

### Background to the survey

The *Working Lives Scotland* report builds on work carried out by the CIPD over the last few years through the *CIPD Good Work Index*, which uses the *UK Working Lives* survey to present annual measures of the seven dimensions of job quality.

Through analysis of our survey data, we can investigate issues ranging from workforce health and wellbeing to the availability of flexible work, as well as skills and career development opportunities. Where we can, we highlight statistically significant differences in gender, age or sector.

Unlike the *CIPD Good Work Index*, the *Working Lives Scotland* report is based around the five fair work dimensions as conceptualised by the Fair Work Convention in 2016. Each main chapter is dedicated to one dimension, with analysis of survey questions providing insight into the relevant aspects of fair work.

### Survey design

In 2017, the CIPD embarked on a project to review the research on job quality and develop a tool to measure the main dimensions of job quality. To this end, it commissioned two reviews: first, from the perspectives of workers, on what constitutes good or poor job quality in addition to the opportunities and pitfalls in measuring it; and second, on the capacity workers have to influence their job quality, and the shifting balance of power between employers and employees. This survey is based on this body of work and further consultation with academics, HR experts and government officials.

The 2025 *UK Working Lives* survey was conducted between 8 January and 18 February 2025 and gave a sample of 5,017 workers. To make the samples representative of the UK as a whole, quotas were used to target the sample, and subsequent weights based on ONS figures are applied to the dataset. The sample is representative of the UK workforce in terms of gender, full- or part-time work status, organisation size within each sector, and industry. For the sixth time, we have a boosted sub-sample for Scotland of 1,018, which has been weighted to be representative of all Scottish working adults (aged 18+).

### **Good work and fair work**

Job quality has become an increasingly important area of public policy in the UK, especially following Matthew Taylor's *Review of Modern Working Practices* published in 2017. Since its publication, building on research by the CIPD and others, numerous initiatives have been launched across the UK, seeking to improve job quality among businesses, including the Good Work Standard in London and the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter.

However, it is Scotland that has been at the forefront of this debate. The Scottish Government set up the Fair Work Convention – bringing academics, businesses and union leaders together – as far back as 2015. Its Fair Work Framework was published a year later and has served as the basis for policy-making since then. For example, the Scottish Government continues to roll out Fair Work First, which ties fair work principles to financial assistance from the government where possible.

The survey we are analysing in this report analyses both objective and subjective measures, as well as universal and relative aspects of work. This is important because, as our previous reports have already highlighted, job quality is not static – what works for some employees will be anathema to others.

Objective measures look at things that should be unbiased, for example how much people earn or types of contracts. Subjective measures, on the other hand, include things that reflect opinions or feelings – meaningful work, job satisfaction or the quality of relationships. In addition, we also look at measures that are universal and will improve job quality for anyone (eg health), but also at aspects that are relative and will differ between employees (eg flexible working arrangements). To get an accurate picture of job quality, we need to look at all of these in the round.

The Fair Work Convention conceptualised job quality from academic research pulled together primarily by the Scottish Centre for Employment Research at the University of Strathclyde. The Convention defined fair work through five dimensions: effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. The dimensions cover a broad range of issues – from how employees are treated at work, to pay and conditions, and whether they can have their voice heard and influence change.

The CIPD's good work dimensions (see Table 1) can be found in some form across the Fair Work Convention's framework too. 'Pay and benefits' and 'Contracts' are both key parts of the *Security* dimension in fair work. 'Health and wellbeing', 'Relationships at work' and 'Work–life balance' are all

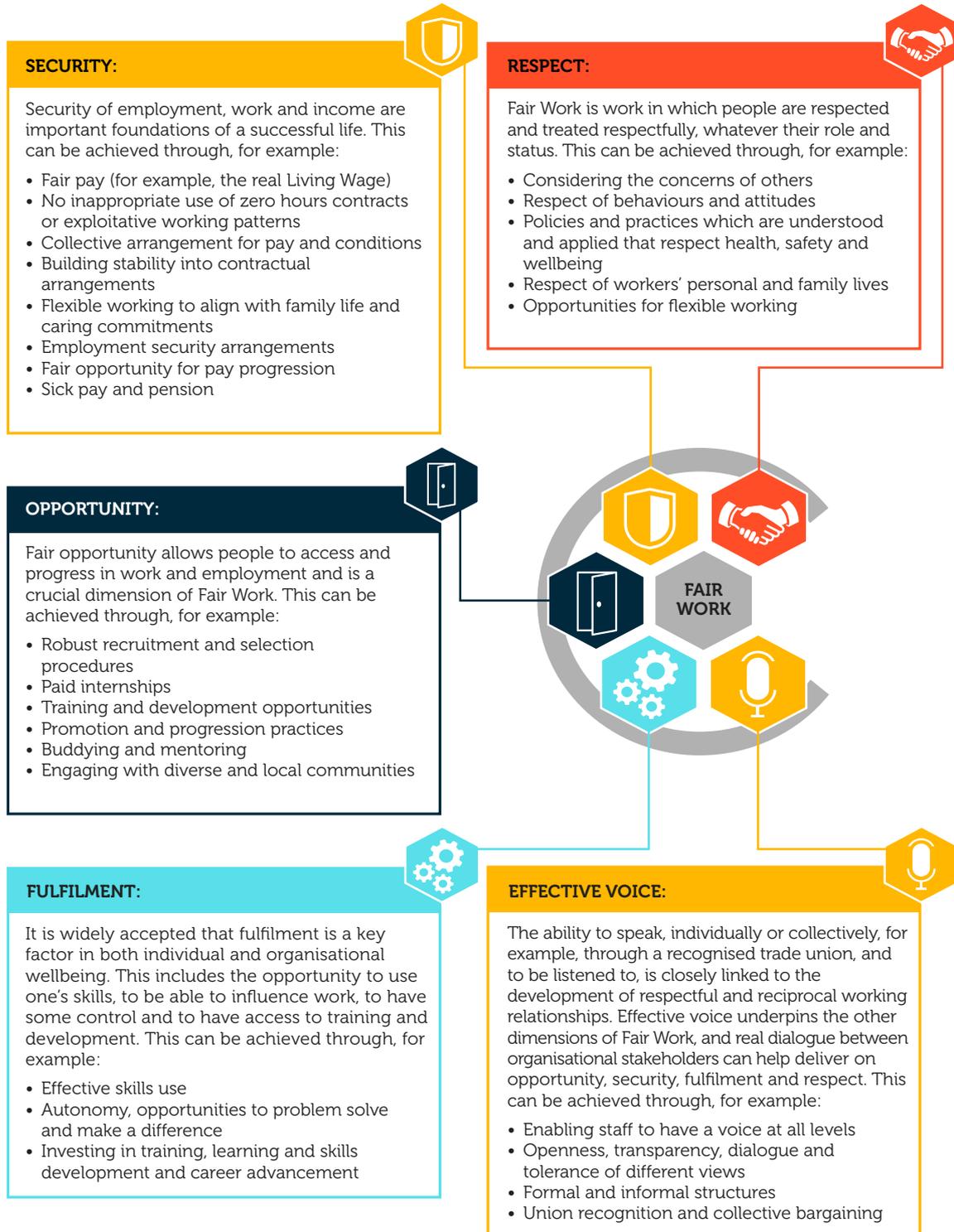
incorporated in the *Respect* dimension. 'Job design and the nature of work' is a key part of the *Fulfilment* dimension, with 'Voice and representation' directly translatable to *Effective* voice. Our survey also includes questions around career and skills development opportunities, which sit at the heart of the *Opportunity* dimension.

**Table 1: The CIPD's seven dimensions of job quality**

Dimensions	Areas included
<b>1 Pay and benefits</b>	Pay as a percentile and in relation to the Living Wage, subjective feelings regarding pay, employer pension contributions and other employee benefits
<b>2 Contracts</b>	The terms of employment: Contract type, underemployment, and job security
<b>3 Work–life balance</b>	Overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and HR provision for flexible working
<b>4 Job design and the nature of work</b>	Workload or work intensity, autonomy or how empowered people are in their jobs, how well resourced they are to carry out their work, job complexity and how well this matches the person's skills and qualifications, how meaningful people find their work, and development opportunities provided
<b>5 Relationships at work</b>	Social support and cohesion: The quality of relationships at work, psychological safety, and the quality of people management
<b>6 Voice and representation</b>	Channels for feeding views to senior management, cultural norms on voice and satisfaction with the opportunities for voice
<b>7 Health and wellbeing</b>	Positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health. Often considered as an outcome of job quality

Ultimately, it does not matter whether we refer to good work, better employment, fair work or any other variation of the concept. What matters is that there is an increasing body of research on job quality that provides policy-makers and HR practitioners with evidence on what works, what can be done better, and how boosting job quality benefits employees and employers alike.

**The Fair Work Convention's Fair Work Framework**



Source: Scottish Government's Best Practice Guidance on Addressing Fair Work Practices, including the Real Living Wage, in Procurement.



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