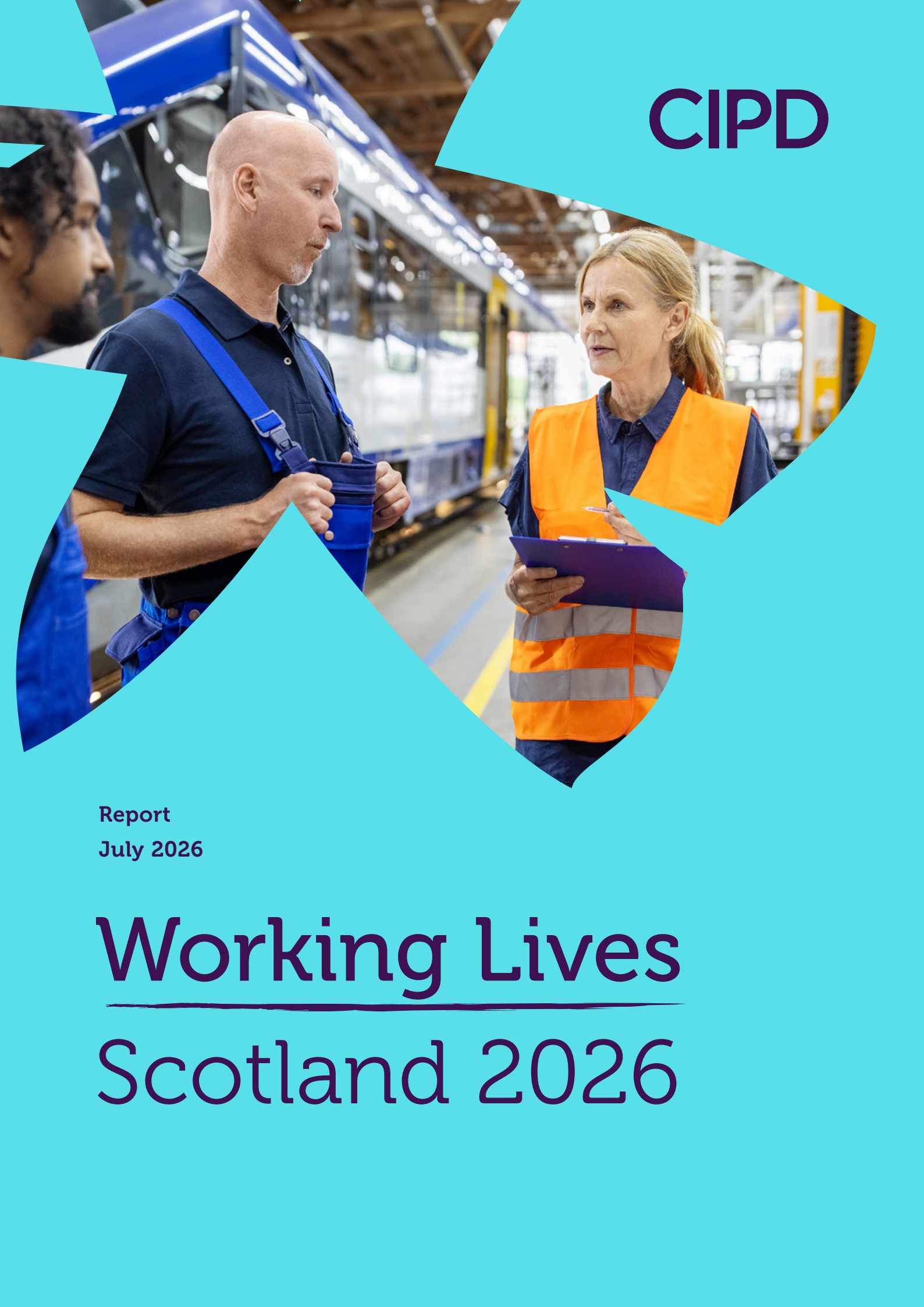




CIPD

Report
July 2026

Working Lives Scotland 2026

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 Policy Forum, we both inform and deliver changes in policy.

Report

Working Lives Scotland 2026

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Foreword

Working Lives Scotland highlights why understanding job quality is important, not just for employees, but for organisations that are seeking to improve their performance and productivity.

Improving the quality of work for employees can reduce the amount of sickness absence they take, while increasing their wellbeing, job satisfaction, motivation and reported performance in their jobs. Employees who are satisfied in their roles are also more likely to recommend their organisation as a good place to work and less likely to leave. Understanding how to improve job quality can therefore contribute positively to efforts to recruit, motivate and retain employees.

A running theme throughout this report is the importance of leadership and people management capability. In workplaces where managers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to manage and develop people effectively, employees are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, feel they are treated fairly and report they will go the extra mile for their organisation.

Good line management underpins many of the other dimensions explored here – wellbeing, workloads, flexible working or employee voice quality. Investing in the capability of line managers should be a priority.

The extent to which employees feel they have an opportunity to develop the skills they need is also central to both job quality and business performance given the proven link between skills and productivity.

The report suggests that investment in upskilling employees is central to ensuring more workers have the skills to use AI effectively in their roles so that it can improve their performance. Our analysis suggests there is significant scope in most workplaces to enable employees to make better use of AI, but this will be dependent on their skills and confidence in using the technology.

This year's *Working Lives Scotland* is published as the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA 2025) is being implemented, which will see multiple changes to employment law introduced over the next 18 months, including changes to try to make work fairer and more secure.

However, the report's findings suggest that for most employees improving job quality will not simply depend on changes to legislation, but on the priority that organisations place on people management and development and the level of resources they have to invest in improving their capability in these areas.

Consequently, it's important that policy-makers ensure changes to employment law are well designed and don't increase the cost of employing people, reducing employers' capacity to invest in their workforces and technology and create jobs.

These considerations are particularly important against an external environment which threatens to undermine business investment at a time when unemployment is already on the increase and UK productivity flatlining.

For our members and employers more widely, the analysis in this report provides more evidence of the business case for investing in the HR/people management practices that can help strengthen job quality and improve organisational performance during uncertain times.

Key findings

This report highlights some of the key factors underlying employees' experiences of 'good work' and how this links to individual and organisational performance. Framed around the CIPD's seven dimensions of good work, it provides essential evidence to HR practitioners, employers and policy-makers striving to make work better for all.

Job quality and business outcomes

- Line management, leadership and meaningful work stand out as having the biggest effect on all five business-related outcomes.
- Job satisfaction, as a primary outcome of job quality, is affected by all job quality dimensions. The willingness to recommend one's employer and the likelihood to quit are also closely aligned, with significant differences across most job quality aspects analysed.
- On employee performance, the evidence around line management, leadership, employee voice, meaningful work and health impacts, as well as skills and career development opportunities, is strong.

Respect

- Over a third (35%) of employees feel their work impacts positively on their mental health, with 27% reporting negative impacts.
- High workloads, stress levels, experience of conflict, weak leadership and poor line management are all correlated with negative impacts on mental health.
- Headline work–life balance findings have remained largely unchanged across the whole time series, including at the height of the pandemic, suggesting that underlying job design and workload play a more important role than employees' work location in their perceptions of work–life balance.

Security

- 72% of employees are satisfied with their job and 63% with their life.
- The main reasons for changing jobs are better pay/benefits (25%), work–life balance (25%), and unhappiness with leadership or management (18%).
- Nearly a fifth (18%) of employees have lost sleep due to worrying about money.

Opportunity

- Just under a third (30%) of employees believe their job offers good prospects for career advancement, while 52% feel their job offers good opportunities to develop their skills.
- The proportion of employees working some of their time from home has stayed the same post-COVID, but the amount of time they spend working at home is declining, indicating a drift towards employer premises.
- 28% of all employees use generative AI in their role at least once a month, although over two-thirds of them have received no AI training at all. Furthermore, 50% do not trust the output of generative AI to be accurate.

Fulfilment

- A third (33%) of all employees say their workloads are too high, with lack of adequate resources at work linked to high workloads.
- Public- and voluntary-sector employees are significantly more likely to feel their jobs are meaningful.
- Over a third (34%) of those who are educated to degree level or above feel overqualified in their current job.

Effective voice

- Nearly a fifth (19%) of employees say they have no voice channel (a way to express their views) at work at all, with availability better across the public sector and worse in small organisations.
- Around a quarter (24%) of employees who are not trade union members would be interested in joining one, if there was the option to do so.
- Ratings of managers' ongoing communication with their employees improved considerably just after the pandemic but have fluctuated since.

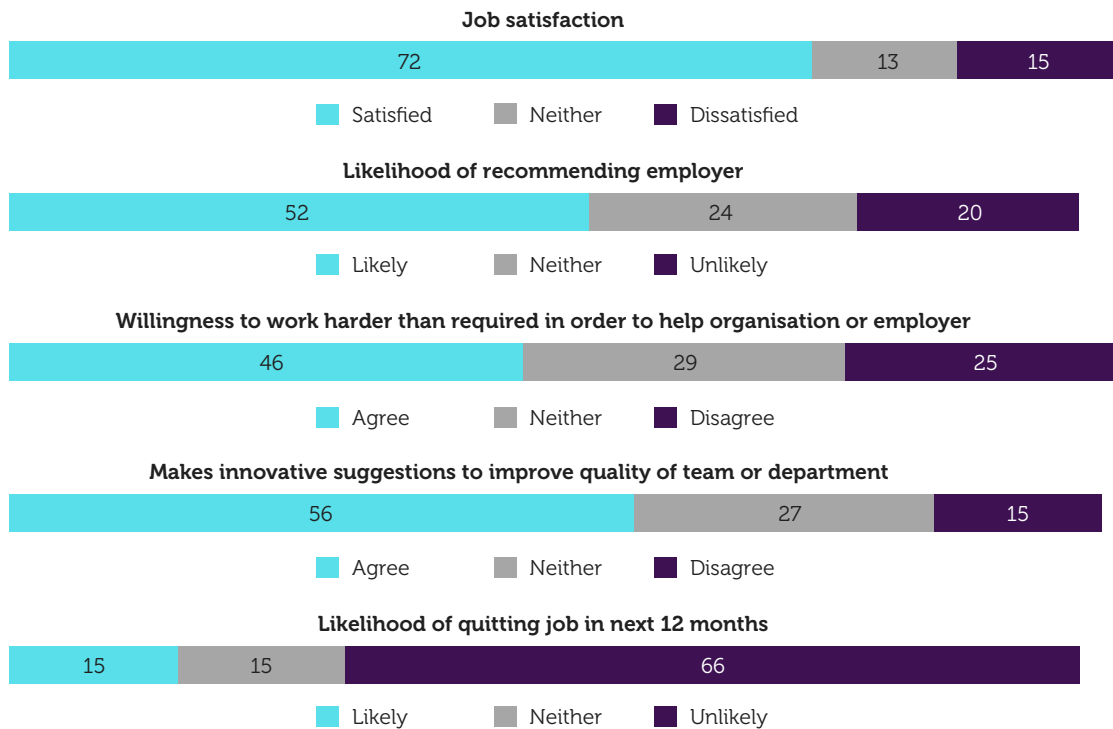
1 Job quality and business-relevant outcomes

There is a significant body of evidence that highlights the strong link between improving job quality and sustainable organisational performance. A 2024 [review](#) of research found that, on balance, academic literature supports a positive relationship between job quality and productivity, innovation and employee health. A 2025 [Rapid Evidence Assessment](#) also found that HR practices have a positive impact on a wide range of workplace outcomes. For employers, good jobs are a direct route to better organisational performance.

This year's *Working Lives Scotland* adds to this body of evidence by drawing out the factors most closely associated with business-related outcomes that are central to an employer's ability to recruit, motivate and retain its workforce.

In this chapter, we have chosen five variables from our dataset to analyse job quality against (Figure 1).

Figure 1: An overview of five key business outcomes (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016) and all except those running their own business or working as a freelancer/contractor for multiple clients (for willingness to work harder) (n=889)

We refer to these as 'business-relevant outcomes' for simplicity, but they relate to different aspects of the employee–employer relationship:

- **job satisfaction** as a primary outcome measure of overall job quality, linked to both performance and retention
- **likelihood of recommending one's employer** as a measure of employee goodwill that is also linked to future recruitment
- **willingness to work harder than one has to** in order to help their organisation or employer, as a measure of discretionary effort
- **making innovative suggestions** to improve quality of the team or department, as a measure of contextual performance
- **likelihood of voluntarily quitting job** in the next 12 months, as a measure of retention.

All five of these outcomes should be of interest to employers. The associations between different job quality dimensions and outcomes provide useful insights into the areas that influence employee views of their work and point to the practices associated with improved performance.

We find statistically significant associations across all five of our core business outcomes and a range of job quality aspects.

Job satisfaction, as a primary outcome of job quality, is affected by all job quality dimensions. The willingness to recommend one's employer and the likelihood to quit are also closely aligned, with significant differences across most job quality aspects analysed.

On performance, the evidence around line management, leadership, employee voice, meaningful work and health impacts, as well as skills and career development opportunities, is strong. And while workloads or conflict may not significantly affect current performance, their effect on long-term performance may be felt through the impact on the innovation pipeline and retention.

Trade union membership is not found to have statistically significant correlations with most business outcomes, with the exception of weak associations to discretionary effort and willingness to recommend one's employer. Our UK-wide analysis also finds no correlation between contractual arrangements (permanent vs atypical) and business outcomes, with the exception of a weak association to the likelihood to quit.

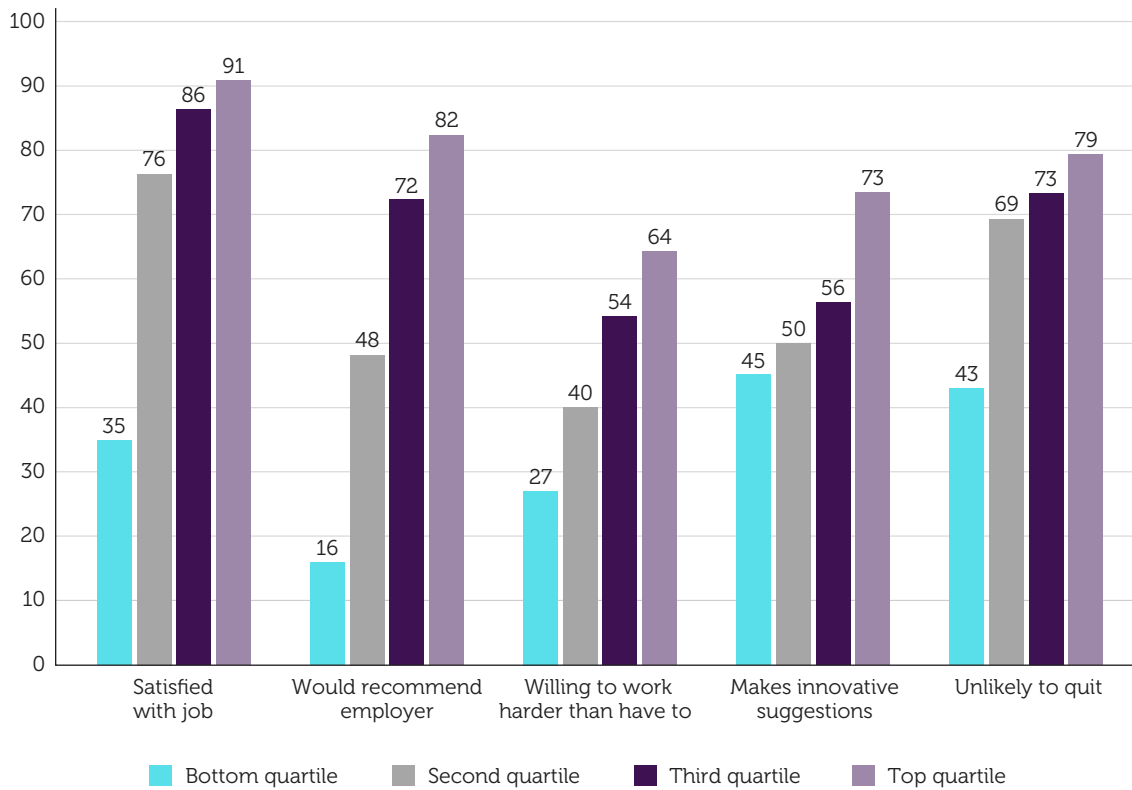
Overall, as summarised in Table 2 in the Appendix, line management, leadership and meaningful work stand out as key factors where the effects on all five business-related outcomes are the greatest.

Improving aspects of job quality explored here requires organisational leadership around good work. In particular, evidence suggests that investing time and resources into ensuring all line managers are equipped with the core soft skills to manage people properly can unlock positive business outcomes.

Line management and leadership

Nine core survey questions around line management allow us to construct a line management index, one of several sub-indices of the statistical *Good Work Index* as described in the [2019 GWI Appendix](#). Breaking that index down into quartiles gives a unified measure of line management quality, with respondents evenly divided into four groups, the bottom quartile being those that rate their managers the poorest.

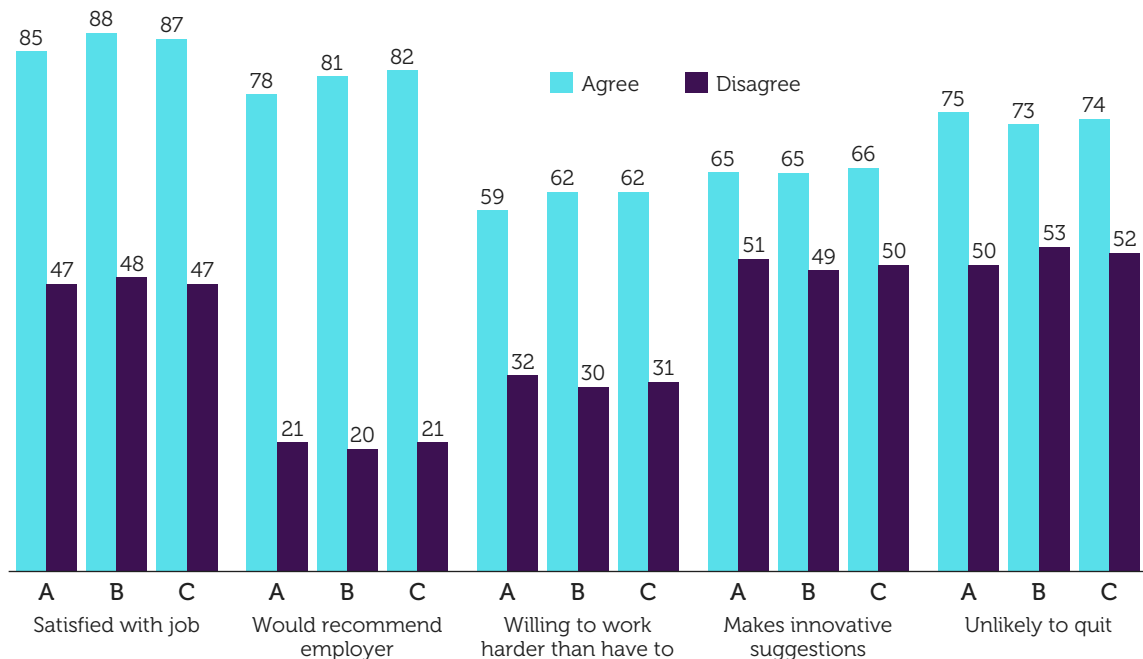
Mapping the quartiles against our core five outcomes (Figure 2) shows significant differences, highlighting the importance of line management to business outcomes.

Figure 2: Line management quality and business outcomes (%)

Base: all working adults with a line manager (n=871)

In addition to line management quality, we also ask a series of questions around senior leadership in the employee's organisation: whether leaders have a clear vision for the organisation; whether employees have confidence in their leaders; and whether they trust them to act with integrity.

As with the line management index above, when we map those answers against our five outcomes, we find clear differences between those who have positive and negative perceptions of senior leaders.

Figure 3: Perception of leadership and business outcomes (%)

A: The directors/senior management of my organisation have a clear vision of where the organisation is going and how to get there (agree/disagree)

B: I have confidence in the ability of the directors/senior management team of my organisation (agree/disagree)

C: I trust the directors/senior management of my organisation to act with integrity (agree/disagree)

Base: all except those running their own business or working as a freelancer/contractor for multiple clients (for willingness to work harder) (n=889)

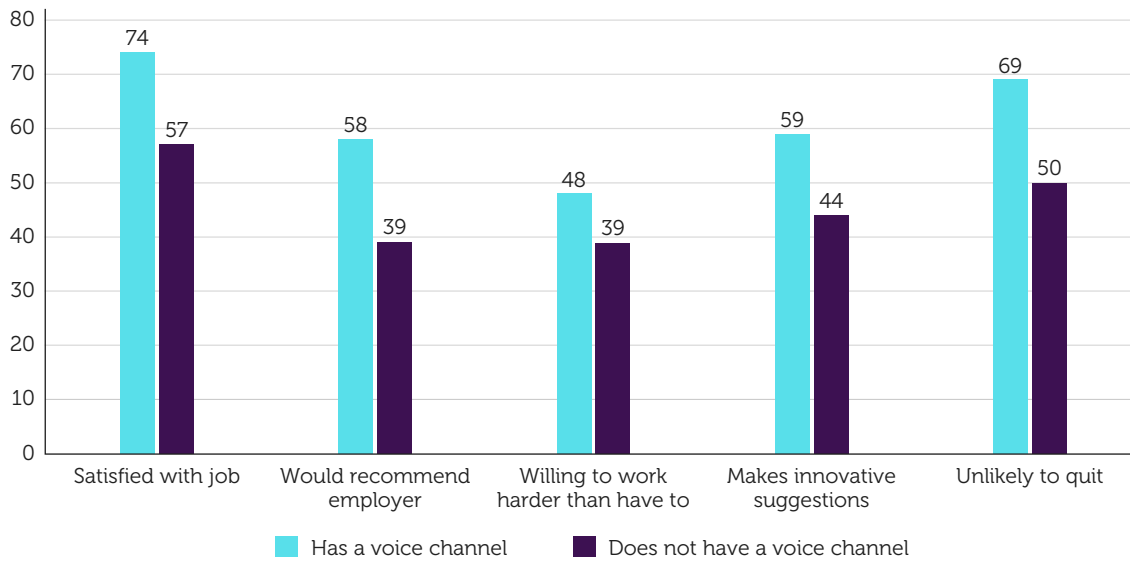
Employee voice availability and quality

Being able to express your views and opinions at work is an important aspect of job quality. Each year, we ask employees which voice channels are available to them – from trade unions and employee surveys to one-to-one line manager meetings – with a consistent fifth reporting they have no access to any channels at all.

The differences to outcomes between those who have some channels and those who have none are summarised in Figure 4. It is worth noting that the differences across contextual performance are not as stark as across the other four business-relevant outcomes, although they remain statistically significant.

We find no significant correlation between trade union membership and three of the five outcomes, with the exception of a weak relationship to discretionary effort and willingness to recommend one's employer.

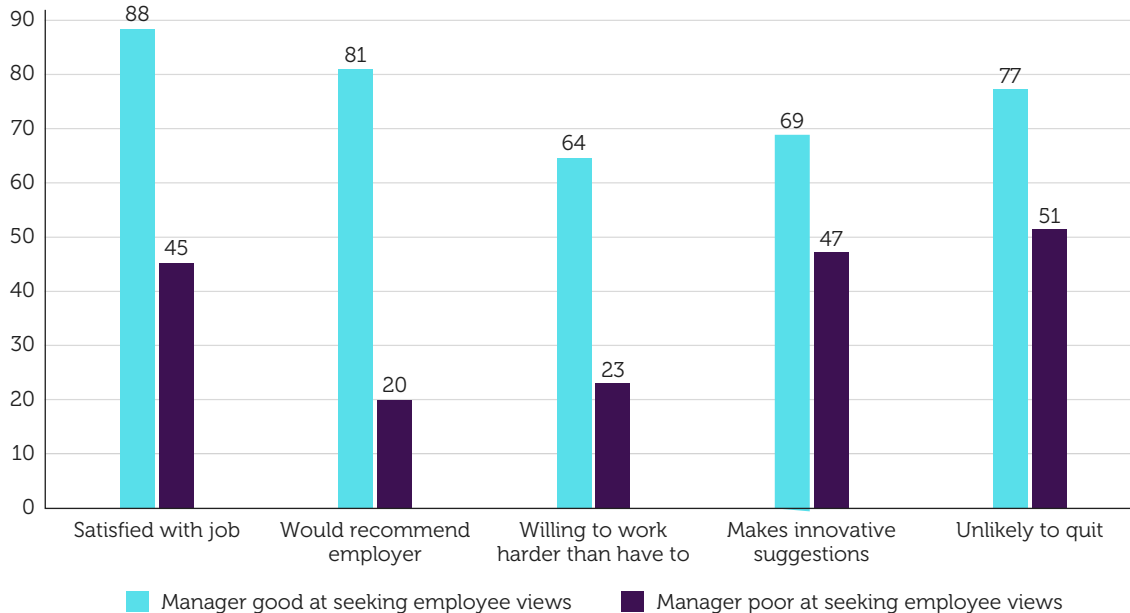
Figure 4: Availability of voice channels and business outcomes (%)



Base: all who are not self-employed (n=902)

In addition to voice channel availability, the quality of voice channels is just as important. We measure this by asking employees to rate their managers on how good or poor they are at keeping employees informed, seeking their views or responding to their suggestions (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Manager voice quality and business outcomes (%)



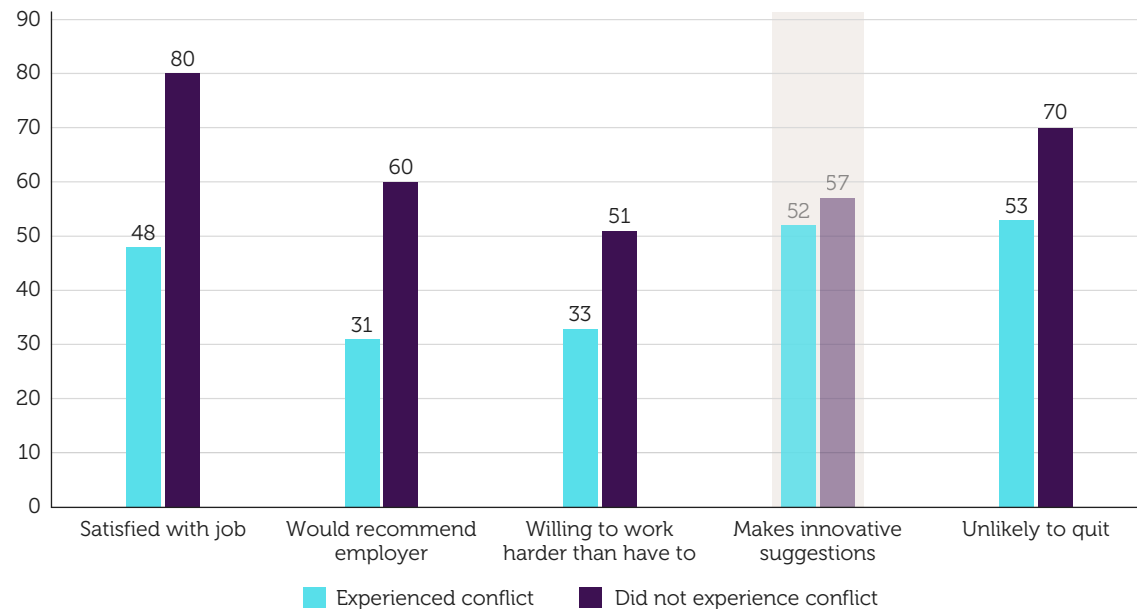
Base: all who are not self-employed (n=902)

Relationships and conflict at work

Relationships in both our working and personal lives determine our overall quality of life. Past research suggests that good relationships at work improve the way an organisation functions, with bad relationships negatively affecting performance. While sample sizes in Scotland are too small, our UK-wide analysis finds strong correlations between all five of our core outcomes and relationships at work, with significantly more positive outcomes for those reporting good relationships with their managers and colleagues.

Furthermore, experiencing conflict at work can have an impact on working lives. There are strong links between conflict experience and most of our core outcomes, with the exception of contextual performance (shaded in Figure 6).

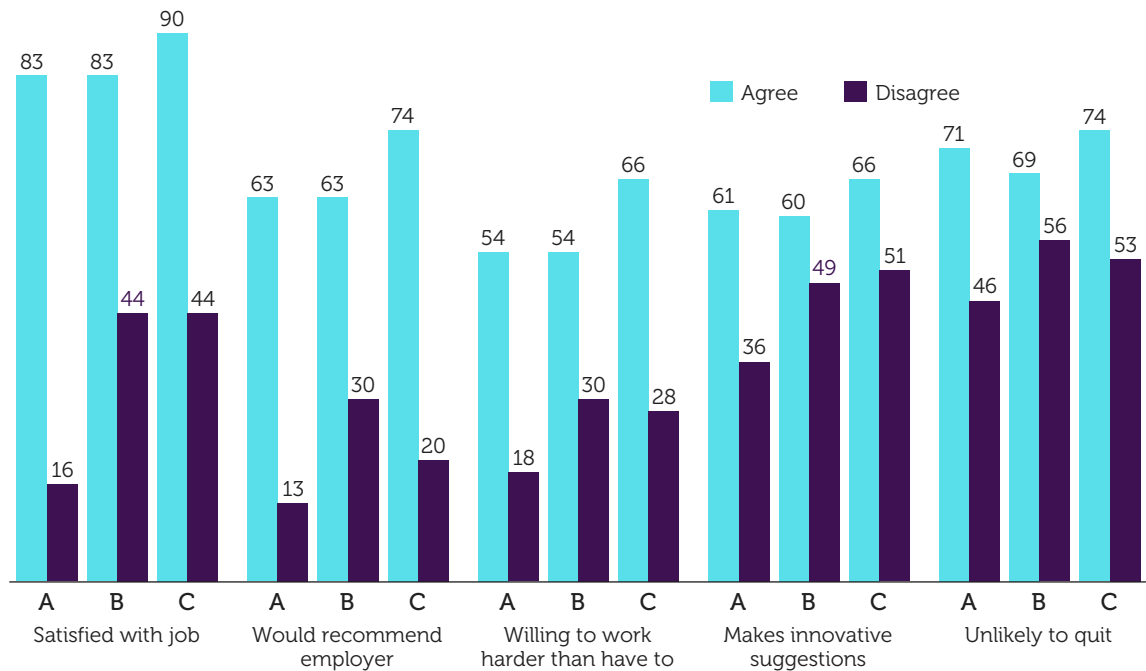
Figure 6: Experience of conflict and business outcomes (%)



Meaningful work and job design

The meaningfulness of work – whether an employee feels they are doing useful work for their organisation or society, or feel inspired by the organisation's purpose – is also associated with outcomes. Employees who report being in meaningful jobs are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, to recommend their employer, to be willing to work beyond their job descriptions, to make innovative suggestions and to not quit.

Figure 7: Meaningfulness of work and business outcomes (%)



A: I have the feeling of doing useful work for my organisation (agree/disagree)

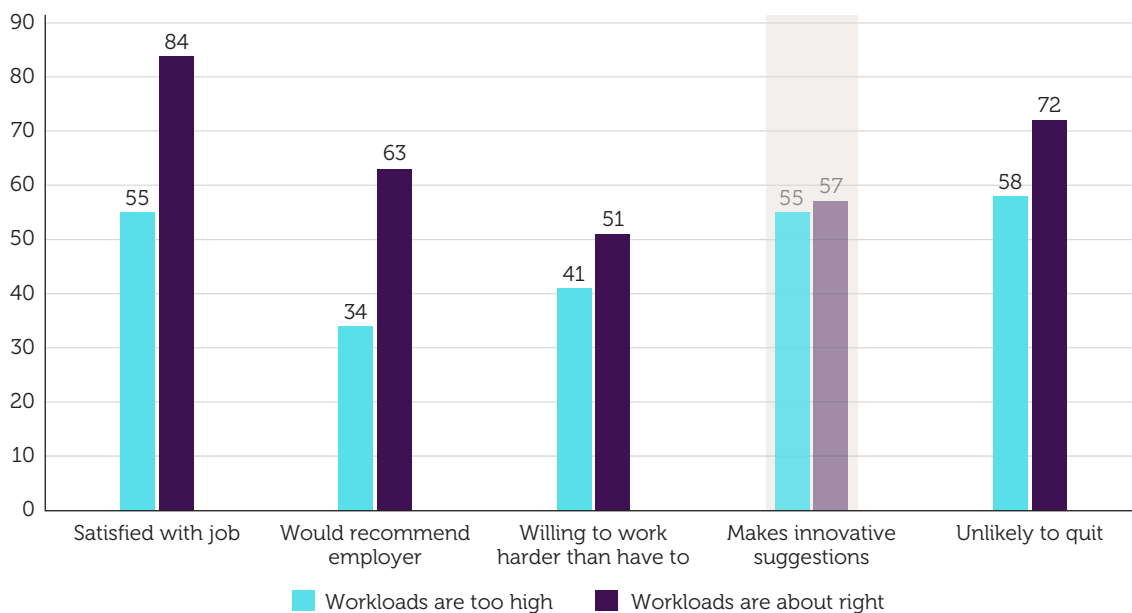
B: I have the feeling of doing useful work for society (agree/disagree)

C: I feel inspired by my organisation's core purpose (agree/disagree)

Base: all working adults (for society question) (n=1,016) and all who are not freelancers (n=980)

The impact of high workloads on job quality is highlighted throughout the report. Mapping workloads (Figure 8) against our five outcomes, we find negative impacts on four out of five outcomes.

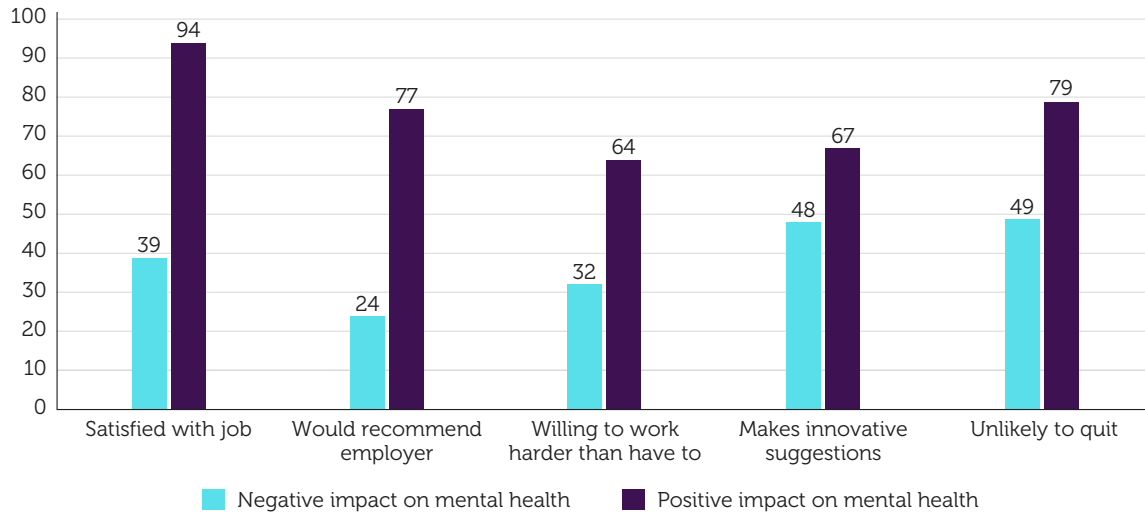
Figure 8: High workloads and business outcomes (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

While performance may not immediately be affected by high workloads, the longer-term impact on health and wellbeing may have an effect. Indeed, the associations between those reporting positive or negative impacts of their work on mental health and job satisfaction (Figure 9) are some of the strongest out of the factors analysed here.

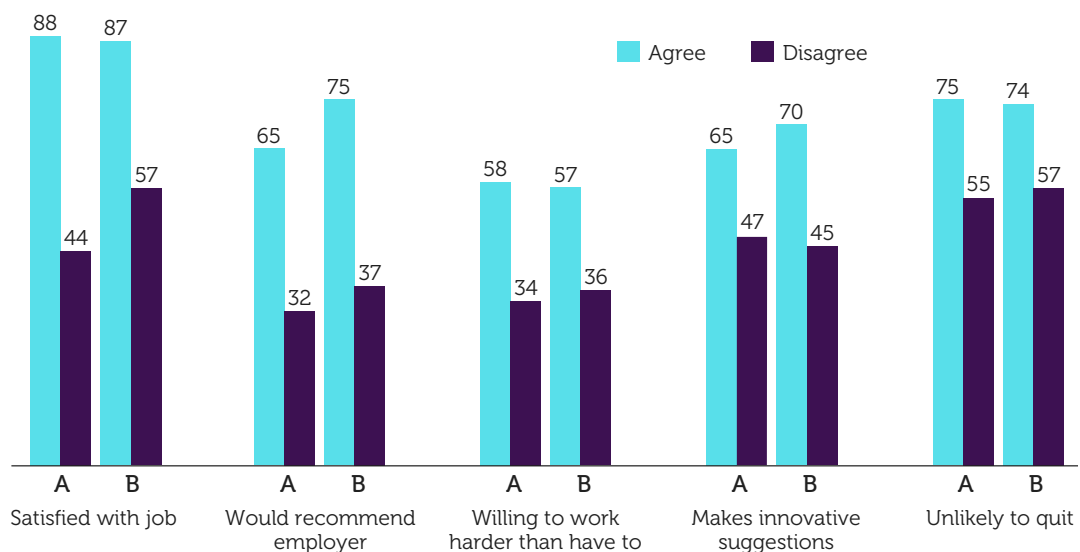
Figure 9: Impact of work on mental health and business outcomes (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

While overqualification points to mismatches between the skills development system and labour market demand, there are considerable gaps in employer-provided skills development, too, as explored in the report. In addition to skills development opportunities, career progression opportunities are an important consideration for employees. Figure 10 shows their association with our five business outcomes.

Figure 10: Impact of work on mental health and business outcomes (%)



A: My job offers me good opportunities to develop my skills (agree/disagree)

B: My job offers me good prospects for career advancement (agree/disagree)

Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

2 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 line management quality, conflict at work and work–life balance.

Key findings

- Over a third (35%) of employees feel their work impacts positively on their mental health, with 27% reporting negative impacts.
- High workloads, stress levels, experience of conflict, weak leadership and poor line management are all correlated with negative impacts on mental health.
- Headline work–life balance findings have remained largely unchanged across the whole time series, including at the height of the pandemic, suggesting that underlying job design and workload play a more important role than employees' work location in their perceptions of work–life balance.

Mental and physical health

Over half of all employees report good physical and mental health – 63% rate their mental health as 'good' and 61% rate their physical health as 'good'. We found significant differences by age around mental health, with workers in older age brackets reporting the best mental health (71% of over-55s and 84% of over-65s said it was good).

When asked about specific health conditions, 48% of employees have experienced some form of physical health condition, while 47% have experienced a mental health condition in the last 12 months.

The most common reported health conditions were:

- backache or other bone, joint or muscle problems (34%)
- anxiety (30%)
- sleep problems (29%)
- depression (16%).

There are some expected differences between occupational groups and industries around health conditions, with those in manual roles more likely to report physical health conditions.

Impact of work on health

In some cases, work can be a contributory factor to the conditions described above. The survey asks employees what impact their work has on their general mental and physical health. Over a third (35%) say work has a positive

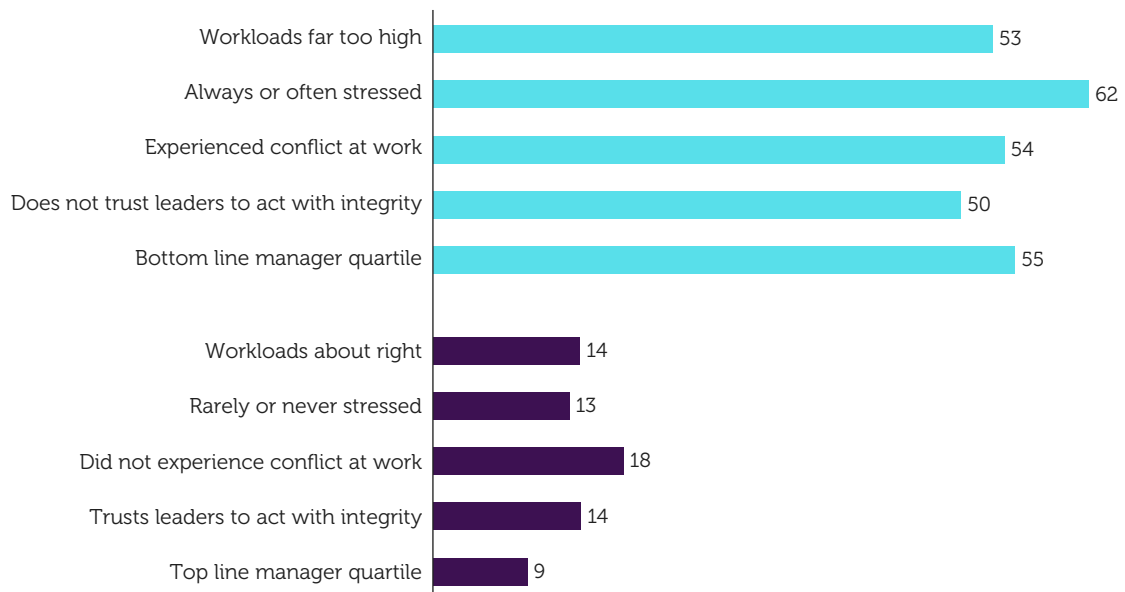
impact on mental health and over a quarter (26%) say the same about physical health. Over a quarter (27%) report negative impacts on mental health and 23% negative impacts on physical health.

We find older workers more likely to report a positive impact of work on their health. This is primarily linked to a much higher proportion of older workers being self-employed and working part-time, with these workers much more likely to be positive about their jobs.

However, we find disabled employees reporting poorer impacts of work on mental health. Over a third (36%) say work has a negative impact on their mental health, compared with only 24% for those without disabilities.

A range of factors will drive negative impacts of work on health, with high workloads and stress levels the two most obvious ones. However, as illustrated in Figure 11, correlations can be found with other job quality dimensions, too – experience of conflict, leadership and line management.

Figure 11: Drivers of work negatively impacting mental health (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

Subjective feelings in work

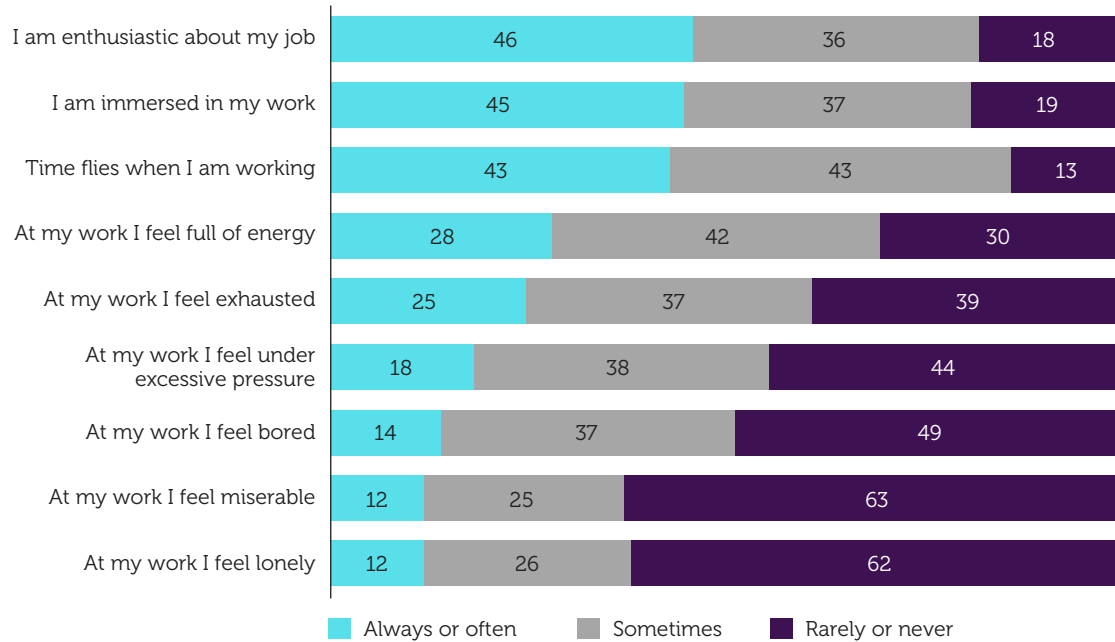
In addition to reporting physical and non-physical conditions and the overall impact of work on health, the survey also looks at the subjective feelings workers have about their jobs. These can be a good indication of the impact work has on individuals' mental health. Figure 12 summarises the answers to the question of how employees feel at their work.

There are some clear associations between occupational groups and management level across these questions and they serve as a good illustration of the trade-offs some make between elements of job quality. For example, we find those in managerial occupations report higher stress levels (being under excessive pressure) than those in administrative occupations.

In our UK-wide analysis, we also find public-sector employees report higher levels of exhaustion and stress. Those in the caring, leisure and other services occupational group report much higher exhaustion levels, too.

Conversely, we find that those fully working from home do much better on exhaustion and stress, but – unsurprisingly – much worse on loneliness.

Figure 12: How workers feel at work (%)

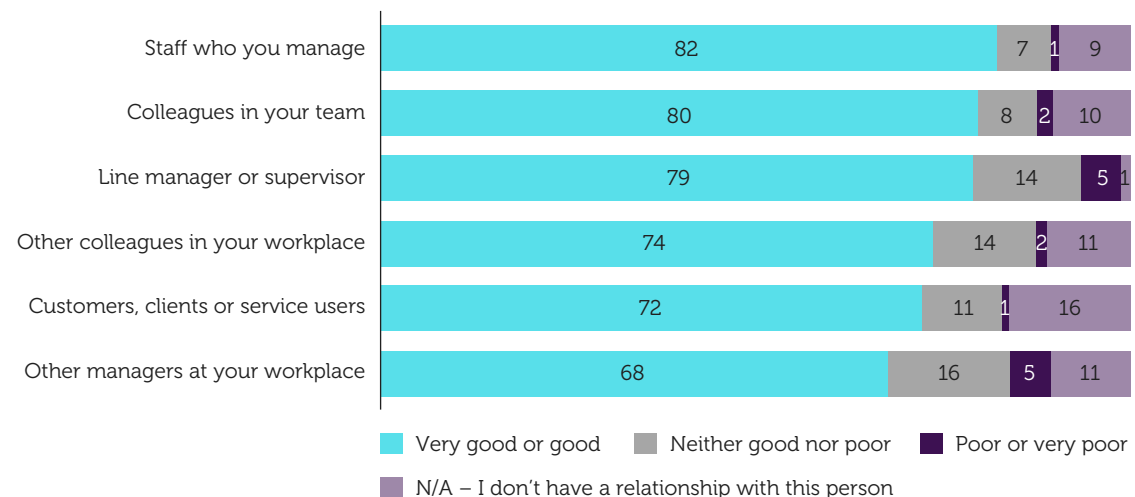


Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

Quality of relationships

The majority of employees report good or very good relationships with those the survey asks about – managers and colleagues – as well as managed staff and customers (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Quality of relationships at work (%)



Base: all working adults (for colleagues and customers) (n=1,016), all with a line manager (for line managers) (n=871) and all who manage staff (for staff managed) (n=372)

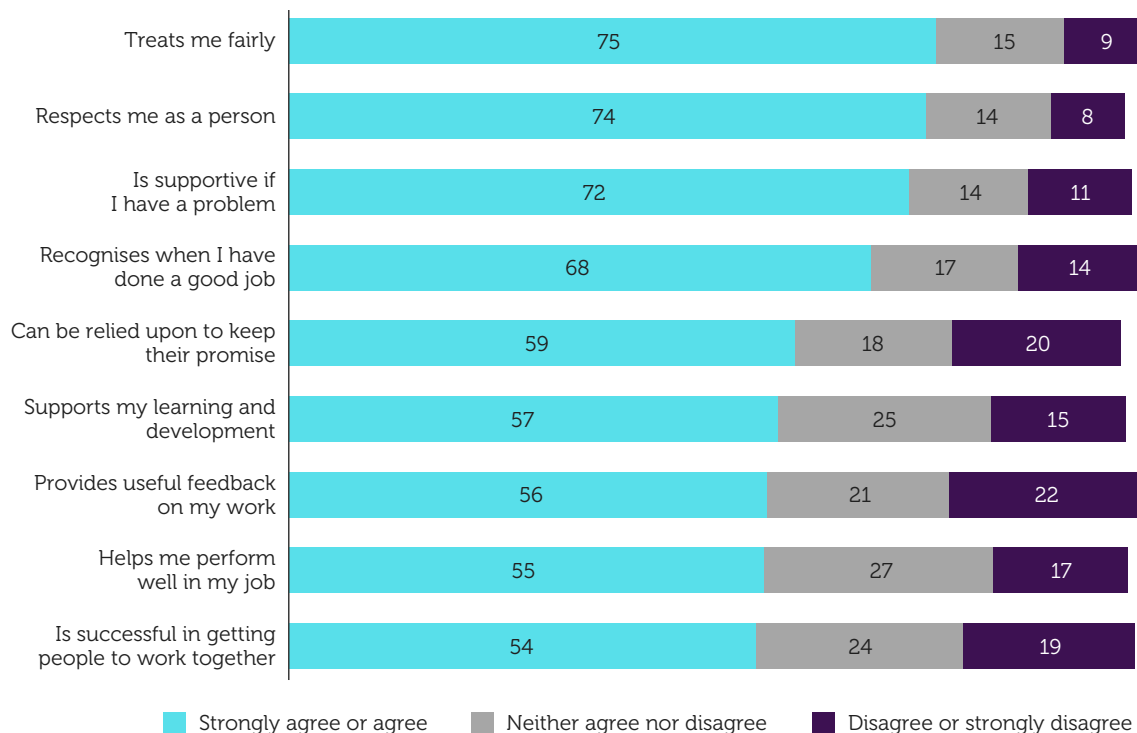
Looking at our UK-wide analysis data, we see no differences in employee/line manager relationships between sectors or organisational size, but we do find that those who fully work from home report better line manager relationships than those who do not.

Conversely, we find homeworkers report poorer relationships with colleagues. Excluding the self-employed from the sample, 10% of those fully working from home say they don't have any relationship with their colleagues, compared with only 3% of those not working from home at all.

Quality of line management

In addition to questions about the quality of relationships in the workplace, the survey includes a series of questions specifically about their managers. There is growing evidence that shows the importance of line management, not only to staff wellbeing, but also their productivity. We have included additional questions in this year's survey and will be publishing further analysis in this area later this year.

Figure 14: Relationships with managers (%)



Base: all with a line manager (n=871)

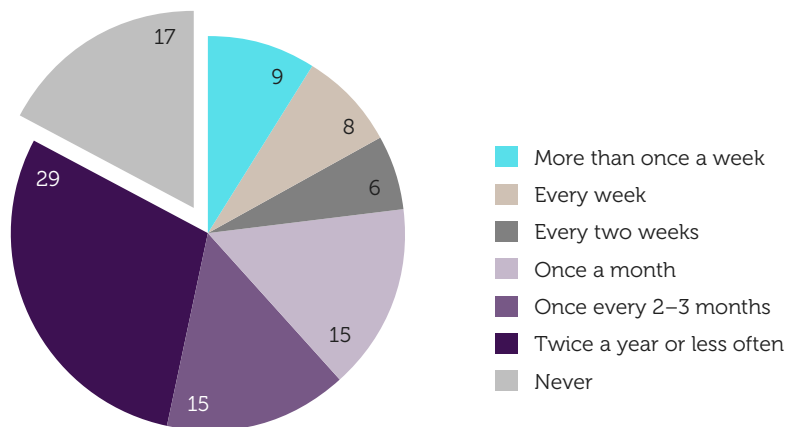
Overall results are largely positive, albeit with significant room for improvement in some areas. For example, less than six in 10 employees agree their manager provides useful feedback, helps them perform well in their job or supports their learning and development. There are also differences in responses across different demographic groups across the UK. Disabled employees rate their managers lower and, conversely, young people rate them higher. In line with the previous section, those working from home give better ratings, too.

We also see that frequency of meetings (summarised in Figure 15) matters. A higher frequency of manager meetings to discuss performance is correlated with better ratings of managers.

Employees generally found the frequency of their manager meetings sufficient – 70% found it adequate, 16% wanted to meet more frequently and 8% less frequently.

Interestingly, out of the 17% who never meet their manager at all to discuss performance, over half (55%) found this adequate, suggesting a serious disconnection from work structures.

Figure 15: Frequency of line manager meetings specifically to discuss performance (%)



Base: all with a line manager (n=871)

Conflict at work

Workplace conflict was one of the focus areas in the 2024 *Working Lives Scotland* report. We have also included this suite of questions in the subsequent two years, to establish whether the incidence of conflict is worsening.

Overall, a quarter (25%) of employees personally experienced some type of workplace conflict, which is the same proportion as in 2024 and 2025. However, we know from our *Winter 2025/26 Labour Market Outlook* that over half of all employers anticipate an increase in workplace conflict because of at least one of the key ERA 2025 changes being introduced.

Employees reported the highest incidence of:

- being undermined and/or humiliated in a job (12%)
- be shouted at or in a very heated argument (9%)
- verbal abuse or insult (8%)
- false allegations made against me (5%).

These answers also remained unchanged, as have the underlying demographic differences highlighted in previous surveys.

Being undermined or humiliated was reported by 15% of women (versus 8% of men) and verbal abuse was much more likely to be reported by disabled

employees (13% vs 6%). Women were also more likely to report unwanted attention of a sexual nature (3% vs 1% for men).

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

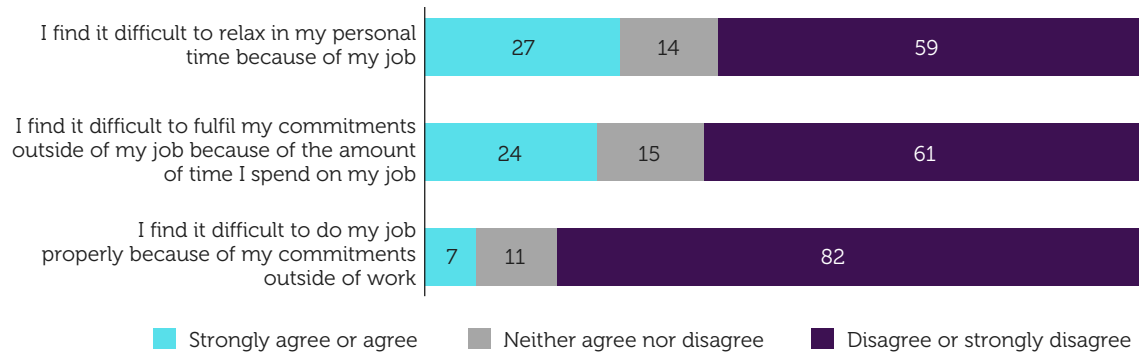
- I just let it go (49%)
- discussion with my manager and/or HR (34%)
- discussion with someone outside of work (eg family, friend) (32%)
- informal discussion with the other person (20%)
- I decided to look for a new job (8%).

Lastly, there was a near-even split in answers to whether the matter has been resolved – 30% felt it was fully resolved, 29% partly and 40% felt it was not resolved, although in some cases the process may have been ongoing.

Balancing work and personal life

Figure 16 summarises our findings across three key work–life balance questions in the survey. These answers have remained largely unchanged across the whole *Working Lives Scotland* time series, including at the height of the pandemic. This suggests that underlying job design and workload play a more important role than employees' work location, with the increase in home and hybrid working not impacting employees' perceptions of work–life balance.

Figure 16: Balancing work and personal life (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

Indeed, those reporting excessive workloads fare less well across work–life balance questions – 54% of those with high workloads say they can't relax in their personal time and 45% can't fulfil their commitments outside of their job, compared with only 14% of those who say their workload is about right for both questions.

Conversely, just 7% of employees said that they find it difficult to do their job due to commitments outside of work. For those with childcare responsibilities, this rises to 11% compared with just 5% for those without any caring responsibilities.

3 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

- 72% of employees are satisfied with their job and 63% with their life.
- The main reasons for changing jobs are better pay and benefits (25%), work–life balance (25%), and unhappiness with leadership or management (18%).
- Nearly a fifth (18%) of employees have lost sleep due to worrying about money.

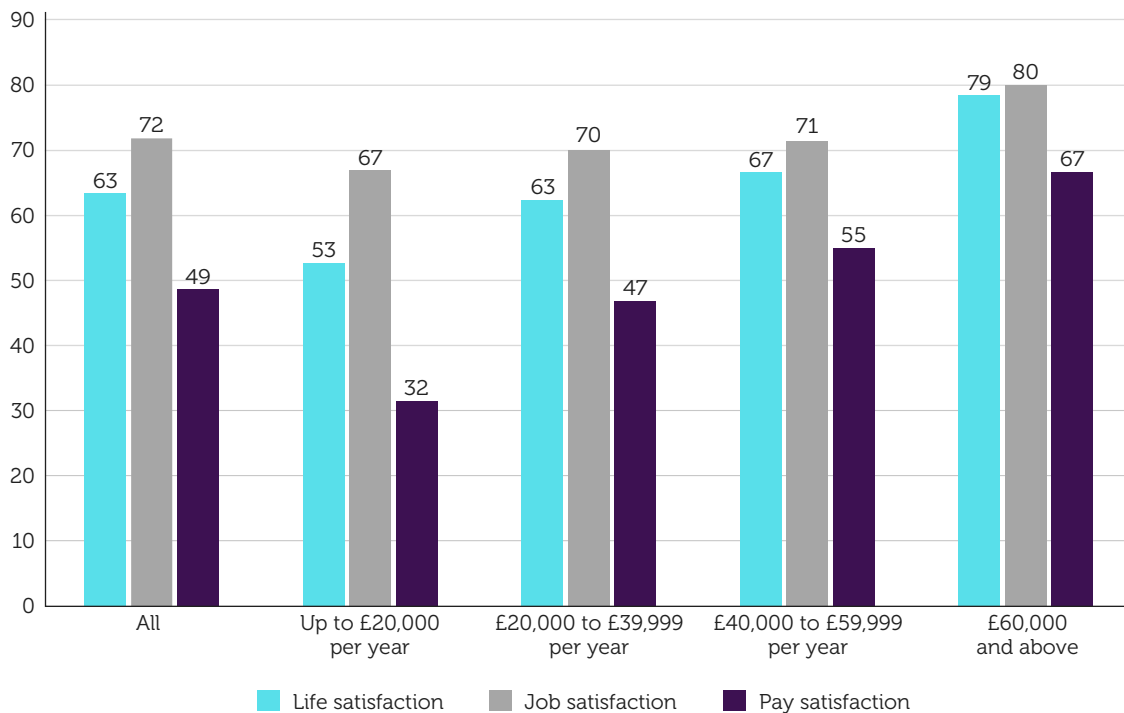
Life, job and pay satisfaction

We generally find high levels of both life and job satisfaction – 63% and 72% respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, higher personal income is associated with both higher life and job satisfaction (Figure 17).

A slightly smaller proportion (49%) of Scottish employees were satisfied with their pay, rising to 67% for those whose personal income is higher than £60,000 per year. There is a clear link to workloads, with poorer life, job and pay satisfaction for those who describe their workloads as too high.

It is worth noting, however, that employees on higher incomes often report poorer negative job quality dimensions in relation to workloads or stress levels – an example of the trade-offs people make between job quality aspects.

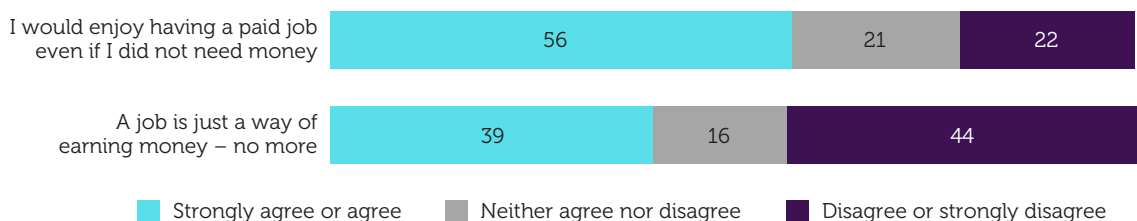
Job satisfaction interacts with other elements of job quality, both as an outcome (for example, negative impacts of work on health increase job dissatisfaction) and as a driver in itself (for example, job dissatisfaction means you are more likely to quit).

Figure 17: Life, job and pay satisfaction by personal income band (%)

Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

Work centrality

In addition to pay satisfaction, our two work centrality questions measure the relative importance of work in employees' lives, with the results summarised in Figure 18. We find older workers tend to be more positive about work – a view driven by higher levels of self-employment and part-time employment among this group.

Figure 18: Measures of work centrality (%)

Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

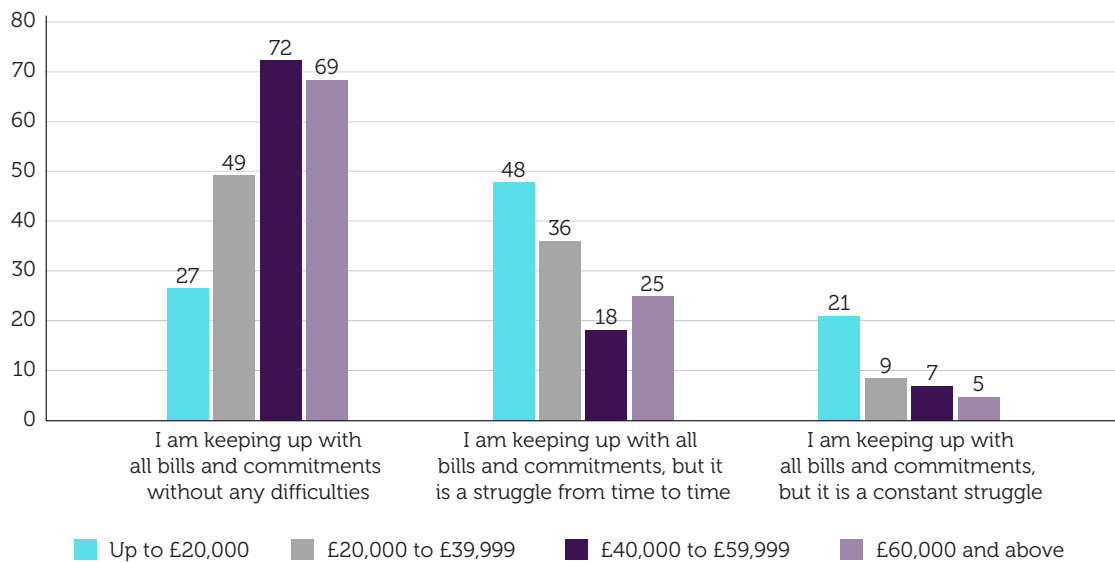
Looking across the UK, the importance of work in people's lives is one of the few measures in our survey that has seen significant change across the series. The worsening trend predates COVID, which understandably saw work centrality improve slightly. The worsening is particularly pronounced in the public sector, which may reflect consistently higher workloads and stress levels – especially in the education and health sectors.

Keeping up with bills

We find that money worries have a real impact on employees' ability to do their job. Over a quarter (27%) said that money worries have had a negative impact, with the most common forms being lost sleep (18%), health problems (13%) and finding it hard to concentrate or make decisions at work (10%).

The cost of living continues to be a concern for employees. With data collected before the conflict in the Middle East, there has been a slight improvement compared to the period of high inflation in 2022/2023, but we still find only 54% of employees can keep up with all bills and commitments without any difficulties. This drops to only 27% of those on the lowest incomes (Figure 19), with 21% of the lowest-paid employees saying keeping up with bills is a constant struggle.

Figure 19: Keeping up with bills by personal income (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

Job security and likelihood to quit

The survey measures the perceived likelihood of the respondent losing or quitting their job in the next 12 months, with the former a measure of job security. Overall, we find 63% of employees saying they were unlikely to lose their job (11% likely) and 66% unlikely to quit their job (15% likely), with the rest responding 'neither' or 'don't know'.

Both measures have stayed relatively stable across the series, with the exception of a dip in the likelihood to quit in our pandemic survey in 2021, with employees less inclined to move jobs during a global economic crisis.

We consistently find public-sector employees report better job security across both measures, as well as those with long tenures in their organisations. We use the 'likelihood to quit' measure as one of our five key outcomes, directly linked to retention, and find a higher likelihood to quit among those dissatisfied with their jobs, workloads that are too high, poor work-life balance, bad line management or experience of conflict.

Of course, the likelihood to quit one's job is not the same as actually quitting. However, the reasons given for changing jobs are consistent with those factors driving the likelihood to quit. For those who have worked in a different organisation before their current job (64% of all employees), the top reasons for changing job were better pay and benefits (25%), better work–life balance (25%) and unhappiness with leadership or senior management (18%).

Underemployment

In addition to number 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'. The difference tells us how much an employee is underemployed or overemployed.

We find that 86% of people work at least as much as they would like to, with 14% saying they would like to work more than they currently do. Just 5% would like to work more than 10 hours per week than they currently do. Conversely, 59% would like to work less than they do currently.

Our UK-wide analysis found that underemployment is much higher for those in part-time roles (33%) and the self-employed (17%), as well as for those on non-standard contracts (40%). This is reflected in differences in underemployment across occupational groups as well as industries, with the highest underemployment found in hospitality (30%) and retail (23%).

4 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.

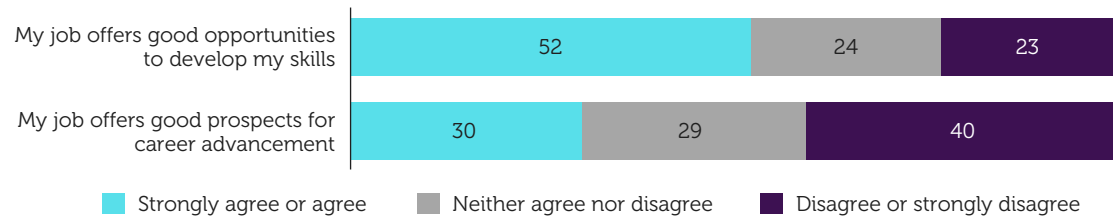
Key findings

- Just under a third (30%) of employees believe their job offers good prospects for career advancement, while 52% feel their job offers good opportunities to develop their skills.
- The proportion of employees working some of their time from home has stayed the same post-COVID, but the amount of time they spend working at home is declining, indicating a drift towards employer premises.
- 28% of all employees use generative AI in their role at least once a month, although over two-thirds of them have received no AI training at all. Furthermore, 50% do not trust the output of generative AI to be accurate.

Personal and career development

We know from our evidence, especially the quarterly *Labour Market Outlook*, that in a tight post-pandemic labour market, many employers have increased focus on skills development and career progression to boost retention, as well as help with recruitment. Employee perception of skills and career opportunities is summarised in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Skills development and career advancement opportunities (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

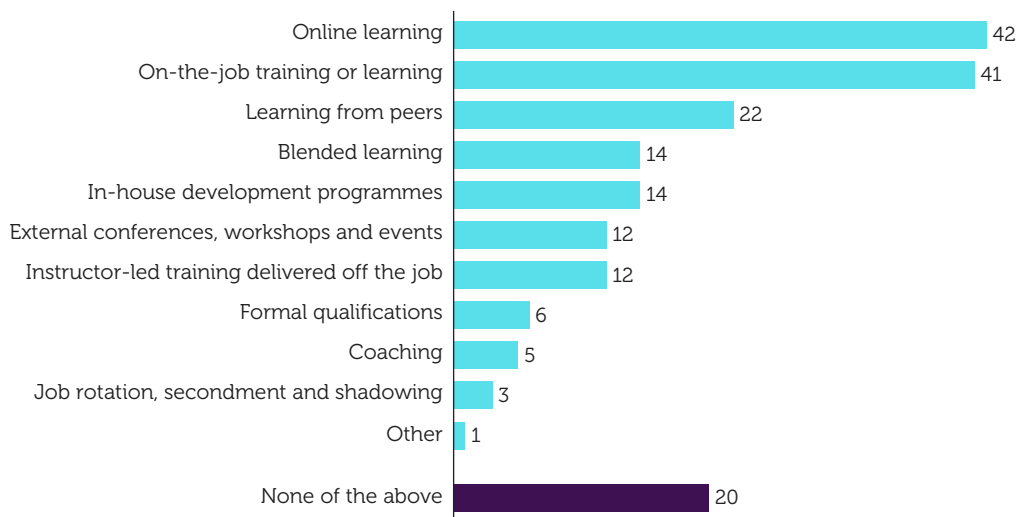
Across both measures, just like in past surveys, those on the highest incomes report higher levels of agreement. This is linked to differences by occupational group, providing further evidence of the gaps in training for those in some of the lower-skilled occupational groups.

On career advancement, we see older workers with lower levels of agreement – only 22% said their job offers good career advancement opportunities, which is partly a reflection of the stage of their working lives.

Training participation

Employer investment in training has dropped considerably over the last 10 years across all parts of the UK. The CIPD has an upcoming report around L&D and skills, aimed at both practitioners and policy-makers, but *Working Lives Scotland* provides a basic breakdown of the types of training employees engaged in over the last year. Three-quarters (76%) participated in some form of training, with the full results in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Participation in training over the last 12 months (%)



Base: all who are not self-employed (n=902)

A fifth (20%) of all employees had not engaged in any form of training at all. We find clear differences by organisational size, with 30% of SME employees not having had any training, compared with 10% for those in 250+ organisations.

Training participation was also much higher in the public sector, with 89% of employees taking part in some form of training, compared with 73% of private-sector employees.

Generative AI

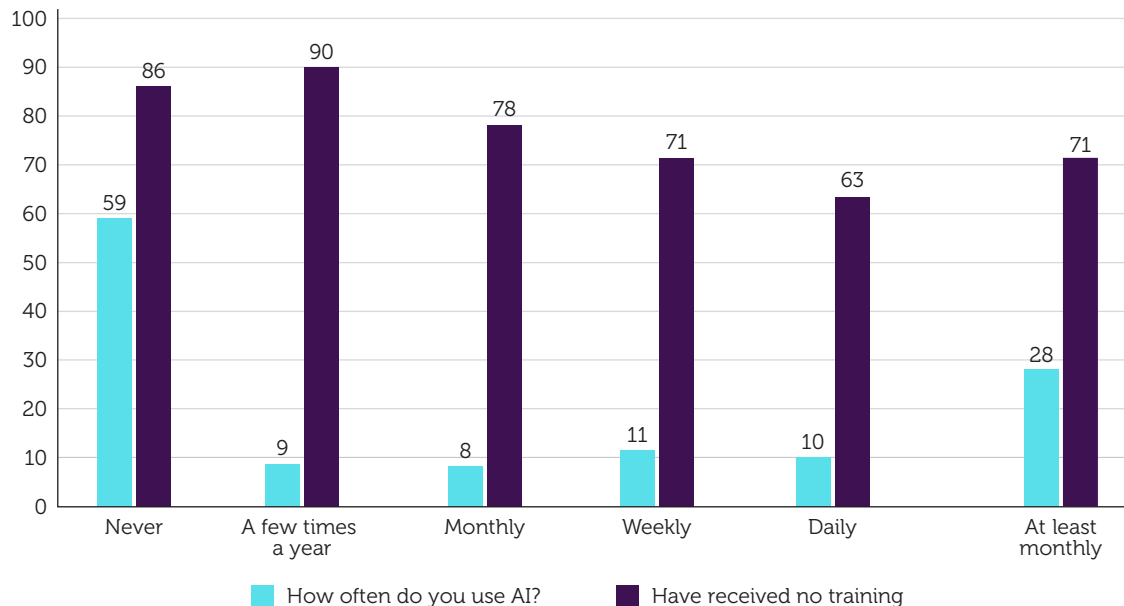
Unlike in past surveys, where we included AI as one of the options listed in Figure 21, we have included a suite of new questions around generative AI in the 2026 survey. More analysis of this data is planned for later this year.

On usage, over half (59%) say they never use AI as part of their job, with 9% saying they use it a few times a year, 8% monthly, 11% weekly and 10% daily.

On training, we find that 11% of all employees received some training in using AI to perform tasks in their current job, with 82% saying they have not.

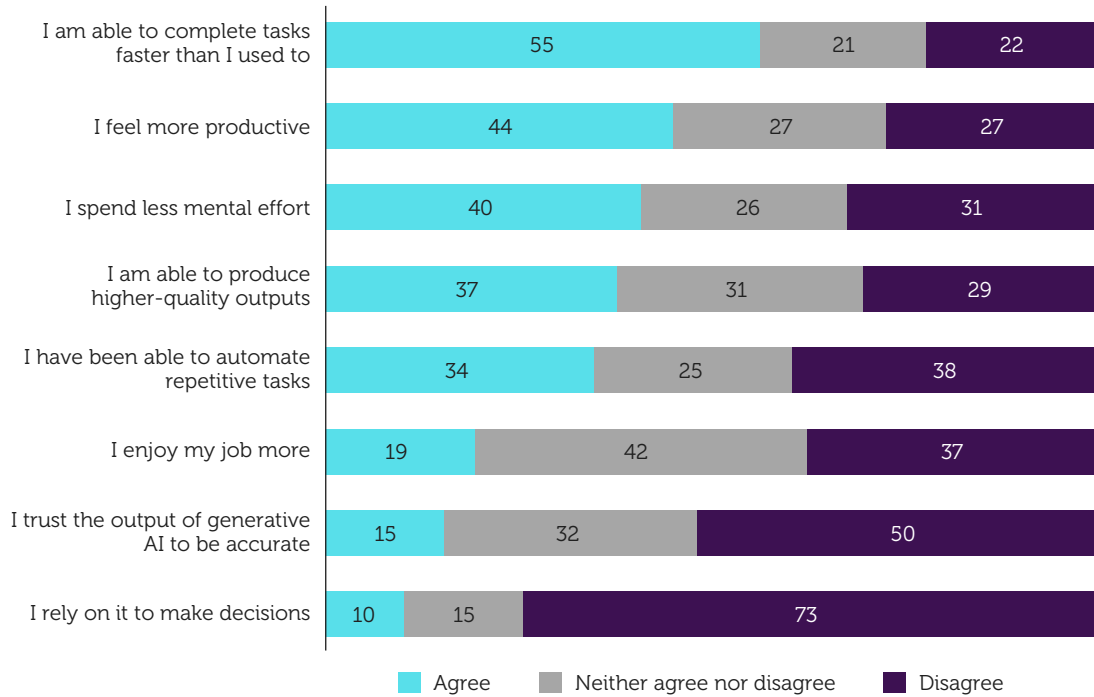
While training participation around AI improves the more regularly an employee uses it, presumably one driving the other, substantial gaps remain. Out of the 28% of employees who use AI at least monthly, 71% say they did not receive any training around AI at all. Out of the 10% who use AI daily, 63% did not receive any training.

Figure 22: Gaps in training around AI use remain even for regular users (%)



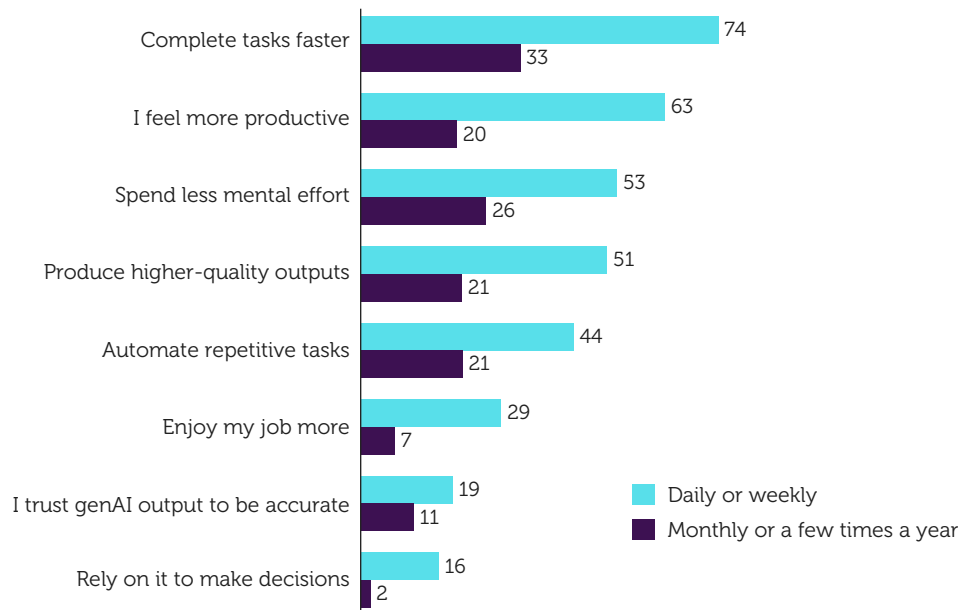
Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

For users of AI, we included a series of questions to assess the impact of AI on their work and their general perception of these digital tools. Answers are summarised in Figure 23, with results, for example, showing that 50% of users do not trust the output of generative AI to be accurate.

Figure 23: View on the impact of the use of generative AI (%)

Base: all who use AI tools as part of their work (n=424)

We also find that the more regular a user of AI is, the more positively they respond to all impact questions. For example, 74% of daily or weekly users say they are able to complete tasks faster, 63% feel more productive and 29% enjoy their job more. Whether their perception of AI changed as a result of use, or their use changed because of a more positive perception is not something we can determine from these questions alone.

Figure 24: View on the impact of the use of generative AI by how often AI is used (%)

Base: all who use AI tools as part of their work (n=424)

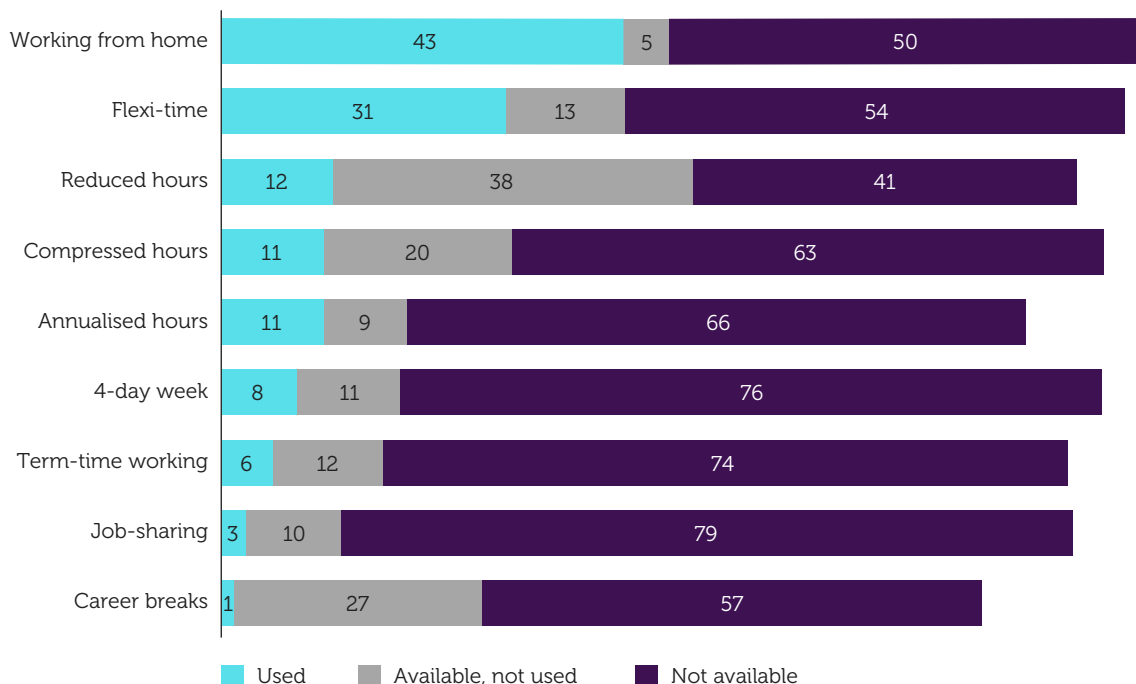
Flexible working

Despite much of the post-pandemic conversation focused on home and hybrid working, there are a range of flexible working arrangements that employees can use. Further strengthening of the right to request flexible working via the ERA 2025 is aimed at boosting the uptake of flexible options. Considerable gaps in availability and use remain, as summarised in Figure 25.

Overall, we find that 70% of employees are using some sort of flexible working arrangement. Before the pandemic in the 2020 *Working Lives Scotland*, 53% of employees reported the same, although we asked about a smaller number of arrangements (the comparable 2026 figure is 65%). The main shift is, understandably, due to an increase in the use of formal homeworking arrangements, which have increased from 30% before the pandemic to 43% today.

There have not been any other significant changes to the other arrangements, although there has been an increase in the availability of compressed hours across the public sector in our UK data. In general, all flexible working arrangements we asked about are significantly more available in the public sector.

Figure 25: Availability and use of flexible working arrangements (%)



Base: All working adults except those running their own business (n=902)

Informal flexibility – measured as the ease of taking a few hours off work to take care of personal or family matters – can also give us greater control over how work interacts with the rest of our lives. We find that 65% of all employees have good informal flexibility in their jobs, saying they would find taking some time off for personal or family matters easy.

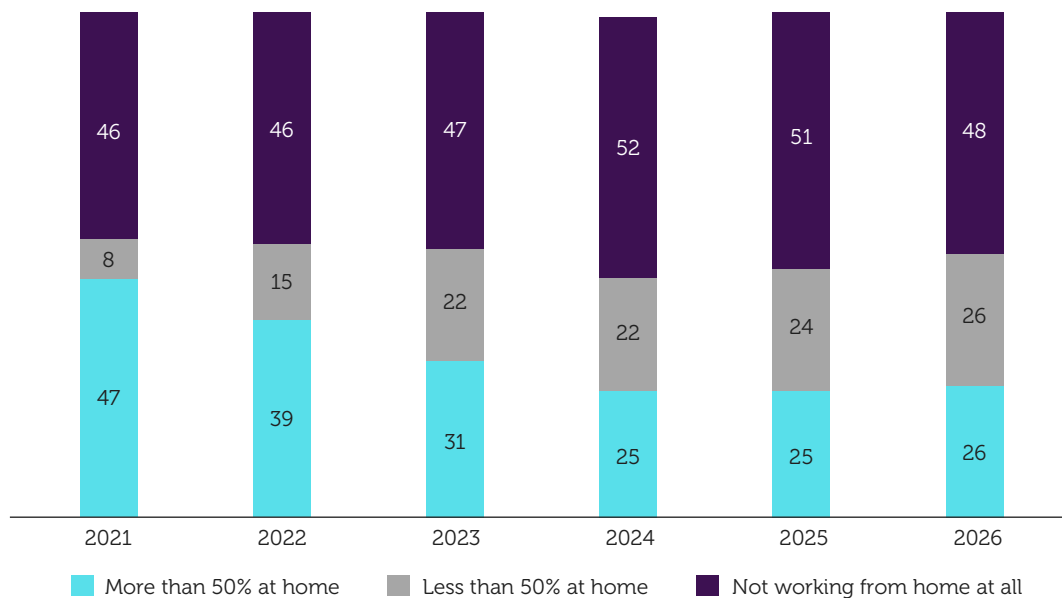
Informal flexibility has also improved compared with the pre-pandemic *Working Lives Scotland* surveys, where an average of 59% of employees reported good informal flexibility. Informal flexibility is much better across smaller organisations, rising to 74% for those working in microbusinesses (2–9 employees).

Home and hybrid working

The most obvious impact of the pandemic has been the increase in home and hybrid working across the UK. Just over half of all employees (52%) work at least some of the time from home – 9% work fully from home, 17% work at home for more than half of their time and another 26% work at home for half or less of their time.

Looking across the entire time series, we find that while the proportion of employees working some of their time from home has stayed roughly the same post-COVID, the share they spend working at home is declining, as illustrated in Figure 26. This corroborates reports of a steadily increasing number of companies mandating office days.

Figure 26: The share of home and hybrid working across the *Working Lives Scotland* series (%)

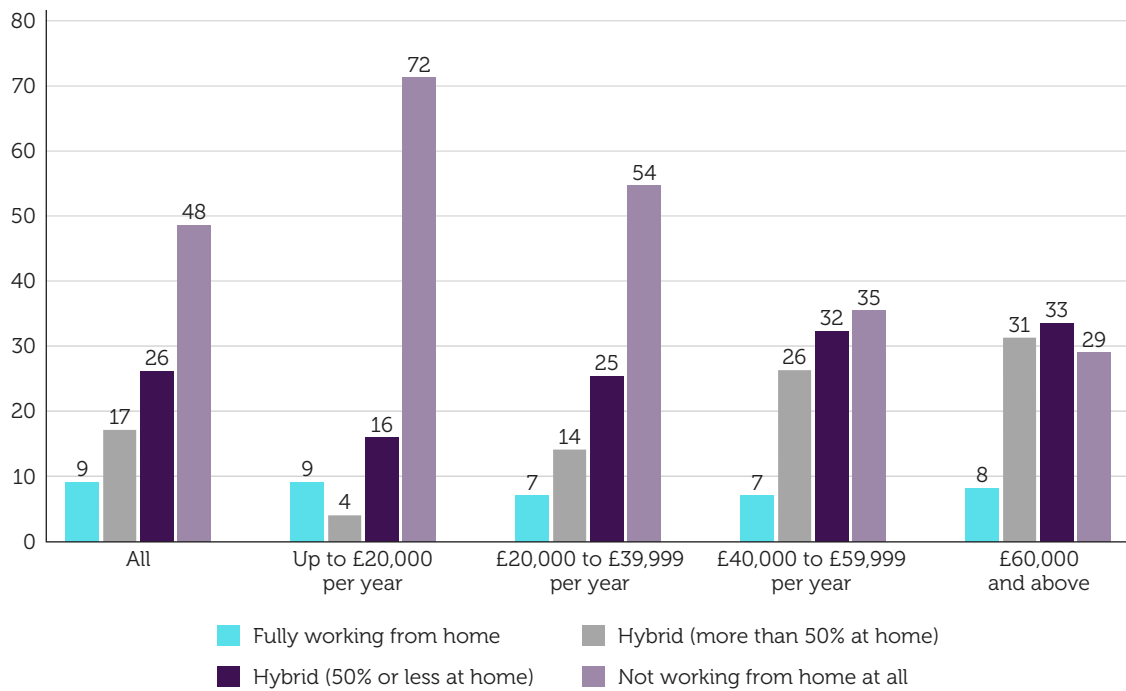


These patterns broadly match future working preferences, too, with the majority of each group of employees (fully, primarily or occasionally WFH) preferring to work in those patterns in the future.

However, we find that 31% of all employees *can't* work from home at all and another 12% *don't want* to work from home at all. This means that for over two-fifths of employees, access to flexible working cannot be achieved through homeworking alone. For employers, there are important considerations around organisational inclusion, retention and fairness.

Home and hybrid working patterns differ considerably across occupational groups, with those in relatively lower-skilled groups reporting poorer availability, as illustrated when breaking patterns down by income band (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Homeworking rates across income bands (%)



Base: all working adults (1,016)

5 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

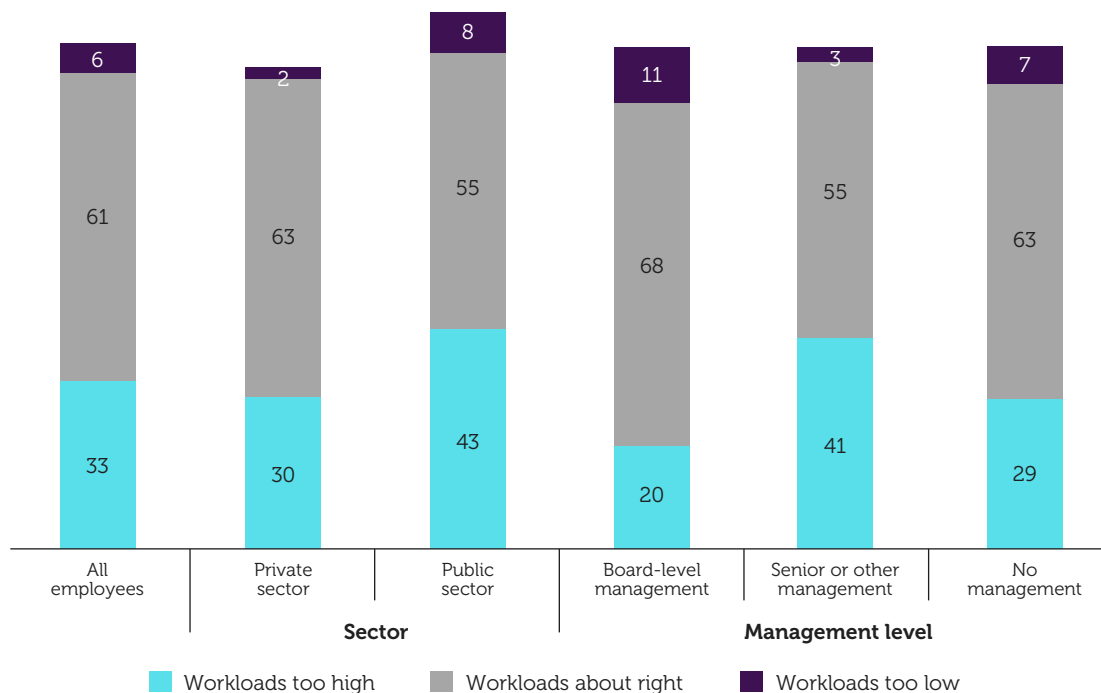
- A third (33%) of all employees say their workloads are too high, with lack of adequate resources at work linked to high workloads.
- Public and voluntary sector employees are significantly more likely to feel their jobs are meaningful.
- Over a third (34%) of those who are educated to degree level or above feel overqualified in their current job.

Workload

In addition to concerns over the *length of time* spent in work, the *relative intensity* of work is increasingly significant to our understanding of the quality of work. The survey asks employees to subjectively rate their workload in a normal week, with 6% saying their workloads were far too much, 27% too much, 61% about right and 6% too little.

Consistent with previous survey waves, we find public-sector employees report higher workloads (43%) as well as those with middle-management responsibilities (41%).

Figure 28: Workloads and work/demographic differences (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

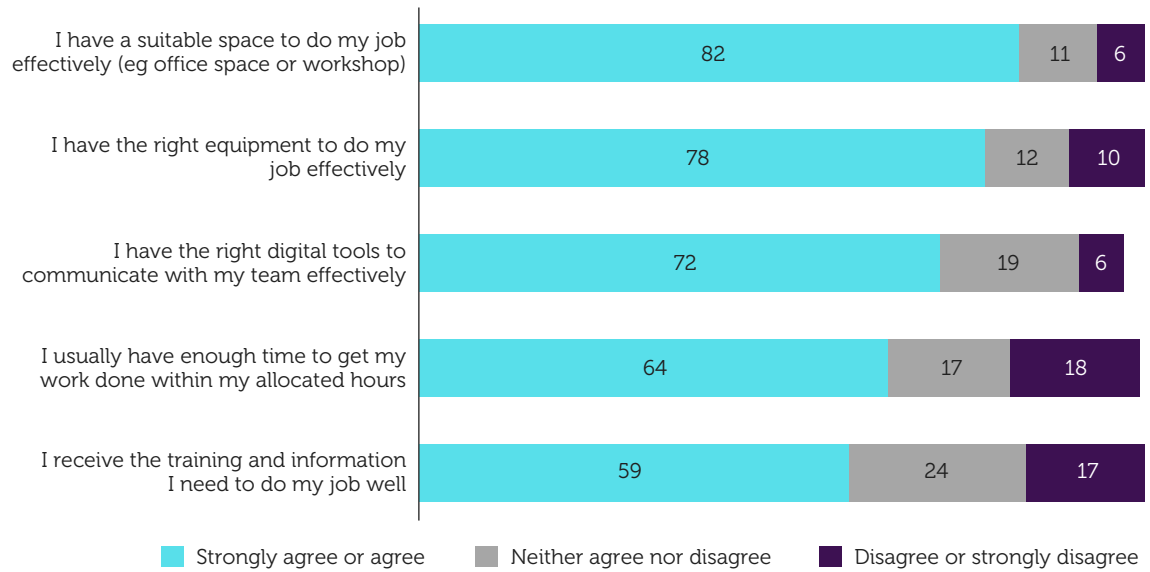
Apart from higher reported workloads by those in the second-highest income bracket, there aren't significant differences between respondents by income, showing that high workload is not confined to lower- or higher-paid occupations.

Those with high workloads are also more likely to report negative impacts of work on their mental health (53%) and physical health (36%).

Adequate work resources

Access to the right resources, equipment, training and suitable premises to do the job effectively is crucial to our performance at work. As illustrated in Figure 29, employees generally reported good access to resources, though with the biggest gaps around training and time to do the job.

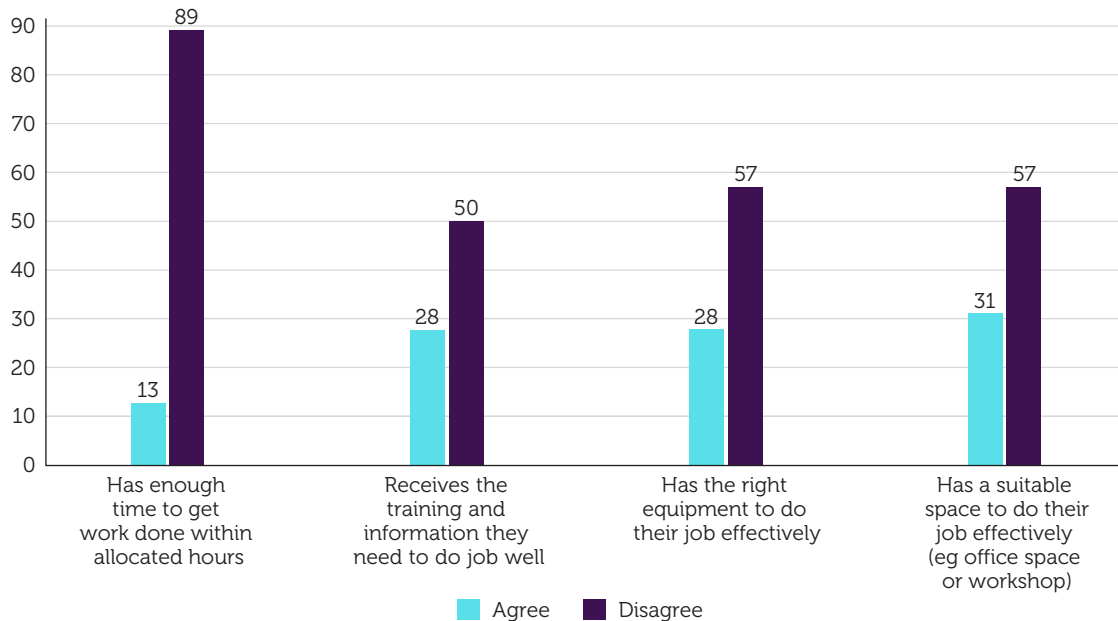
Figure 29: Adequacy of work resources (%)



Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

The importance of adequate resources for job design is reflected in their relationship with above-mentioned workloads. Figure 30 shows significant differences in high workloads between those who say they have adequate resources and those who do not.

Figure 30: High workloads and adequacy of work resources (%)



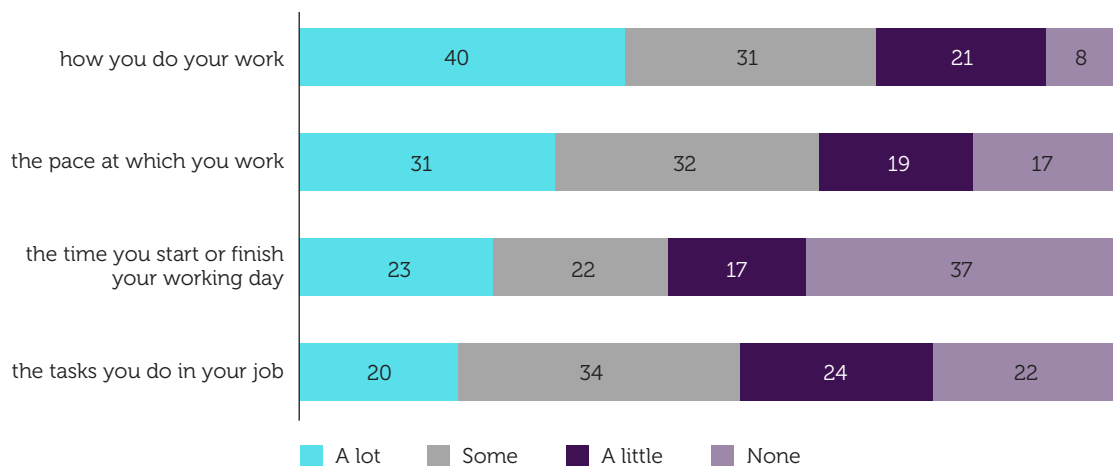
Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

Job autonomy and complexity

The level of control over one's job is an intrinsic component of the nature of work – this can be control over time, pace or tasks in one's job. In addition, the survey looks at job complexity, examining the nature of an employee's job and whether it involves interesting or monotonous tasks, as well as problem-solving (see Figure 31 and Figure 32).

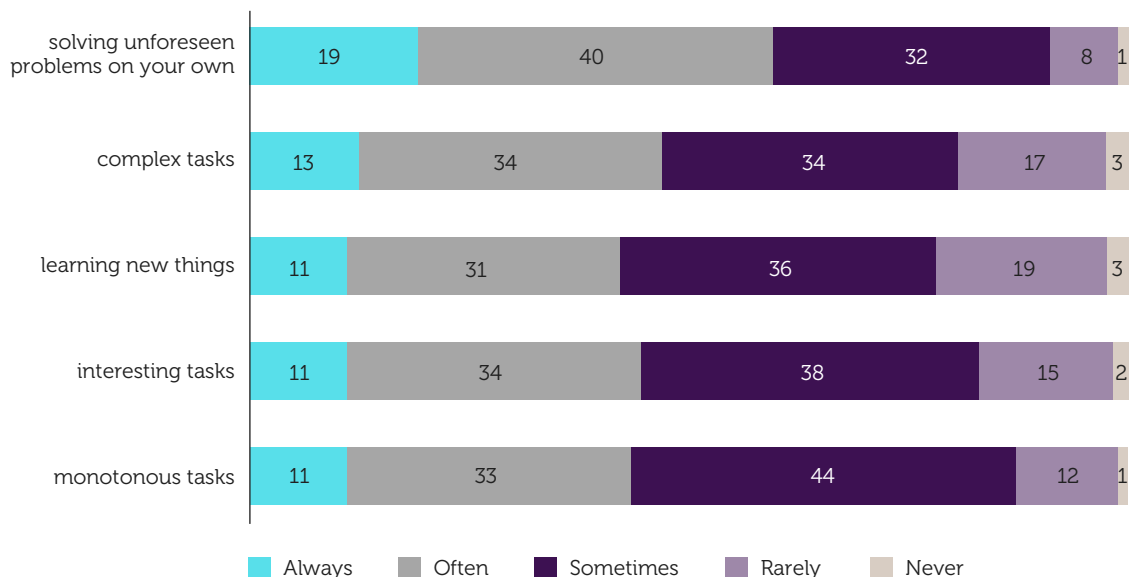
Both job autonomy and job complexity are closely linked to occupation and impact other dimensions of job quality. In general, higher-skilled occupational groups tend to report more job autonomy and more job complexity. This then translates into better findings for those working from home or hybrid, as well as those in managerial roles, since higher-skilled occupational groups are more likely to include managerial roles and offer home and hybrid working opportunities, as shown above.

Figure 31: How much autonomy do you have over... (%)



Base: all who are not self-employed (n=902)

Figure 32: How often does your job involve... (%)

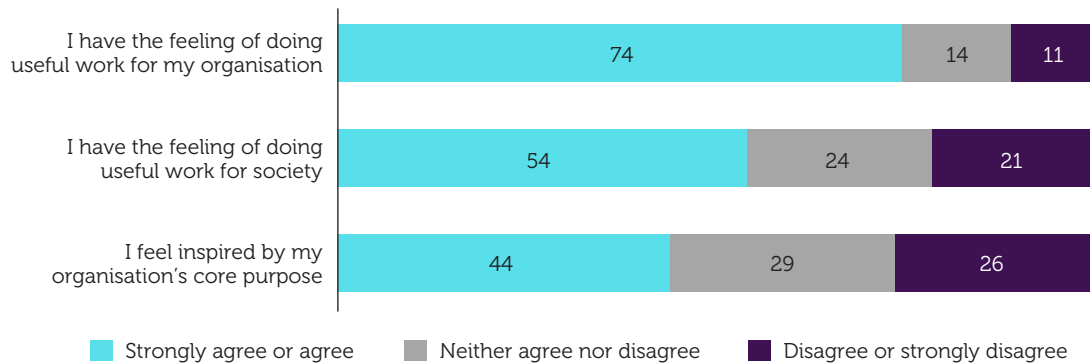


Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

Meaningful work

The survey also looks at whether employees feel they make a useful contribution through their work – be it to the organisation or to society as a whole – as well as whether they feel inspired by their organisation's core purpose. These are all indicators of experiencing fulfilling and meaningful work, with the results summarised in Figure 33.

Figure 33: Feelings of meaningfulness of work (%)



Base: all who are not freelancers (n=980) and all working adults (for society question) (n=1,016)

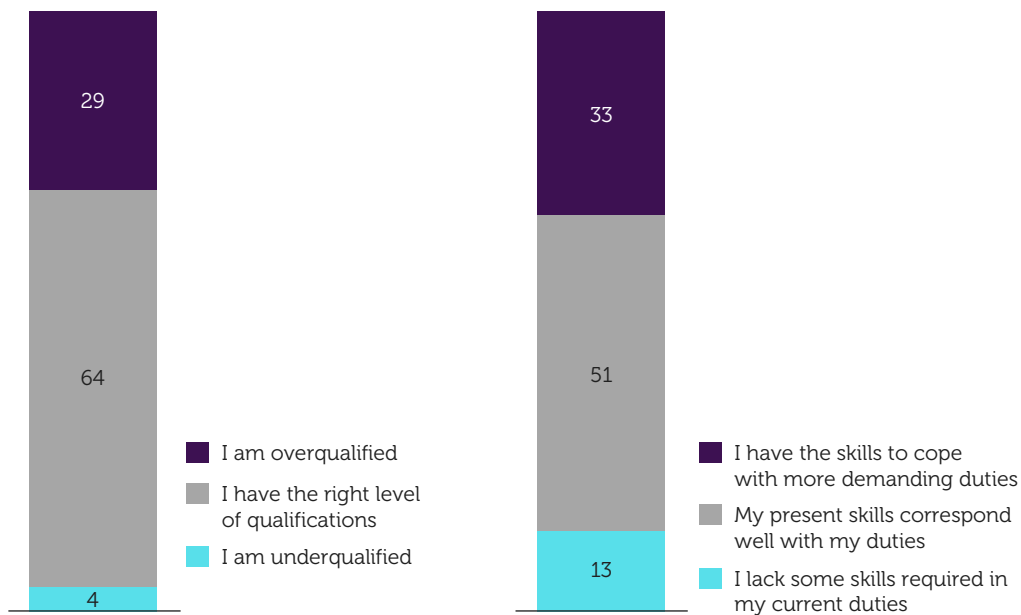
The meaningfulness of work is an area where employees who work in the public or voluntary sectors have done significantly better across our seven-year series. The differences are most pronounced in the question around societal impact, with 72% of public-sector employees feeling they are doing useful work for society, compared with only 48% of private-sector employees. In the public sector, the feeling that one does meaningful work can serve as a powerful recruiting tool, as well as a trade-off against some of the more negative aspects we highlight throughout this report, like workloads or stress.

Skills and qualification match

The majority (64%) of employees feel their qualifications match their job well, but 29% feel overqualified. A third (33%) say they have the skills to cope with more demanding duties, with over half (51%) saying their skills match their current duties well. There has been little change across these measures in nine years.

Over a third (34%) of those who are educated to degree level or above feel overqualified in their current job. This does not change by job tenure (with the exception of those with over 10 years of service), suggesting that those whose initial employment failed to match their expectations can struggle subsequently to find a role requiring their qualifications.

Breaking down UK-wide results by occupation and industry, we find that the highest overqualification is reported by those in sales and customer services (48%), with the highest proportions by industry found in retail and hospitality – 42% and 45% respectively. This is most likely a reflection of further and higher education students who either work alongside their studies or continue working after graduating, but not in graduate jobs.

Figure 34: Skills and qualification match (%)

Base: all working adults (n=1,016)

6 Effective voice

Meaningful employee voice allows workers to communicate concerns and provide feedback and suggestions. The survey underpinning this report explores various forms of employee voice, including individual and collective voice, as well as direct engagement with managers.

Key findings

- Nearly a fifth (19%) of employees say they have no voice channel (a way to express their views) at work at all, with availability better across the public sector and worse across small organisations.
- Around a quarter (24%) of employees who are not trade union members would be interested in joining one, if there was the option to do so.
- Ratings of managers' ongoing communication with their employees improved considerably just after the pandemic, but have fluctuated since.

Voice channel availability

In line with findings across all our nine surveys, the most common channels available to employees were one-to-one meetings with managers, team meetings and employee surveys, available to 57%, 48% and 43% of employees respectively. The availability of voice channels has not changed throughout the series.

Figure 35: Voice channels available to workers (%)

Base: all who are not self-employed (n=902)

Of ongoing concern is that nearly a fifth (19%) of employees report having no voice channel at all. This is linked primarily to organisation size, with 30% of all employees working for organisations with fewer than 50 employees saying they had no voice channel, compared with 9% of those in 250+ organisations. Public-sector employees report better voice channel availability than private-sector employees, too.

Considering that we include team meetings as well as one-to-one meetings with managers in this question, it is concerning to see such high proportions of SME employees reporting no voice channels at all. This points to the importance of upskilling managers in how to engage with employees, especially across the large proportion of small businesses in the UK.

Trade unions

One of the objectives of the Employment Rights Act 2025 is to shift the industrial relations landscape across Great Britain, through new rights for trade unions to access workplaces for recruitment purposes, and by making it easier for them to achieve statutory recognition and to take industrial action. To gauge the potential impact of these changes, the survey included a number of questions, exploring the appetite among employees for joining a trade union.

Those who are not trade union members were asked to give a reason, with the headline results summarised below:

- There is no union or staff association at my workplace (24%).
- There is no union for the type of work I do (17%).
- I am treated fairly by my employer (10%).
- A union would make no difference in a workplace like mine (9%).
- I disagree with them in principle (5%).
- It costs too much (5%).
- Being in a union would not bring me any advantages (5%).

In addition, we asked those who are not members whether they would be interested in becoming members, if there was an option to do so. We find that 24% would be interested and 44% would be uninterested. Those with higher-level qualifications and those in higher-skilled occupational groups (professional and associate professional) were more likely to be interested in joining a trade union.

Those reporting negative aspects of job quality (job dissatisfaction, unsuitable contracts, negative impacts of work on health) were also more likely to be interested in joining a trade union. Conversely, those with comparatively longer job tenures were less likely to be interested.

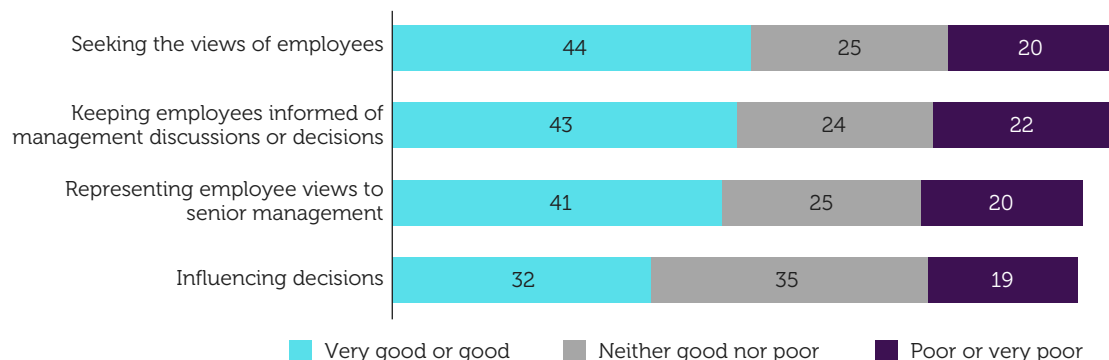
The survey data suggests that new rights giving trade unions access to workplaces for recruitment and organising purposes may not lead to a significant increase in union membership. For example, among the quarter (24%) of employees who say they are not members because there is no union of staff association, just a third (33%) say they would be interested and 30% would be uninterested in joining a union.

That means less than one in 10 (8%) of all employees who are currently not trade union members are realistic immediate recruitment targets. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of this group of employees work in organisations with 20 or more employees. This suggests that the most realistic recruitment targets are concentrated in larger organisations.

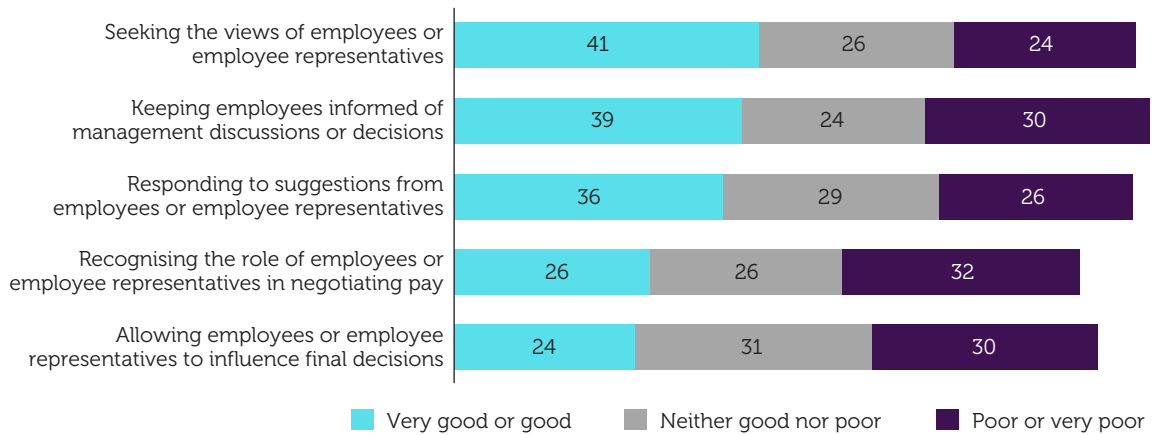
Employee ratings of representatives and managers

The availability of voice channels in workplaces itself does not tell us anything about their effectiveness or perceived quality. The survey therefore asks a series of questions that employees use to rate the quality of their employee representatives (if they have one) and their managers across several voice dimensions. The results are summarised in Figure 36 and Figure 37.

Figure 36: Employee ratings of their representatives (%)



Base: All with an employee representative (n=194)

Figure 37: Employee ratings of their managers (%)

Base: All who are not self-employed (n=902)

In line with previous years, both managers and representatives were rated the poorest on questions around employees influencing decisions, as well as pay negotiations (in the case of managers).

Voice quality is an area where we have recorded statistically significant changes just after the pandemic. We hypothesised that the driver of this shift was the additional focus on communication with employees during fast-paced changes during the pandemic. As seen in Figure 38, voice ratings have fluctuated considerably since.

Figure 38: Employee voice ratings across the *Working Lives Scotland* series (%)

Base: All who are not self-employed (for managers) (n=902 in 2026), and all with an employee representative (n=194 in 2026)

7 Conclusions and recommendations

The 2026 *Working Lives Scotland* report is structured around the Fair Work Convention's five dimensions of fair work. Now in its seventh year, it provides essential insights to Scottish policy-makers and employers around key aspects of fair work and their impact on organisations. The report is based on an analysis of a sample of over 1,000 respondents across Scotland, weighted to be representative of all working adults.

This year's report highlights the areas of job quality which have the strongest relationships to five business-related outcomes: job satisfaction, willingness to recommend one's employer, going above and beyond at work, making innovative suggestions and likelihood to quit. All are closely linked to an organisation's ability to recruit, motivate and retain its workforce.

The report is published as measures in the Employment Rights Act 2025, intending to tackle insecure work, improve employee voice and representation and boost workplace productivity, start to be implemented in Great Britain.

While any potential impact of the Act is not reflected in this data (collected Dec 2025–Feb 2026), the report's findings suggest that the changes to workplace practices which will have the most impact on improving people's job quality are not those which will be affected by the introduction of new employment laws.

The report's analysis finds that legislative changes to try to improve contractual security for some workers and to improve trade union representation and collective voice are less likely to make a difference to overall job quality in the UK.

Instead, the quality of people management, organisational leadership and meaningfulness work are some of the factors most associated with job satisfaction, performance and retention.

Our key recommendations for HR practitioners include:

- Management quality should be a priority, given the associations between line management experiences and a range of business outcomes. Providing managers with the time and training to manage staff well can make a considerable difference.
- Perceptions of organisational leadership are closely linked to business outcomes. Foster an open culture in the organisation that allows for honest conversations.
- Clearly articulate organisational purpose, with roles designed around it, as it links to employee performance, job satisfaction and retention.
- With strong links to business outcomes, address training gaps where and when identified and ensure that skills development and career progression opportunities are available across the workforce.
- Be holistic and look at physical, mental, social and financial wellbeing to support employee performance and retention.

- Review flexible working policies and make a broad range of formal and informal arrangements available to broaden your talent pool.
- Any changes to hybrid working policies should be underpinned by solid reasoning and communicated well.
- Understand the drivers of high workloads, provide adequate resources for employees and take steps to minimise unsustainable workloads to avoid negative health impacts.
- Explore the opportunities of generative AI, develop clear policies for its deployment and provide training in its use to boost employee performance.
- Understand skills mismatches in your organisation and make efforts to explore upskilling or redeployment options with employees.
- Positive workplace relationships with managers and colleagues are linked to performance, job satisfaction and retention. Focus on organisational culture and spend additional effort managing hybrid teams.
- Put in place policies to manage and resolve conflict, underpinned by line manager training around difficult conversations.
- Look at the whole suite of voice channels when establishing communication and regular feedback loops with employees. This is especially important given upcoming ERA 2025 changes around trade unions.

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* (UKWL) 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

The 2026 *UK Working Lives* (UKWL) survey was conducted between 12 December 2025 and 18 February 2026 and gave a sample of 5,074 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

seventh time, we have a boosted sub-sample for Scotland of 1,016, which has been weighted to be representative of all Scottish working adults (aged 18+). Not all figures throughout the report add up to 100% due to “don’t know” answers.

Good work and fair work

The 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.

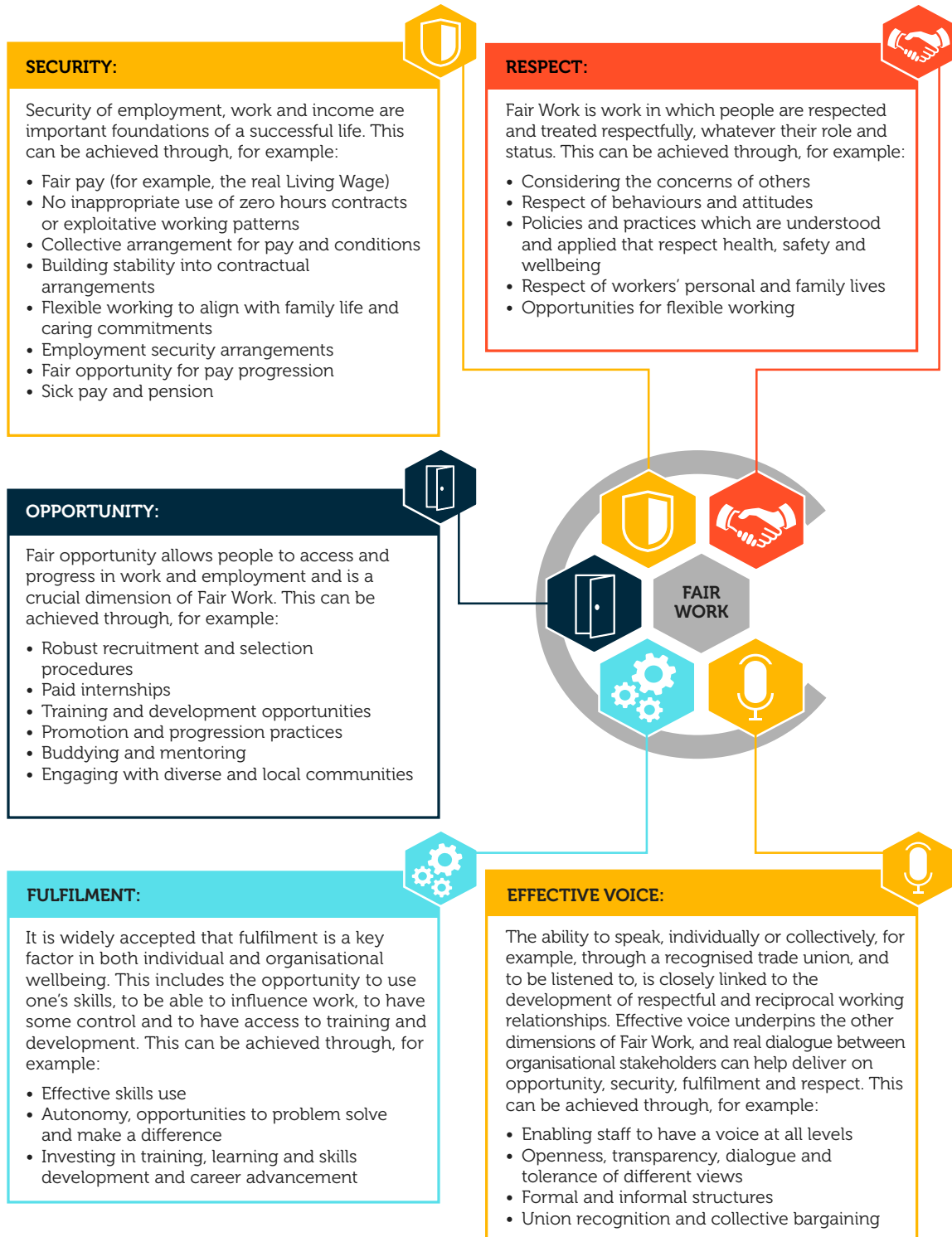
The Fair Work Convention conceptualised job quality on academic research pulled together primarily by the Scottish Centre for Employment Research at the University of Strathclyde. The Convention defined fair work through five dimensions: effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. 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
1 Pay and benefits	Pay as a percentile and in relation to the Living Wage, subjective feelings regarding pay, employer pension contributions and other employee benefits
2 Contracts	The terms of employment: Contract type, underemployment, and job security
3 Work–life balance	Overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and HR provision for flexible working
4 Job design and the nature of work	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
5 Relationships at work	Social support and cohesion: The quality of relationships at work, psychological safety, and the quality of people management
6 Voice and representation	Channels for feeding views to senior management, cultural norms on voice and satisfaction with the opportunities for voice
7 Health and wellbeing	Positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health. Often considered as an outcome of job quality

The Fair Work Convention's Fair Work Framework



Source: from the Scottish Government's [Best Practice Guidance on Addressing Fair Work Practices, including the Real Living Wage, in Procurement](#).

Table 2: Job quality dimensions and their correlation to business-related outcomes

Correlation coefficients (Spearman's) shaded by strength of association within each outcome. Dark purple cells are top quartile associations (high), blue are middle two quartile associations (medium) and grey cells are bottom quartile associations (low). Yellow shaded cells are not statistically significant associations.

	Job satisfaction	Employer recommendation	Discretionary effort	Contextual performance	Likelihood to quit
Line management	0.570	0.582	0.345	0.268	0.307
Leadership	0.502	0.655	0.398	0.195	0.252
Voice channel availability	0.142	0.139	0.040	0.131	0.153
Trade union membership	0.041	0.086	0.068	0.016	0.053
Management voice quality	0.483	0.588	0.406	0.246	0.281
Conflict experience	0.317	0.298	0.178	0.081	0.167
Meaningful work	0.492	0.466	0.383	0.231	0.228
Workloads	0.255	0.253	0.077	0.004	0.065
Work impact on mental health	0.582	0.486	0.313	0.184	0.239
Skills development opportunities	0.443	0.351	0.263	0.169	0.220
Career advancement prospects	0.323	0.383	0.233	0.213	0.203



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