CIPD

Survey report

July 2026

CIPD Good Work Index 2026

The CIPD has been championing better work and working lives for over 100 years. It helps organisations thrive by focusing on their people, supporting our economies and societies. It's the professional body for HR, L&D, OD and all people professionals – experts in people, work and change. With over 160,000 members globally – and a growing community using its research, insights and learning – it gives trusted advice and offers independent thought leadership. It's a leading voice in the call for good work that creates value for everyone.

Survey report

CIPD Good Work Index 2026

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Introduction

The *CIPD Good Work Index* 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, supported by a range of other evidence, 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 *CIPD Good Work Index* is published as the Employment Rights Act 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.

The report's findings, though, 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 that 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 is 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, skills development opportunities 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, relationships, meaningful work, health impacts as well as skills and career development opportunities is strong.

Pay and benefits

- 70% of employees are satisfied with their job and 65% with their life.
- Just half of respondents feel they are paid appropriately, rising to 72% for those on the highest incomes.
- Work centrality – how much importance people place on work in their lives – has been steadily declining over the *Good Work Index* series.

Contracts

- Most employees (over 90%) say their contracts suit them well, with 77% of those on temporary, zero- or short-hours contracts finding them suitable.
- Employees generally report good job security, but those with higher workloads, poorer workplace relationships or worse managers are much more likely to say they want to quit.
- The three most common reasons for changing jobs are better pay and benefits, better work–life balance and unhappiness with senior management.

Work–life balance

- 27% of all employees say they can't work from home and another 10% don't want to work from home at all.
- 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.
- Headline findings have remained largely unchanged across the whole *Good Work Index* 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.

Job design and nature of work

- 30% of all employees say their workloads are too high, with lack of adequate resources at work linked to high workloads.
- A third (33%) of those educated to degree level or above say they are overqualified for their role.
- 34% of all employees use generative AI in their role at least once a month, although two-thirds of them have received no training around AI at all. Furthermore, 45% do not trust the output of generative AI to be accurate.

Relationships at work

- The vast majority of employees report good relationships with managers and colleagues, as well as managed staff and customers. There has been a slight improvement across both manager and colleague relationships across the series.
- A quarter (25%) of employees have personally experienced some conflict at work, with a majority (51%) saying they just let it go.
- Homeworkers report better relationships with their managers, but poorer relationships with colleagues.

Voice and representation

- A fifth (20%) 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.
- Less than 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 have improved considerably during the pandemic but have fluctuated since.

Health and wellbeing

- Nearly two-fifths (37%) of employees feel their work impacts positively on their mental health, with 25% 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.
- A fifth (20%) of employees say they always or often feel under excessive pressure, with a quarter saying they feel exhausted at work. These proportions are higher in the public sector.

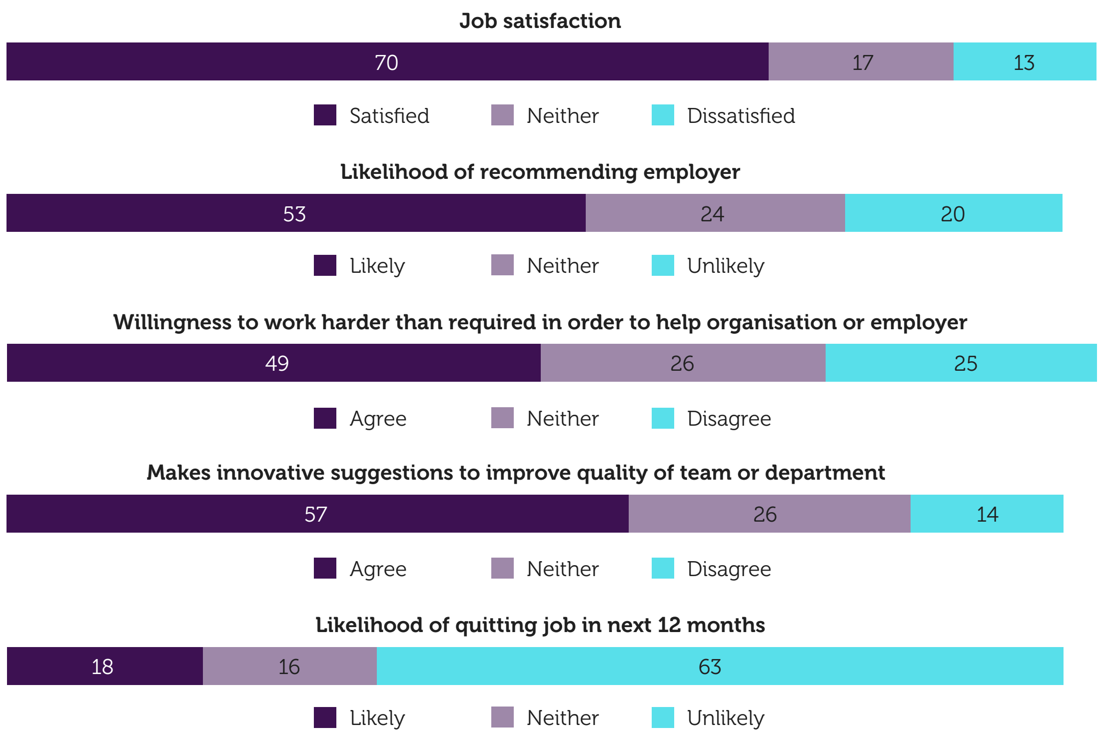
1 Job quality and business-relevant outcomes

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 relationship with a wide range of workplace outcomes. For employers, good jobs are a direct route to better organisational performance.

This year's *CIPD Good Work Index* 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 against which to analyse job quality (Figure 1).

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



Base: all working adults (n=5,074) and all except those running their own business or working as a freelancer/contractor for multiple clients (for willingness to work harder) (n=4,521)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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, relationships, meaningful work, 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 effects on the innovation pipeline and retention.

Trade union membership and contractual arrangements (permanent vs atypical) are not found to have statistically significant correlations with most business outcomes, with the exception of weak associations to discretionary effort for trade unions and likelihood to quit for contracts.

Overall, as summarised in Table 1 in the Appendix, line management, leadership, skills development opportunities and meaningful work stand out as key factors where the effects on all five business-related outcomes are the greatest.

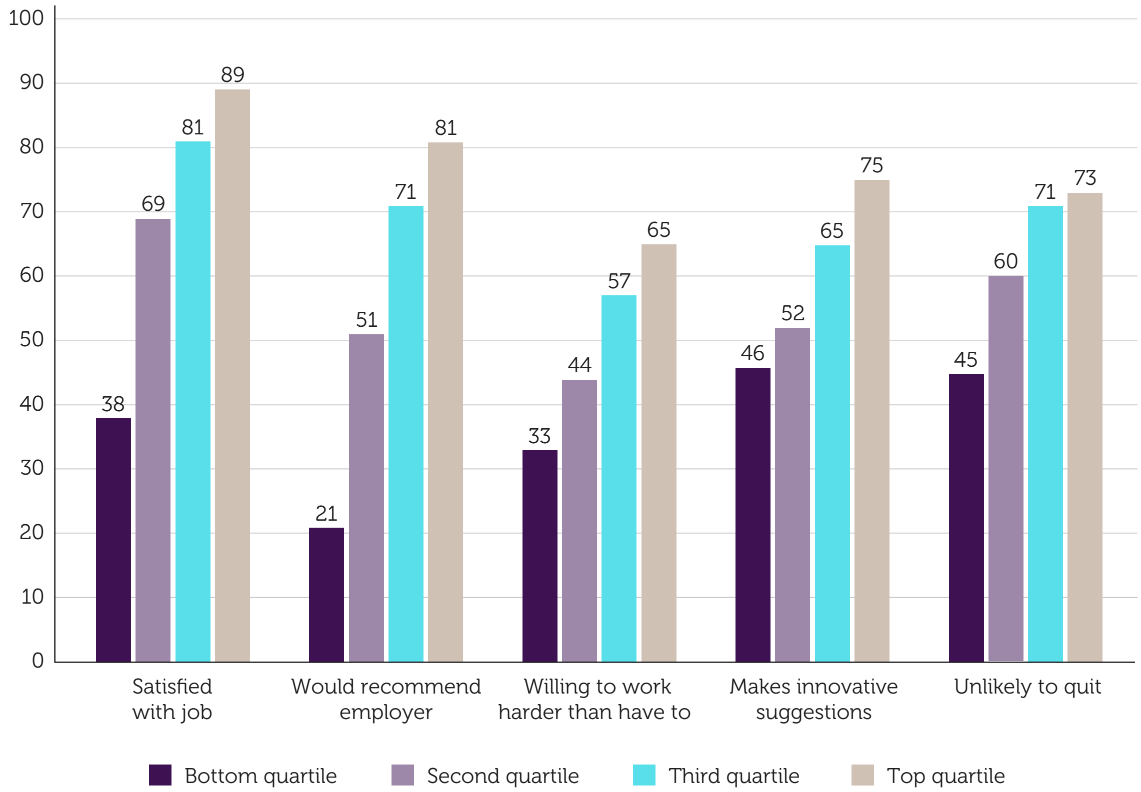
Improving aspects of job quality explored here requires organisational leadership around good work. In particular, evidence suggests that investing time and resources into ensuring all line managers are equipped with the core soft skills to manage people properly can unlock positive business outcomes.

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 *UK Working Lives* Appendix 2. 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 (%)

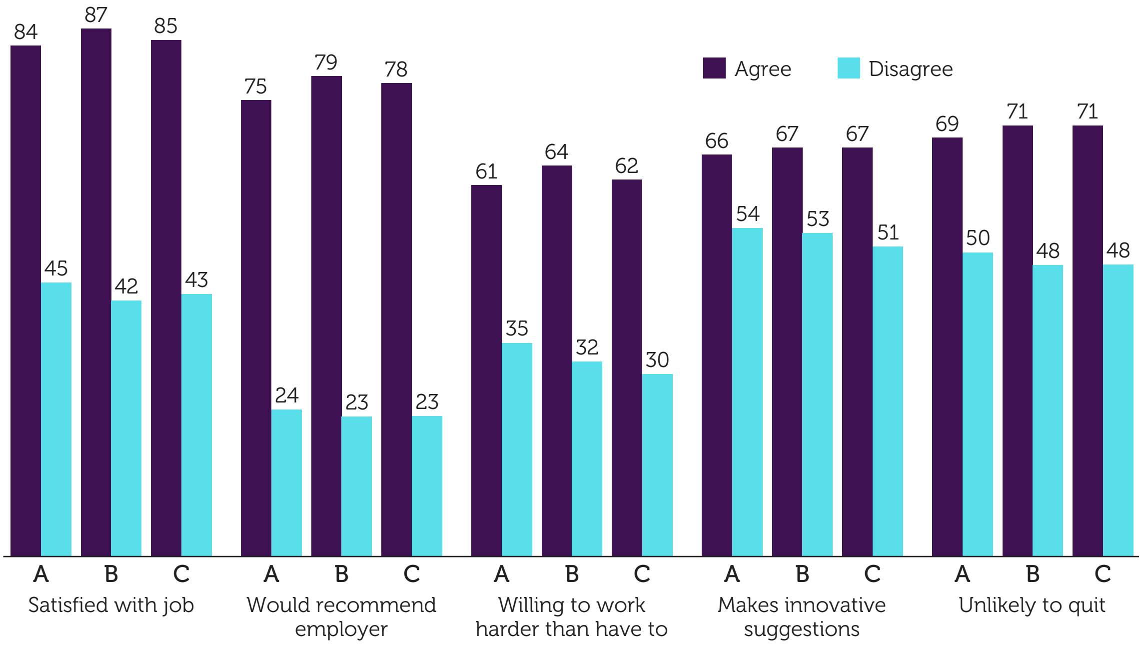


Base: all working adults with a line manager (n=4,392)

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 the 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 (n=4,521)

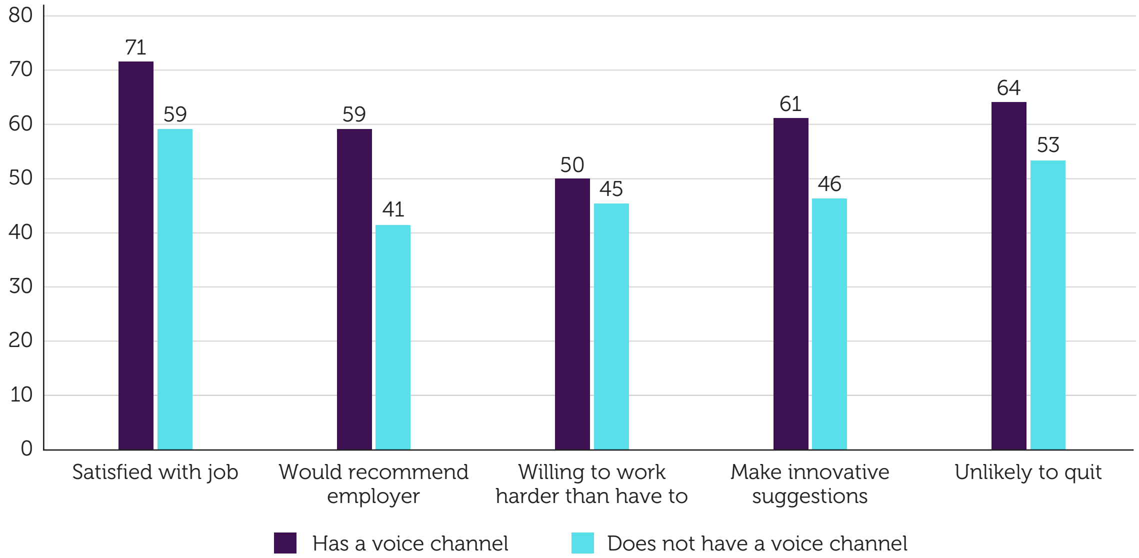
Employee voice availability and quality

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 discretionary effort are not as stark as across the other four business-relevant outcomes, although they remain statistically significant.

We find no significant correlations between trade union membership and four of the five outcomes, with the exception of a weak relationship to discretionary effort.

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

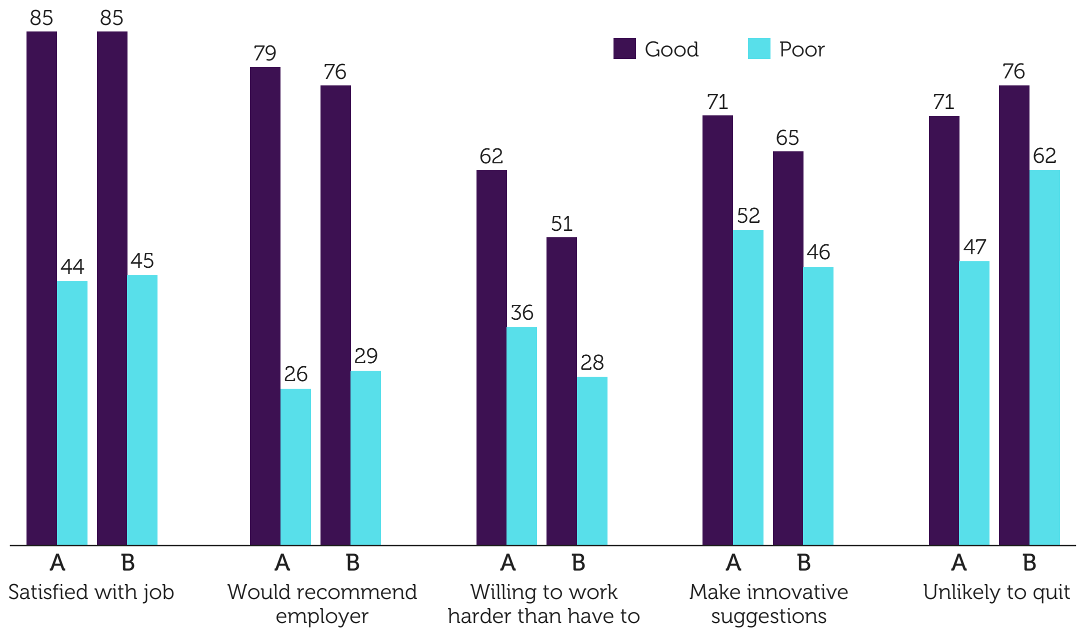


Base: all who are not self-employed (n=4,588)

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

The differences in outcomes between good and poor managers are bigger than the differences between good and poor representatives, emphasising the importance of good line management even further.

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



A: How would you rate your manager at seeking the views of employees? (good/poor)

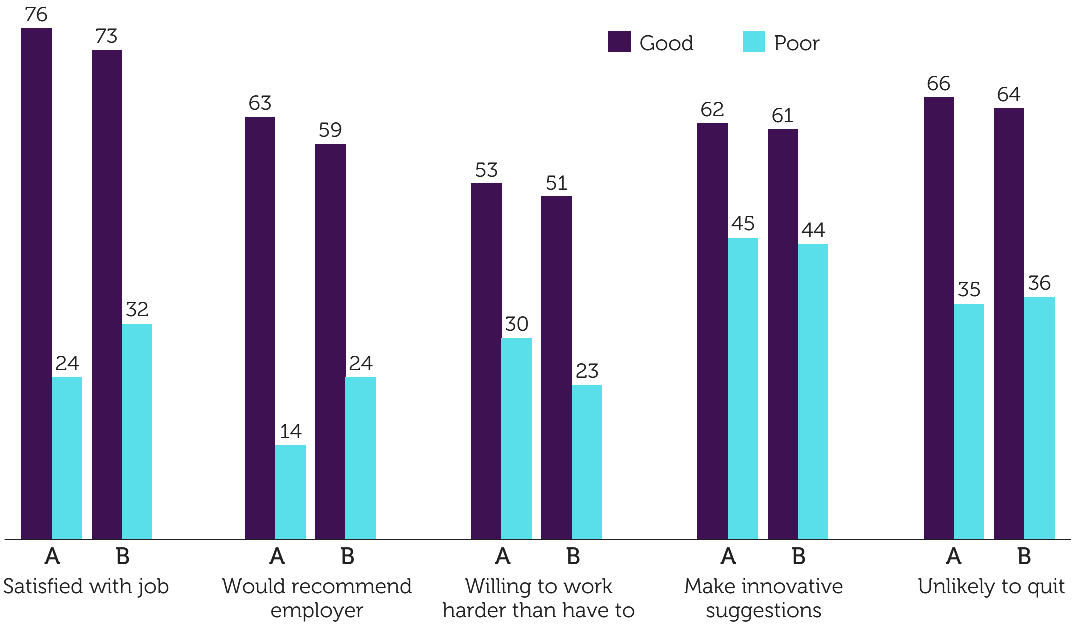
B: How would you rate your representative at seeking the views of employees? (good/poor)

Base: all who are not self-employed (n=4,588) (for manager voice), and all with an employee representative (n=938)

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 organisations function, with bad relationships negatively affecting performance. We find 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 their colleagues.

Figure 6: Relationships with managers and colleagues, and associated business outcomes (%)

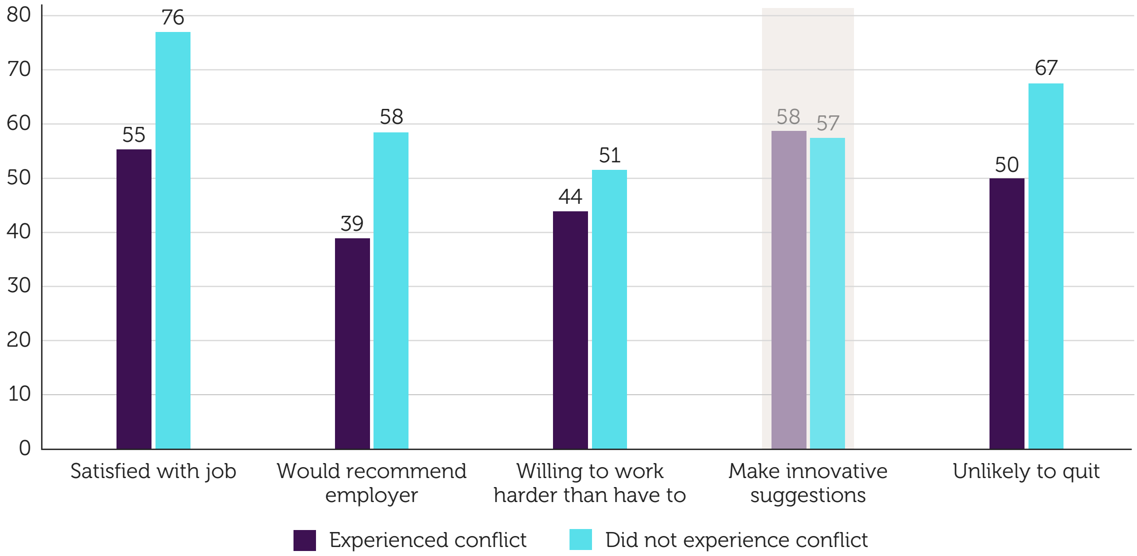


A: How would you rate your relationship with your manager? (good/poor)
B: How would you rate your relationship with your colleagues? (good/poor)

Base: all working adults (n=5,074) (for colleagues) and all with a line manager (n=4,392)

Furthermore, experiencing conflict at work can have an impact on working lives. There are strong correlations between conflict experience and most of our core outcomes, with the exception of contextual performance (shaded in Figure 7).

Figure 7: Experience of conflict and business outcomes (%)

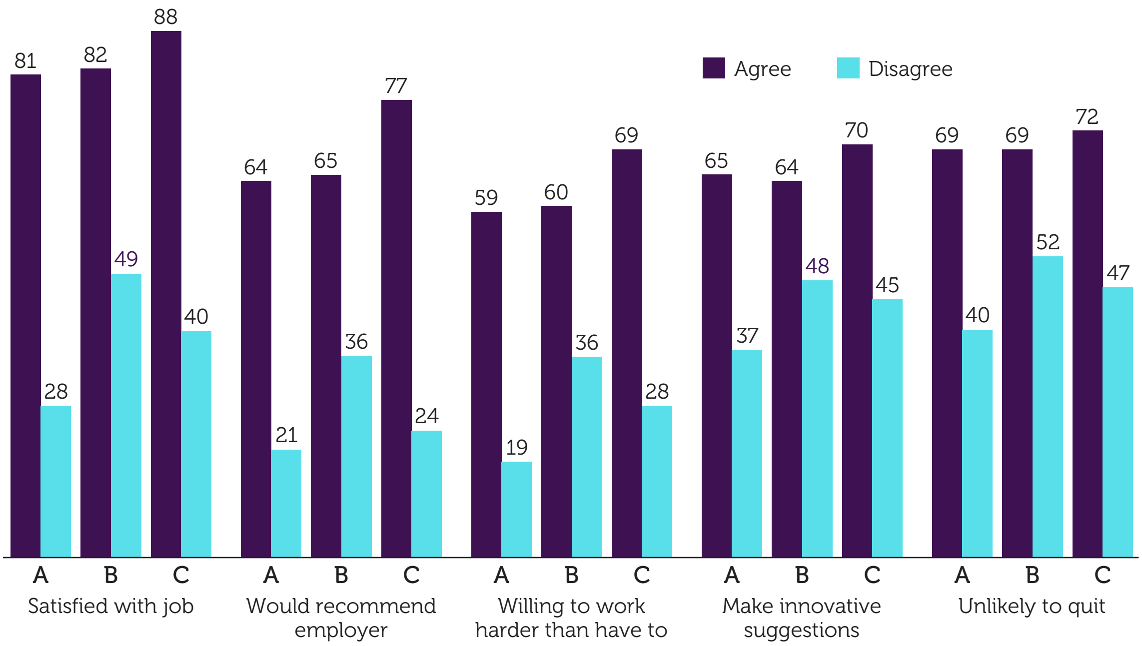


Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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 8: Meaningfulness of work and business outcomes (%)

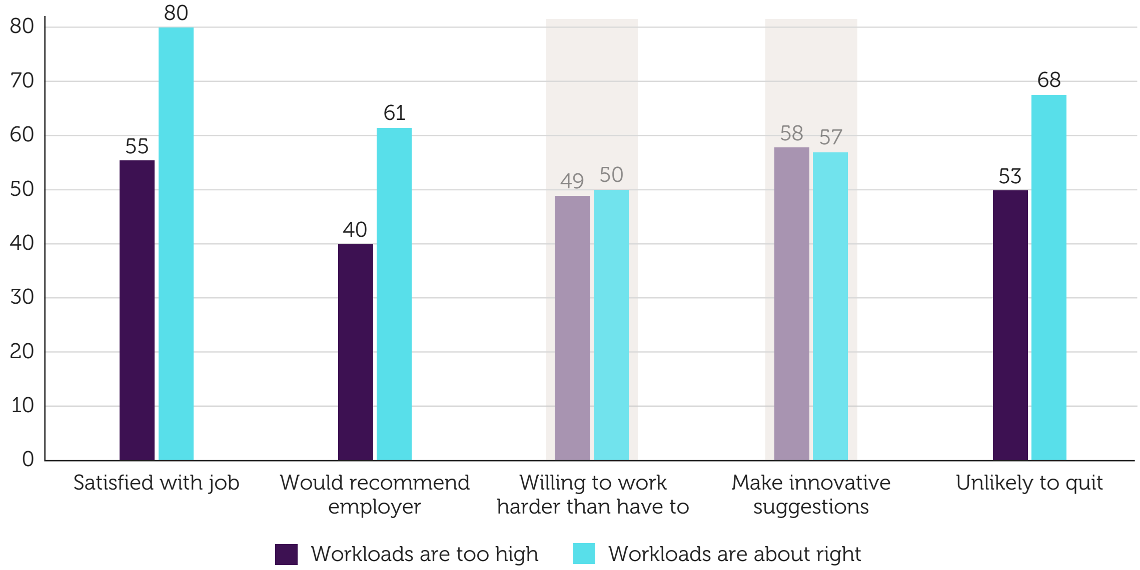


A: I have the feeling of doing useful work for my organisation (agree/disagree)
B: I have the feeling of doing useful work for society (agree/disagree)
C: I feel inspired by my organisation's core purpose (agree/disagree)

Base: all working adults (n=5,074) (for society question), and all who are not freelancers (n=4,882)

The impact of high workloads on job quality is highlighted throughout the report. Mapping workloads (Figure 9) against our five outcomes, we find negative impacts on three out of five outcomes.

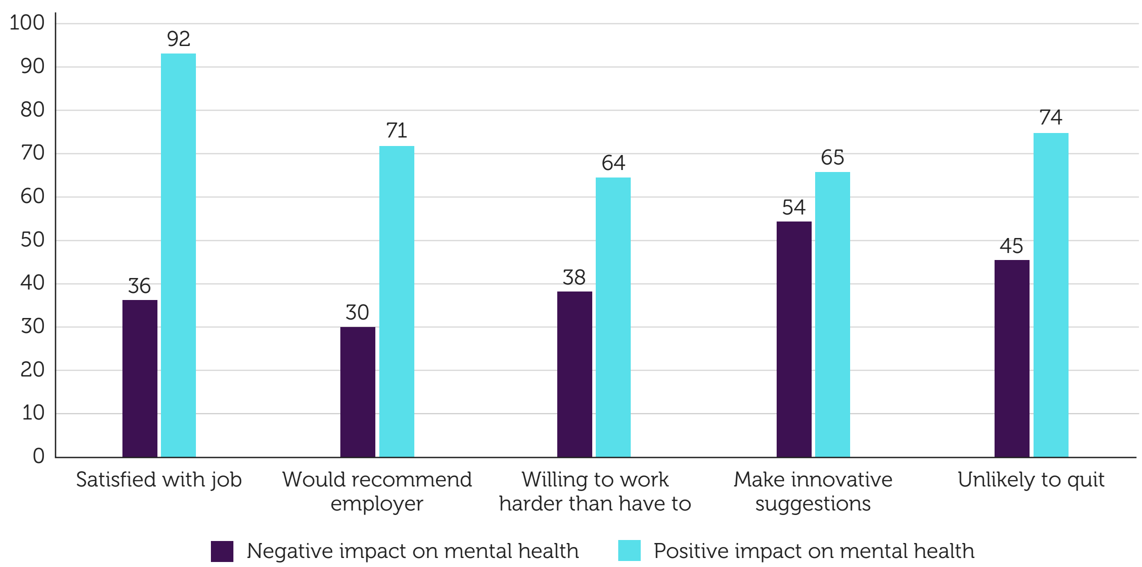
Figure 9: High workloads and business outcomes (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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 10) are some of the strongest out of the factors analysed here.

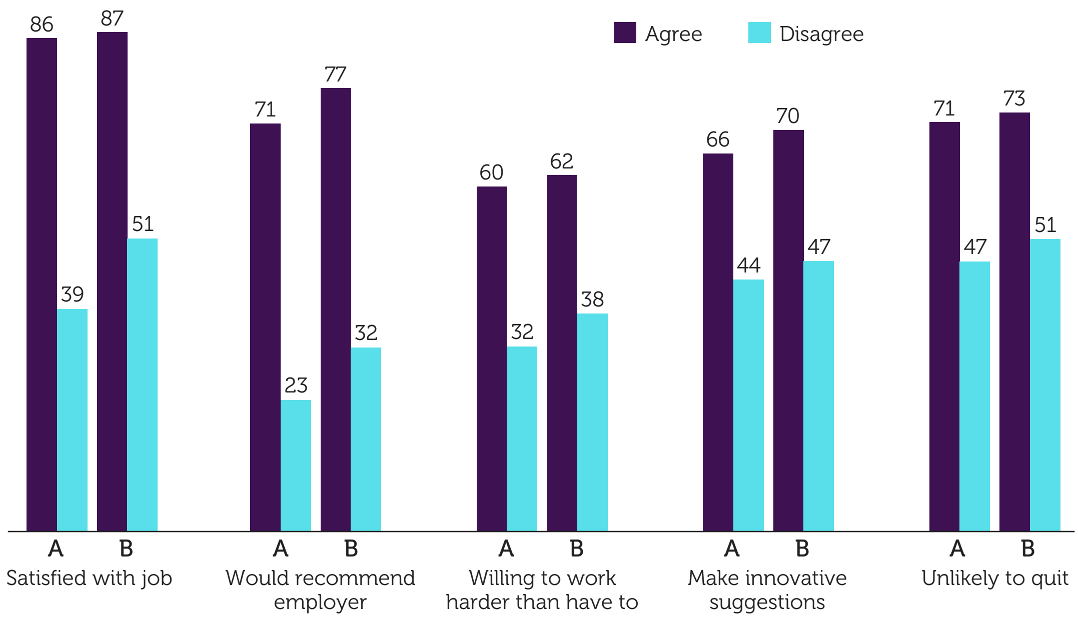
Figure 10: Impact of work on mental health and business outcomes (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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 11 shows their association with our five business outcomes.

Figure 11: Skills development and career advancement 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=5,074)

2 Pay and benefits

Objective pay (how much someone *actually* earns) and subjective pay (whether they feel their pay is appropriate), in addition to a broad range of employee benefits, are key elements of job quality that directly impact on individuals' and their families' quality of life, as well as job and life satisfaction.

Life, job and pay satisfaction

We generally find high levels of both life and job satisfaction – 65% and 70% respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, higher personal income is associated with both higher life and job satisfaction (Figure 12).

A slightly smaller proportion (50%) of UK employees were satisfied with their pay, rising to 72% 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.

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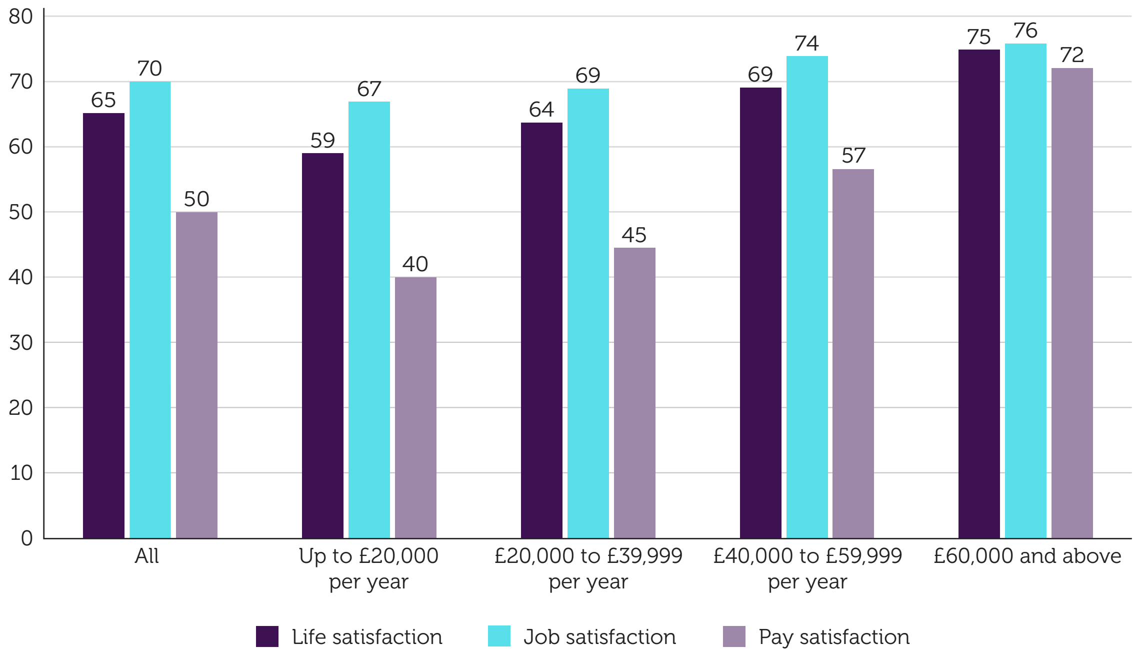
It is worth noting, however, that employees on higher incomes often report poorer negative job quality dimensions in relation to workloads or stress levels – an example of the trade-offs people make between job quality aspects.

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

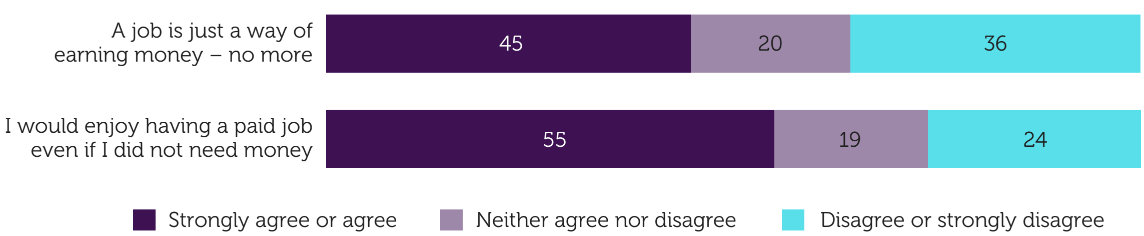


Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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 13. 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.

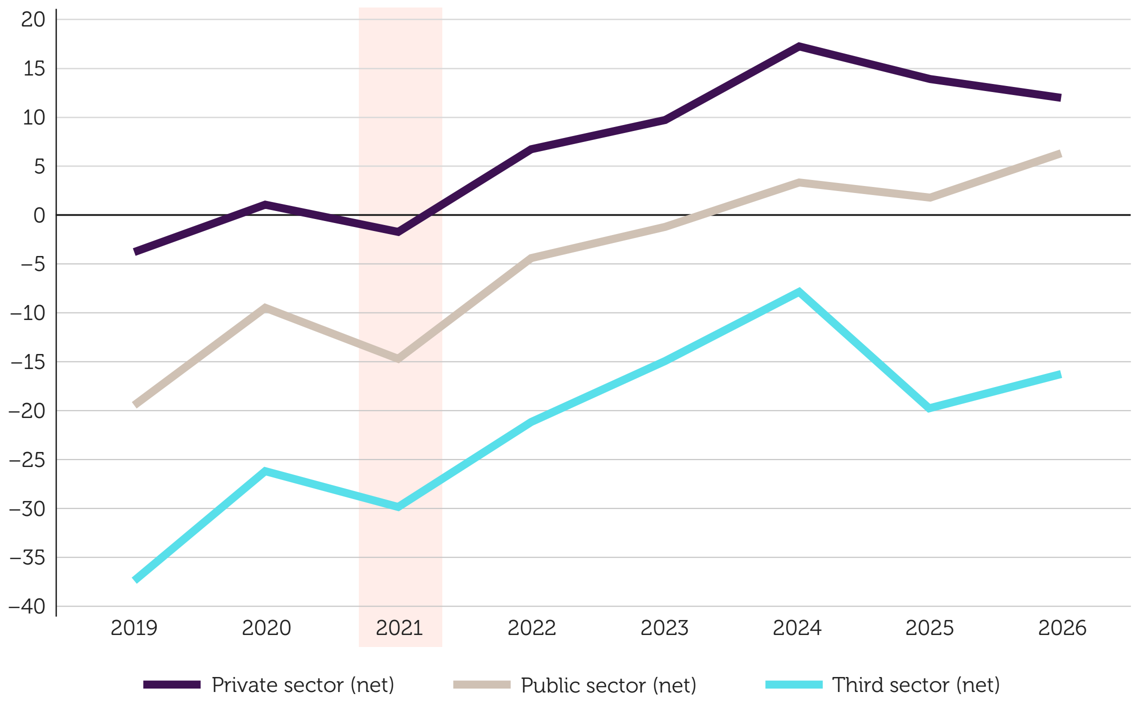
Figure 13: Measures of work centrality (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

Work centrality is one of the few measures in our survey that has seen significant change across the series, as highlighted in Figure 14. The worsening trend pre-dates 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.

Figure 14: Work centrality over time (net % agreeing – % disagreeing that a job is just a way of earning money, no more) (%)



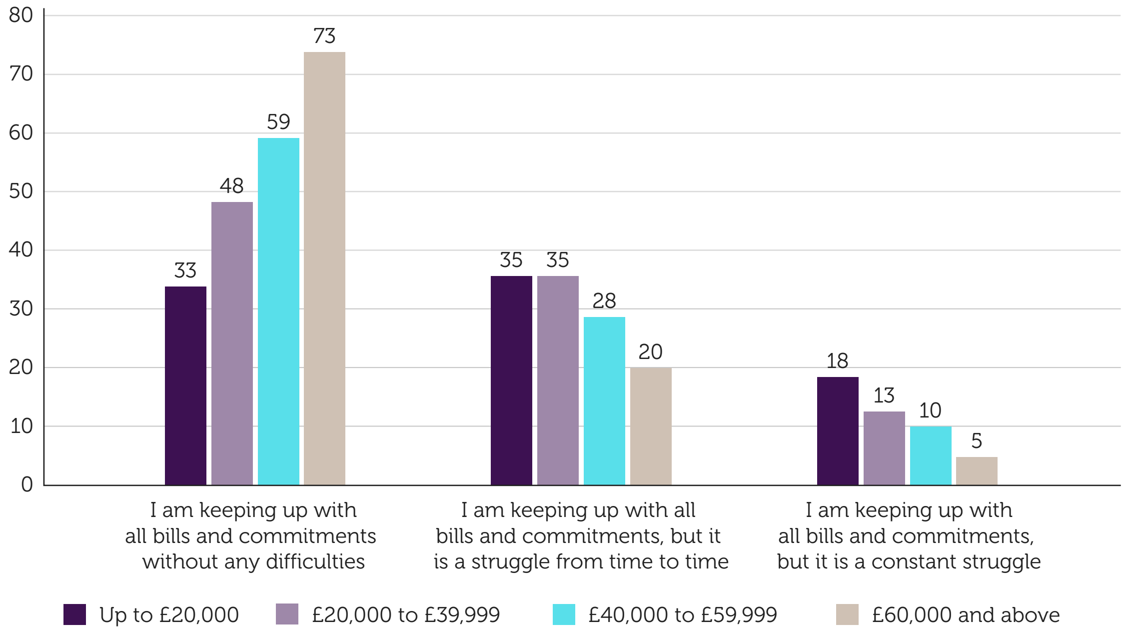
Base: all working adults (n=5,074 for 2026)

Keeping up with bills

We find that money worries have a real impact on employees' ability to do their job. Nearly a third (32%) said that money worries have had a negative impact, with the most common forms being lost sleep (19%), health problems (15%) and finding it hard to concentrate or make decisions at work (12%).

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 with the period of high inflation in 2022/23, but we still find only 51% of employees can keep up with all bills and commitments without any difficulties. This drops to only a third of those on the lowest incomes (Figure 15), with 18% of the lowest-paid employees saying that keeping up with bills is a constant struggle.

Figure 15: Keeping up with bills, by personal income (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

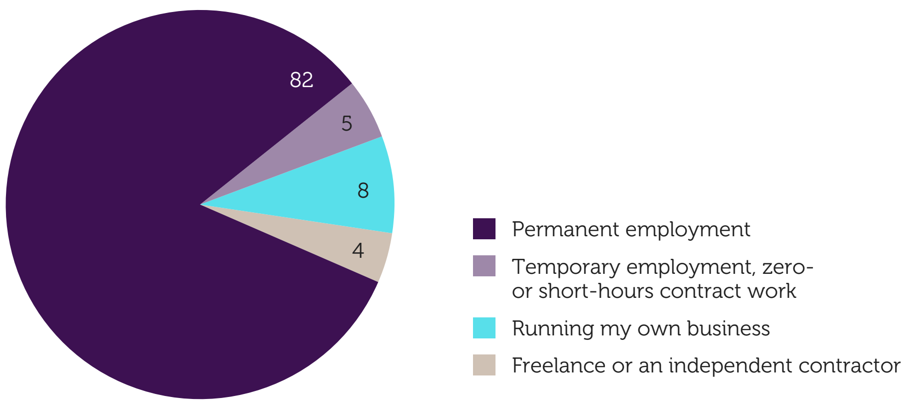
3 Contracts

The second good work dimension relates to contracts. This covers the type of employment contract, the suitability of contracts, job security and underemployment – where employees work fewer hours than they would want.

Types of contract

Contractual working arrangements and the related issues of job and hours insecurity, as well as underemployment, are aspects of job quality that have risen within the public policy agenda in recent years. In line with official figures, the majority of respondents are on permanent contracts (either part-time or full-time), with smaller shares of freelancers, self-employed or non-standard contracts.

Figure 16: Types of contract (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

Sample sizes limit the level of analysis we can conduct around non-standard contracts, but we are planning to supplement our previous work around zero-hours contracts with new analysis based on merged data in the coming months. Looking across the series, however, we can see that the proportions in Figure 16 have not significantly changed – there has not been an increase in non-standard contracts. This stability reflects official statistics from the Office for National Statistics, which show that the proportion of people in non-permanent employment has remained stable at about 20% of the workforce for the last two decades.

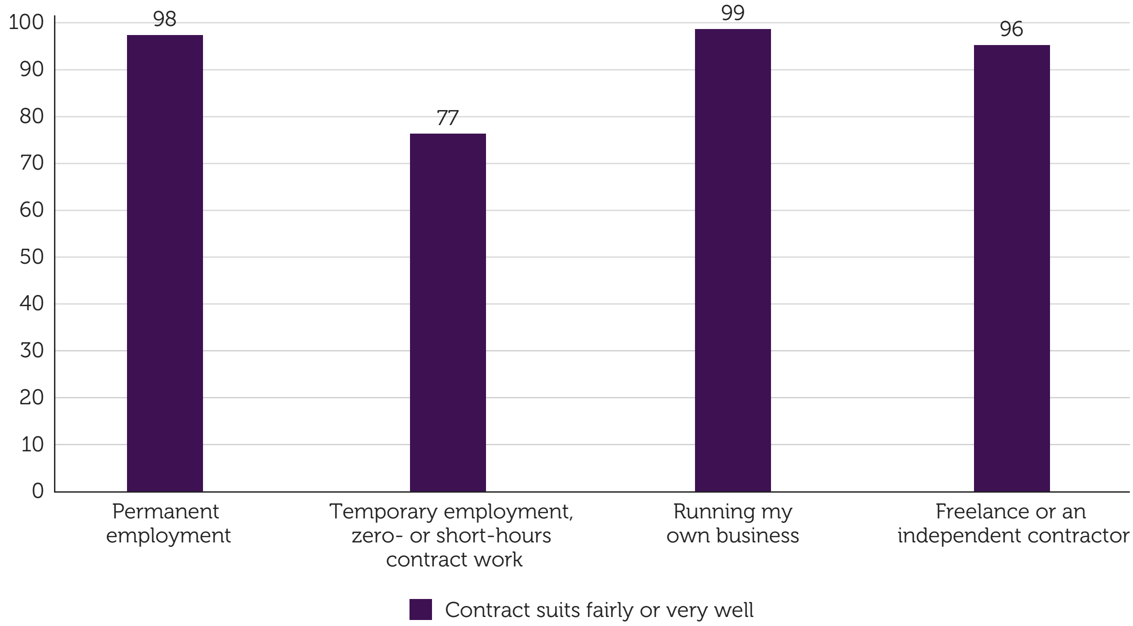
We also see demographic differences in the data. Young people are much more likely to be on atypical contracts, especially temporary, zero- or short-hours contracts, giving weight to the concerns over the impact of parts of the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA 2025) on youth unemployment. We find older workers and disabled workers are more likely to be on zero-hours contracts, but are also much more likely to be freelancers or to run their own business.

Suitability of contract

Much of the debate over atypical contracts in recent years has focused on their unsuitability for those employed under these arrangements. All our survey respondents are asked whether or not their contract suits them. A vast majority say their contracts suit them fairly or very well, with a breakdown by contract type shown in Figure 17.

Nearly eight in 10 (77%) of those on zero-hours contracts, short-hours contracts or in temporary employment say that they suit them well. While this is lower than for permanent employees, freelancers or those running their own business, it is still a considerable majority.

Figure 17: Suitability of contract, by contract type (%)



Base: all in permanent employment (n=4,328), all in temporary employment and on zero- or short-hours contracts (n=193), all running their own business (n=361) and all freelancers or independent contractors (n=164)

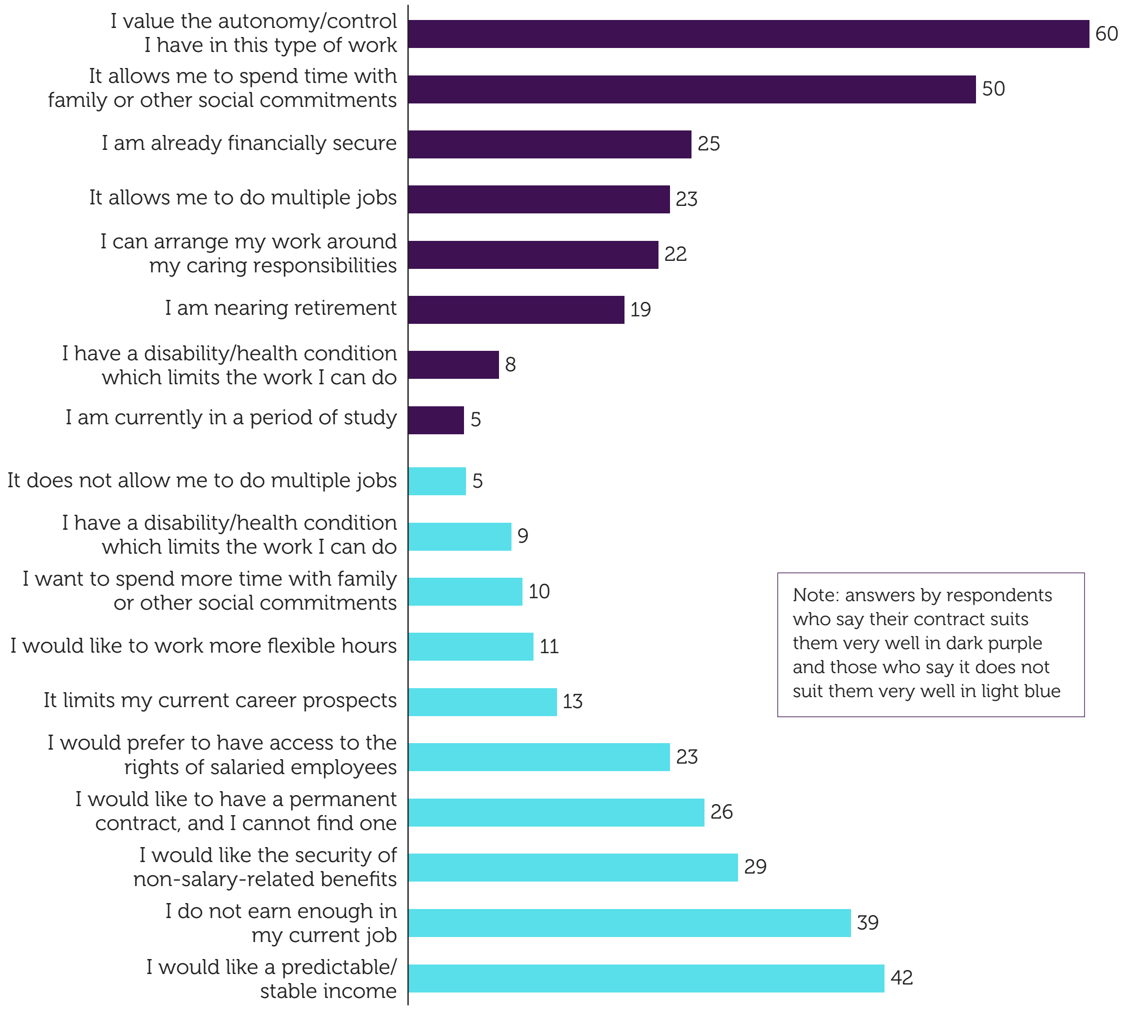
By combining temporary, zero-hours, short-hours and freelance arrangements, we get a cohort of employees on atypical contracts. Figure 18 provides a breakdown of the primary reasons for why such contracts suit employees very well and why they do not.

The findings support the existing narrative around the circumstances under which non-standard contracts can suit some employees, while having drawbacks for others.

Flexibility and autonomy (the ability to choose when and how to work) are key for those who say these contracts suit them well. This allows them to flex work around family or other commitments. It also suits some of those nearing retirement or those who are already financially secure, by providing extra activity and income.

On the other hand, the lack of a predictable or stable income, as well as the amount earned, are the main drawbacks of non-standard contracts, according to those who said these contracts didn't suit them very well. Stronger employment rights and lack of non-salary benefits are also highlighted. For just over a quarter (26%) of this group, the key issue is the lack of a permanent contract – a primary source of insecurity.

Figure 18: Reasons for and against the suitability of atypical contracts (%)



Base: all working adults on temporary, zero- or short-hours contracts and freelancers (n=357)

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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 60% of employees saying that they were unlikely to lose their job (13% likely) and 63% unlikely to quit their job (18% likely), with the rest responding 'neither' or 'don't know'.

Both measures have stayed relatively stable across the nine-year 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 (61% of all employees), the top reasons for changing job were better pay and benefits (29%), better work–life balance (23%) and unhappiness with leadership or senior management (19%).

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 6% would like to work more than 10 hours per week more than they currently do. Conversely, 59% would like to work less than they do currently.

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 Work–life balance

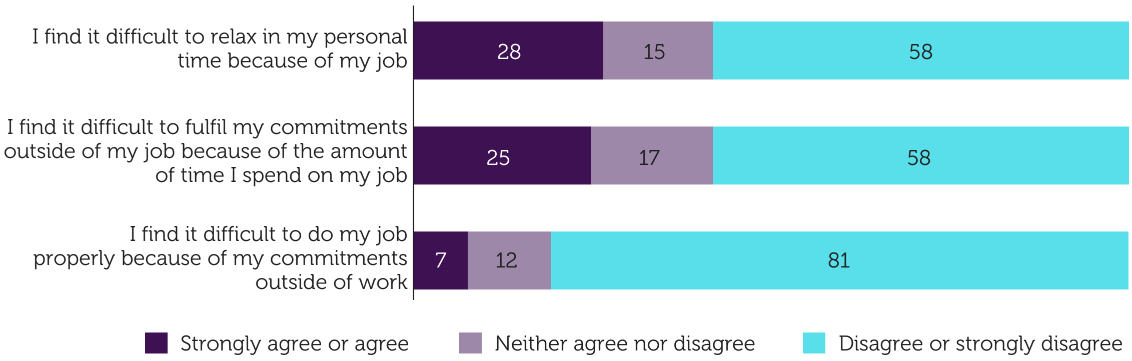
The balance between our personal and working lives was thrust into the spotlight during the pandemic and – with continually elevated rates of home and hybrid working – continues to attract the attention of employees, employers and policy-makers.

On the one hand, work commitments can spill over into our personal lives, and on the other, our personal commitments can impede on the ability to do our jobs properly. Both can have an impact on performance and wellbeing.

Balancing work and personal life

Figure 19 summarises our findings across three key work–life balance questions in the survey. These answers have remained largely unchanged across the whole *Good Work Index* 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 19: Balancing work and personal life (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

Indeed, those reporting excessive workloads fare less well across work–life balance questions – 51% of those with high workloads say they can't relax in their personal time and 47% can't fulfil their commitments outside of their job, compared with only 16% 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.

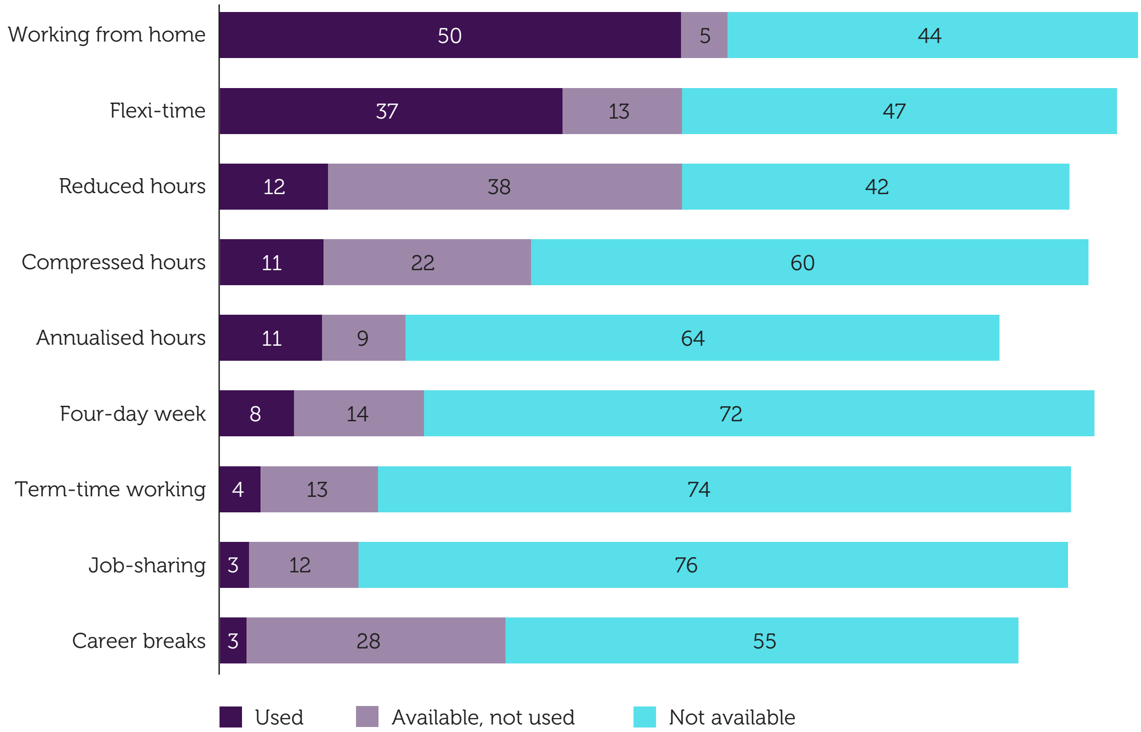
Flexible working

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 an array of flexible options. Considerable gaps in availability and use remain, as summarised in Figure 20.

Overall, we find that 72% of employees are using some sort of flexible working arrangement. Before the pandemic in the 2020 *Good Work Index*, 56% of employees reported the same, although we asked about a smaller number of arrangements (the comparable 2026 figure is 67%). 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 50% 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 general, all flexible working arrangements we asked about are significantly more available in the public sector.

Figure 20: Availability and use of flexible working arrangements (%)



Base: all working adults except those running their own business (n=4,588)

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 68% of all employees have good informal flexibility in their jobs, saying they would find taking some time off for personal or family matters easy.

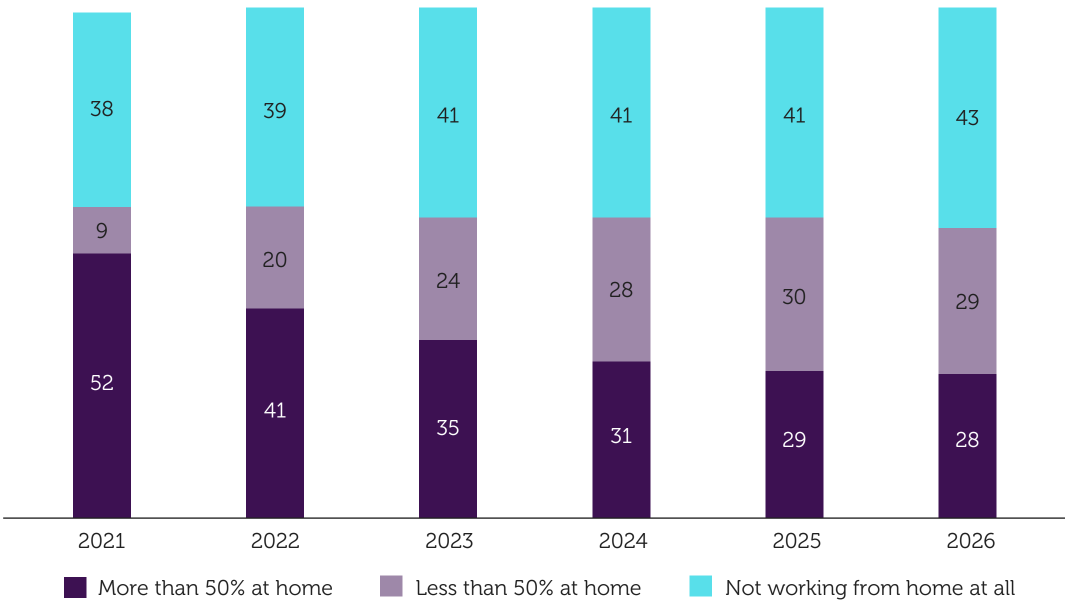
Informal flexibility has also improved compared with the pre-pandemic *Good Work Index* surveys, where an average of 63% employees reported good informal flexibility. Informal flexibility is much better across smaller organisations, rising to 77% for those working in microbusinesses (2–9 employees).

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 (57%) work at least some of the time from home – 8% work fully from home, 20% work at home for more than half of their time and another 29% 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 the same post COVID, the share they spend working at home is declining, as illustrated in Figure 21. This corroborates reports of a steadily increasing number of companies mandating office days.

Figure 21: The share of home and hybrid working across the *Good Work Index* series (%)



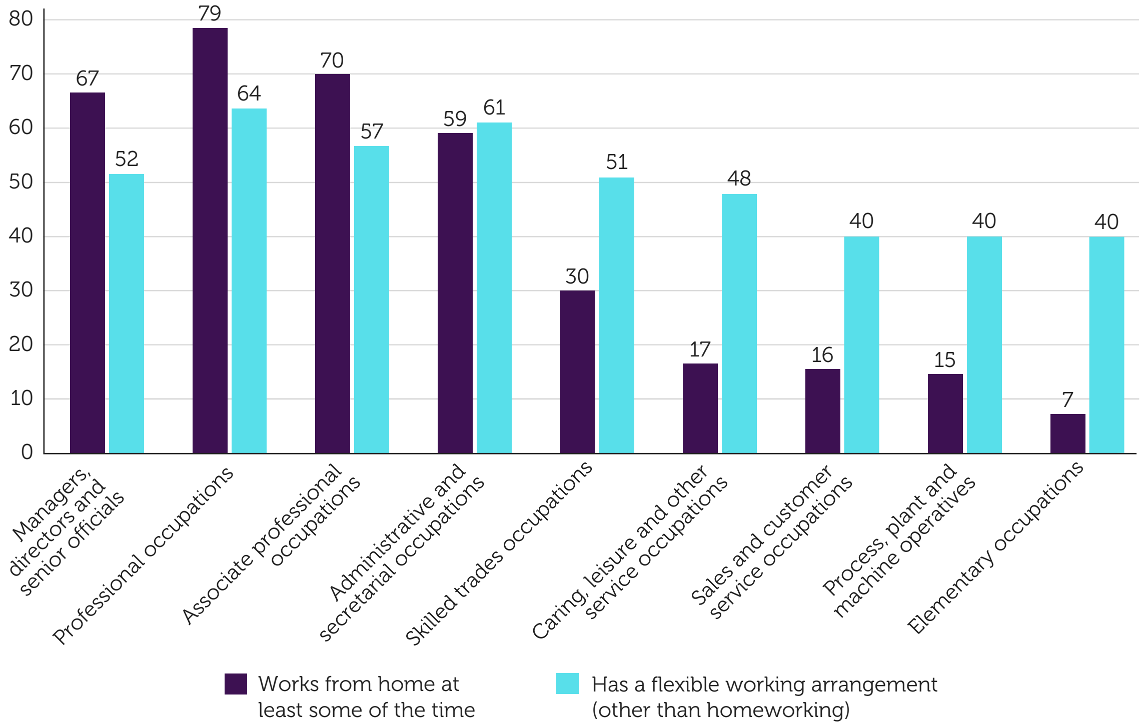
Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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

However, we find that 27% of all employees *can't* work from home at all and another 10% don't want to work from home at all. This means that for nearly 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, just like overall flexible working arrangements, differ considerably across occupational groups (Figure 22), with those in relatively lower-skilled groups reporting poorer availability of both.

Figure 22: Homeworking rates and flexible working across occupational groups (%)



Base: all excluding self-employed (n=4,588)

5 Job design and the nature of work

The intrinsic features of jobs are covered by the job design and the nature of work dimension. This includes a broad range of issues, from job autonomy and complexity, skills development and overqualification, to workloads and personal meaningfulness of work. In this year's survey, we have also added questions around generative AI use and its impact on work.

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 that their workloads were far too much, 23% too much, 62% about right and 7% too little.

Consistent with previous survey waves, we find public sector employees report higher workloads (37%) as well as those with middle management responsibilities (35%). Furthermore, disabled employees reported higher workloads than those without disabilities, with 35% saying their workloads are too high (versus 29%).

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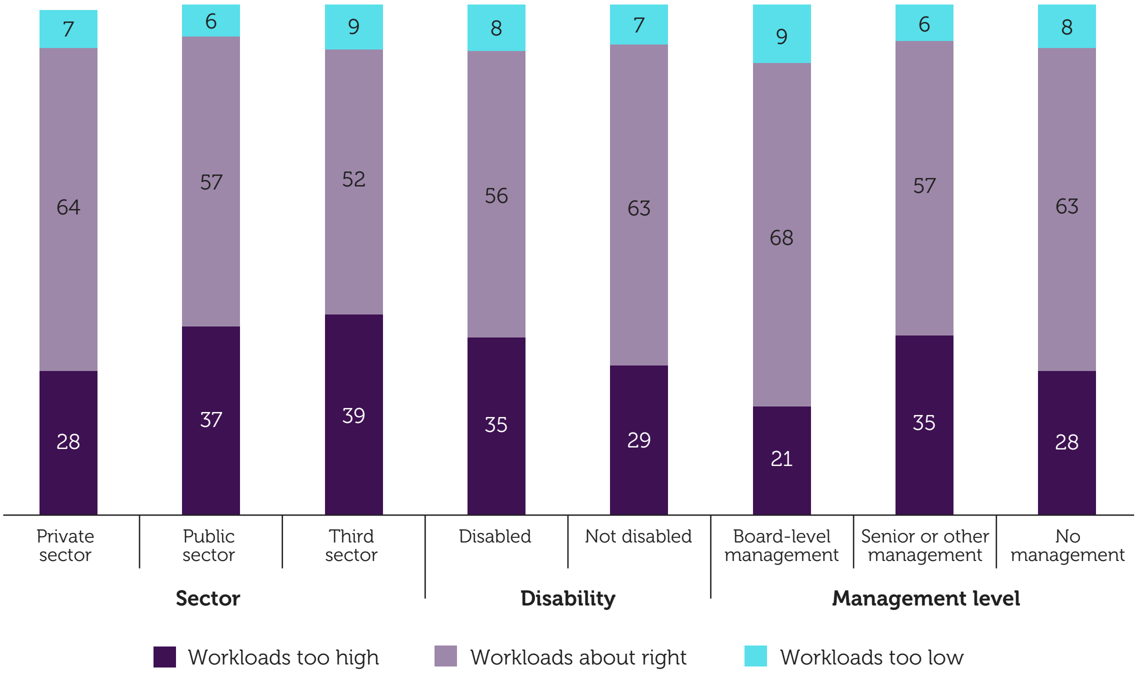
Figure 23: Workloads and work/demographic differences (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

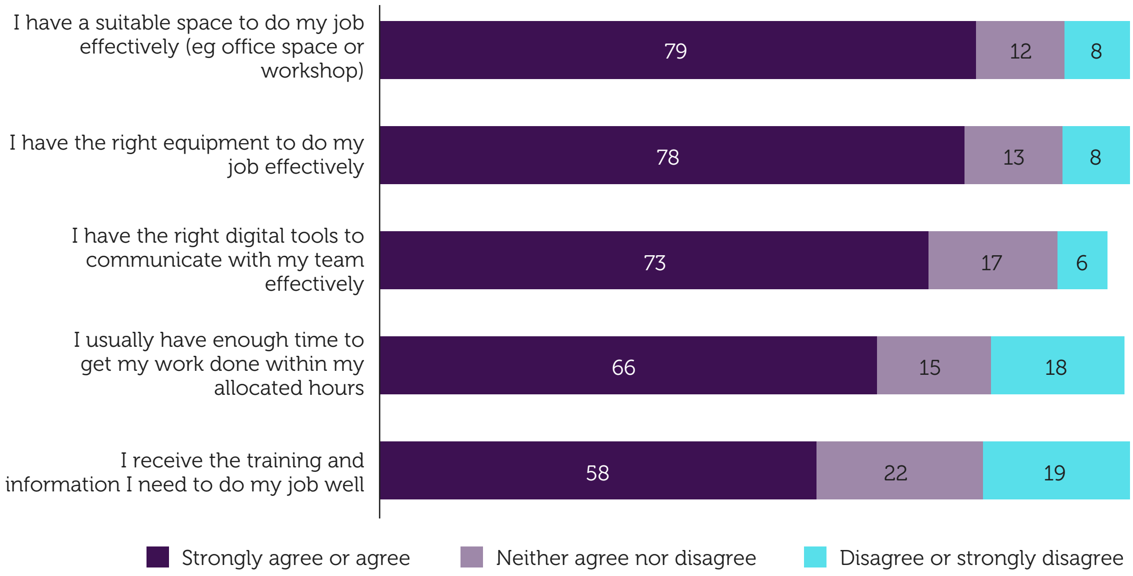
Apart from lower reported workloads by those on the lowest incomes – predominantly part-time or self-employed respondents – there aren't significant differences between respondents by income, showing that high workload is not confined to lower- or higher-paid occupations.

Those with high workloads are also more likely to report negative impacts of work on their mental health (47%) and physical health (38%).

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 24, employees generally reported good access to resources, though with the biggest gaps around training and time to do the job.

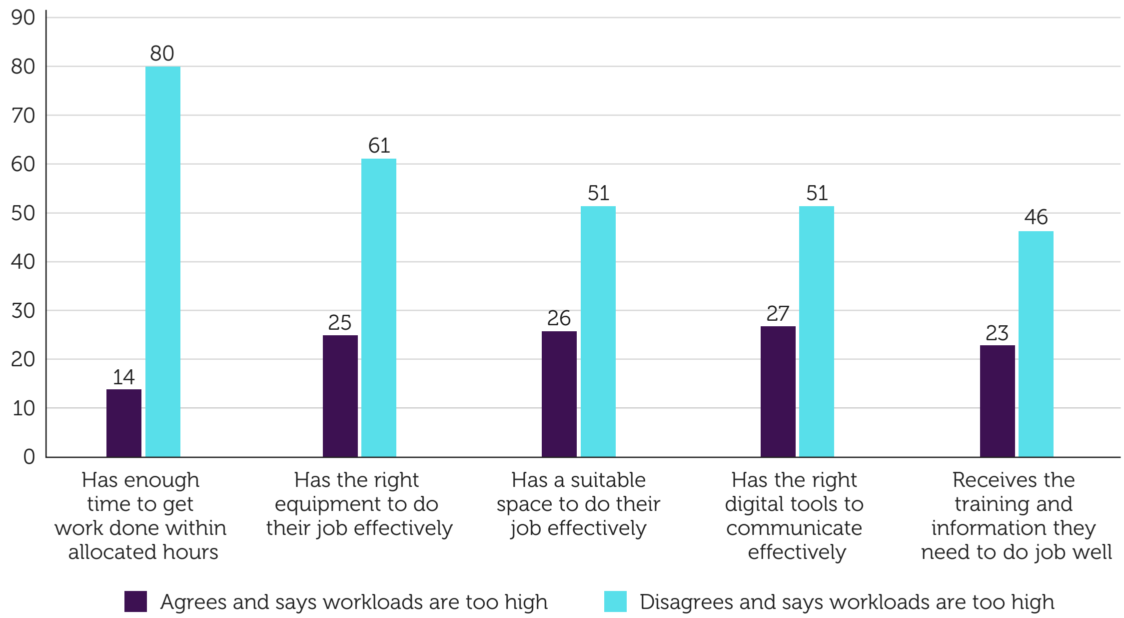
Figure 24: Adequacy of work resources (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

The importance of adequate resources for job design is reflected in their relationship with above-mentioned workloads. Figure 25 shows significant differences in high workloads between those who say they have adequate resources and those who do not.

Figure 25: High workloads and adequacy of work resources (%)



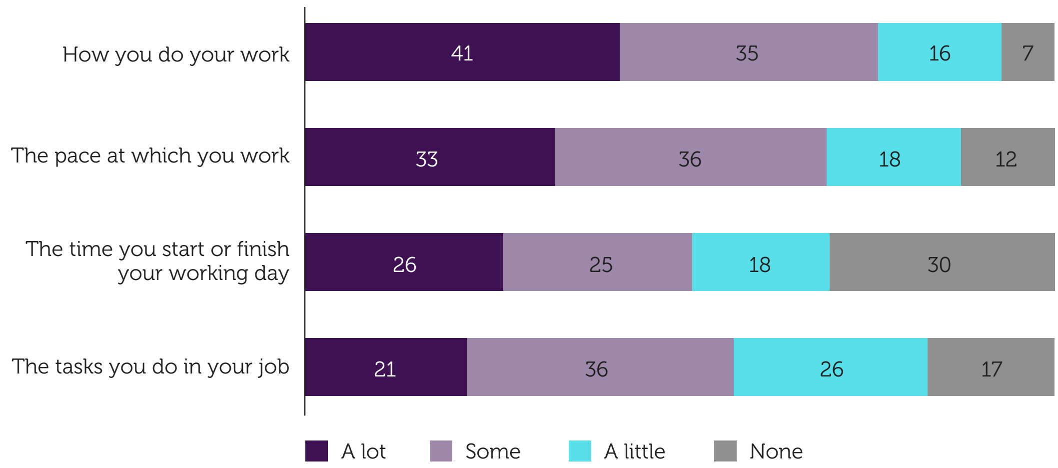
Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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 26 and Figure 27).

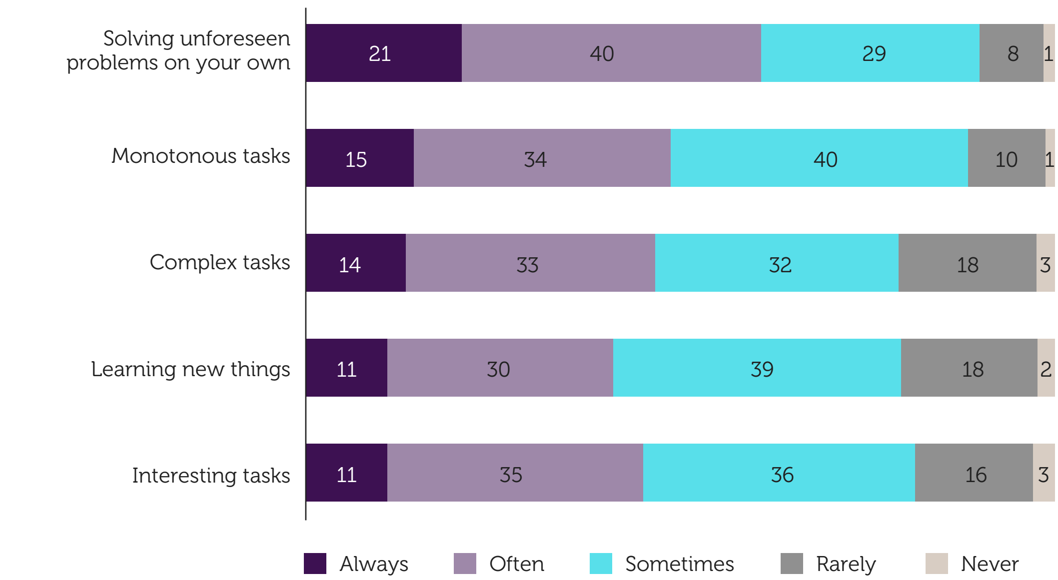
Both job autonomy and job complexity are closely linked to occupation and impact other dimensions of job quality. In general, higher-skilled occupational groups tend to report more job autonomy and more job complexity. This then translates into better findings for those working from home or hybrid, as 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 26: Job autonomy (%)



Base: all working adults except the self-employed (n=4,588)

Figure 27: Job complexity (%)

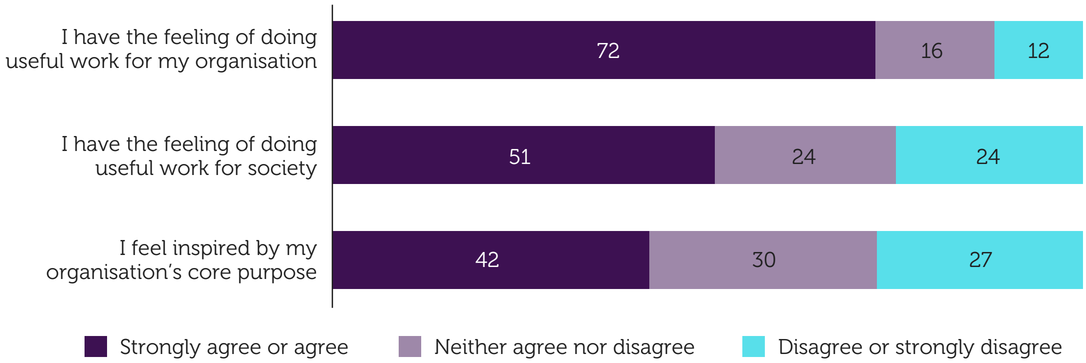


Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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 28.

Figure 28: Feelings of meaningfulness of work (%)



Base: all who are not freelancers (n=4,882) and all working adults (n=5,074) (for society question)

The meaningfulness of work is an area where employees who work in the public or voluntary sectors have done significantly better across our nine-year series. The differences are most pronounced in the question around societal impact, with 71% of public sector employees and 80% of voluntary sector employees feeling they are doing useful work for society, compared with only 45% 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 (55%) saying their skills match their current duties well. There has been little change across these measures in nine years.

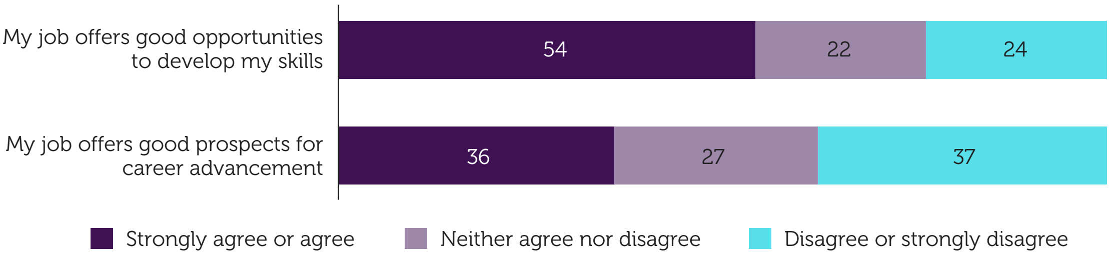
A third (33%) of those who are educated to degree level or above feel overqualified in their current job. This does not change by job tenure (with the exception of those with over 10 years of service), suggesting that those whose initial employment failed to match their expectations can struggle subsequently to find a role requiring their qualifications.

Breaking down the 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.

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 29.

Figure 29: Skills development and career advancement opportunities (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

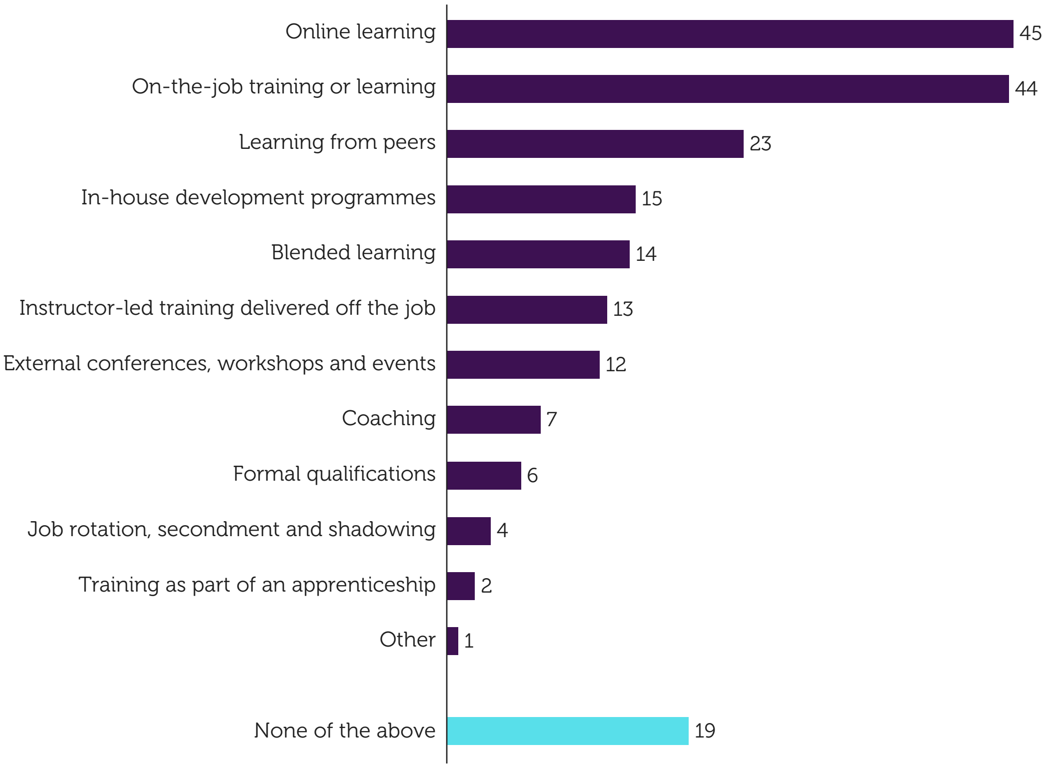
Across both measures, just like in past surveys, those on the highest incomes report higher levels of agreement. This is linked to differences by occupational group, providing further evidence of the gaps in training for those in some of the lower-skilled occupational groups.

On career advancement, we see older workers with lower levels of agreement – only 23% said their job offers good career advancement opportunities, which is partly a reflection of the stage of their working lives. We also find women report poorer opportunities across both questions, which will be linked to higher rates of part-time work.

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 learning and development and skills, aimed at both practitioners and policy-makers, but the *Good Work Index* 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 30.

Figure 30: Participation in training over the last 12 months (%)



Base: all who are not self-employed (n=4,588)

Nearly a fifth (19%) of all employees had not engaged in any form of training at all. We find clear differences by organisational size, with 27% of employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (2–49 employees) not having had any training, compared with 13% for those in organisations with 250+ employees.

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.

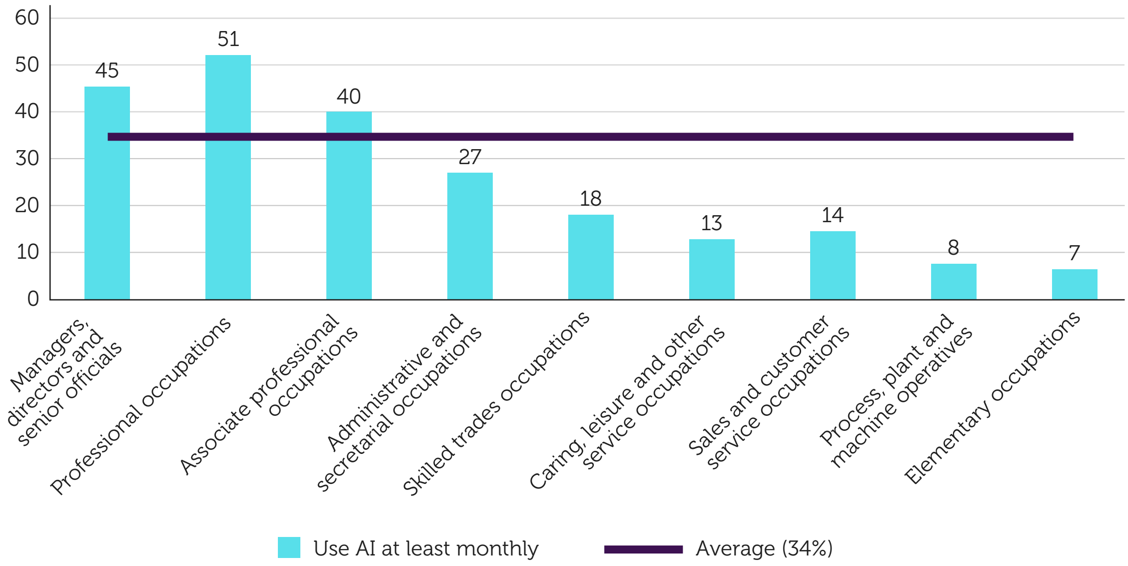
Generative AI

Unlike in past surveys, where we included AI as one of the options listed in Figure 30, 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 (52%) say they never use AI as part of their job, with 11% saying they use it a few times a year, 7% monthly, 16% weekly and 11% daily. Figure 31 shows considerable differences by occupational group.

On training, we find that 13% of all employees received some training in using AI to perform tasks in their current job, with 78% saying they have not.

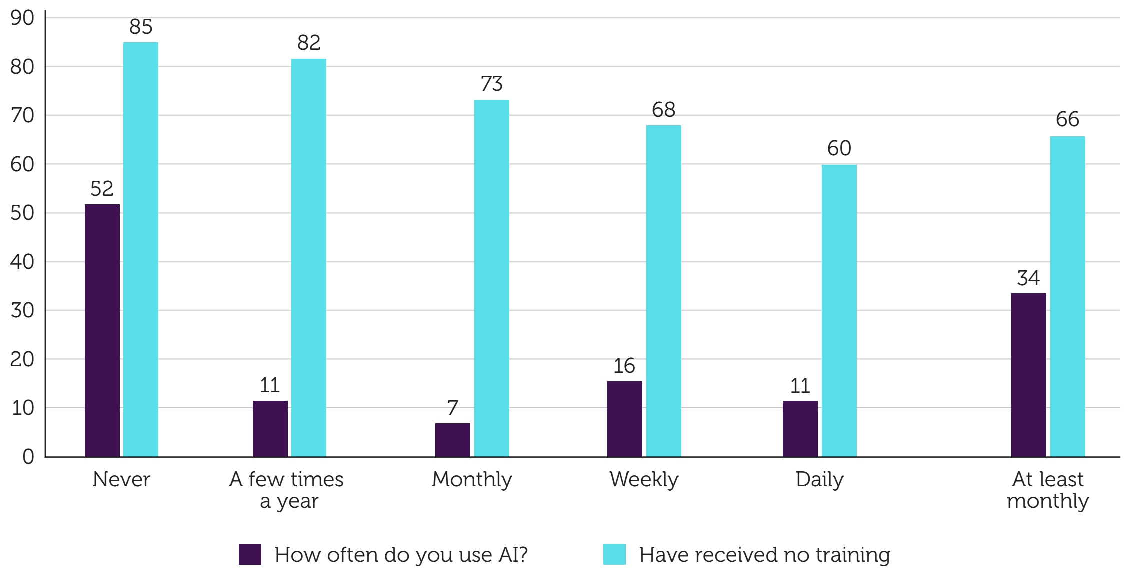
Figure 31: Differences in AI use, by occupational group (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

While training participation around AI improves the more regularly an employee uses it, presumably one driving the other, substantial gaps remain. Out of the 34% of employees who use AI at least monthly, 66% say they did not receive any training around AI at all. Out of the 11% who use AI daily, 60% did not receive any training.

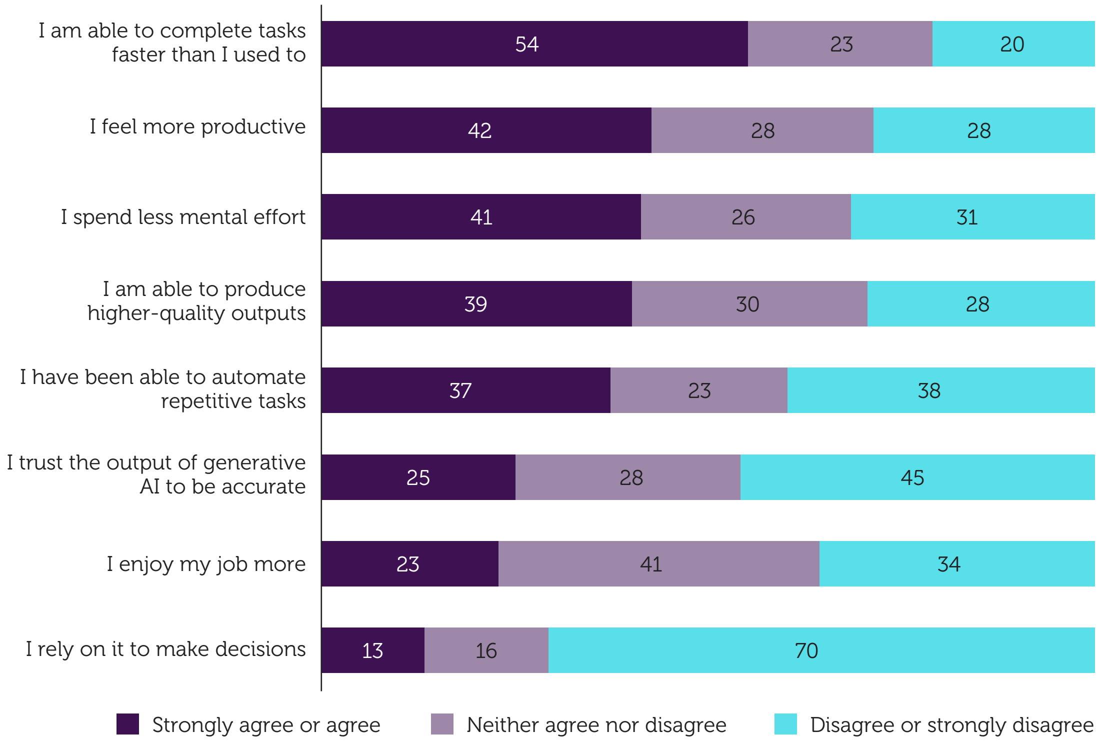
Figure 32: Gaps in training around AI use remain even for regular users (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

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 33, with results showing, for example, that 45% of users do not trust the output of generative AI to be accurate.

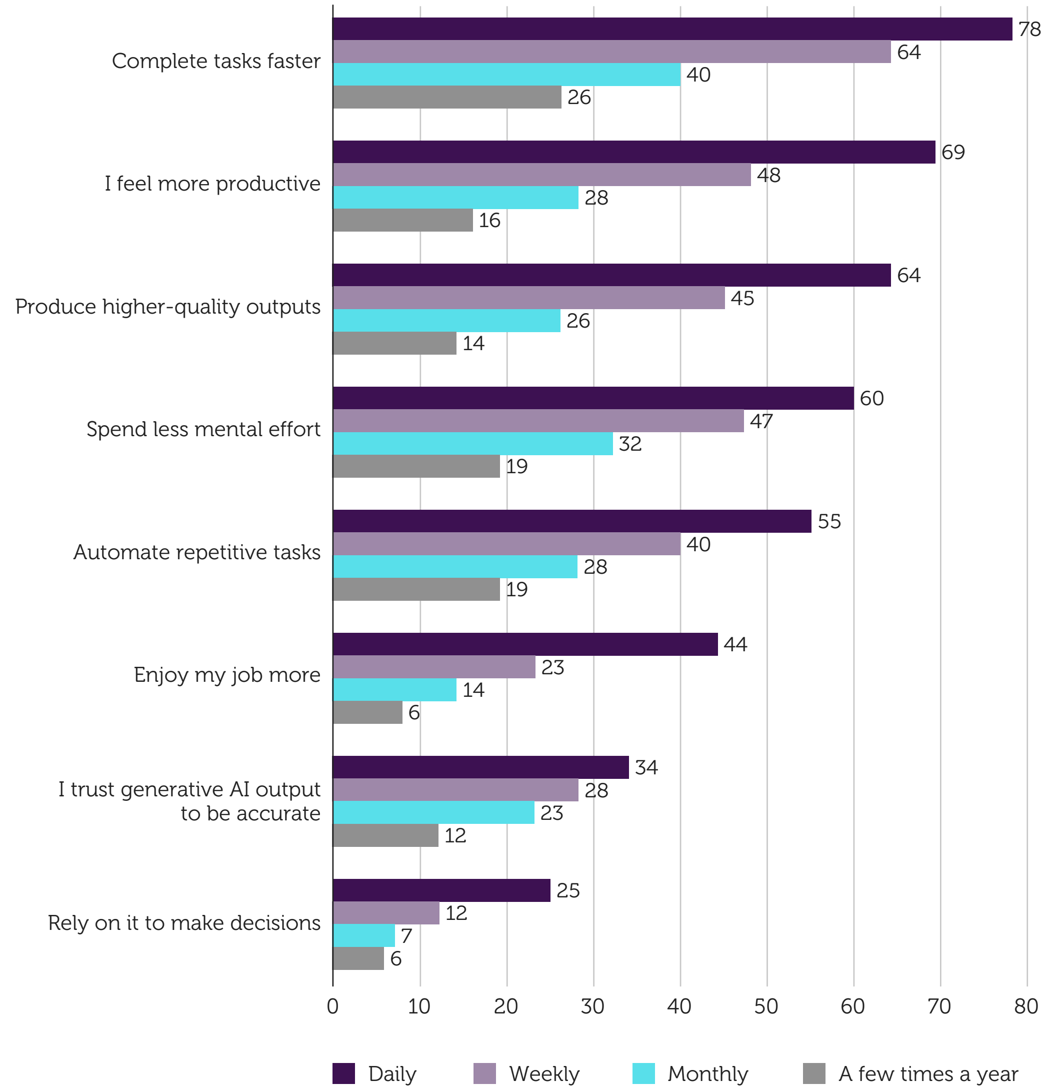
Figure 33: View on the impact of the use of generative AI (%)



Base: all who use AI tools as part of their work (n=2,351)

We find that the more regularly someone uses AI, the more positively they respond to all impact questions. For example, 78% of daily users say they are able to complete tasks faster, 69% feel more productive and 44% 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.

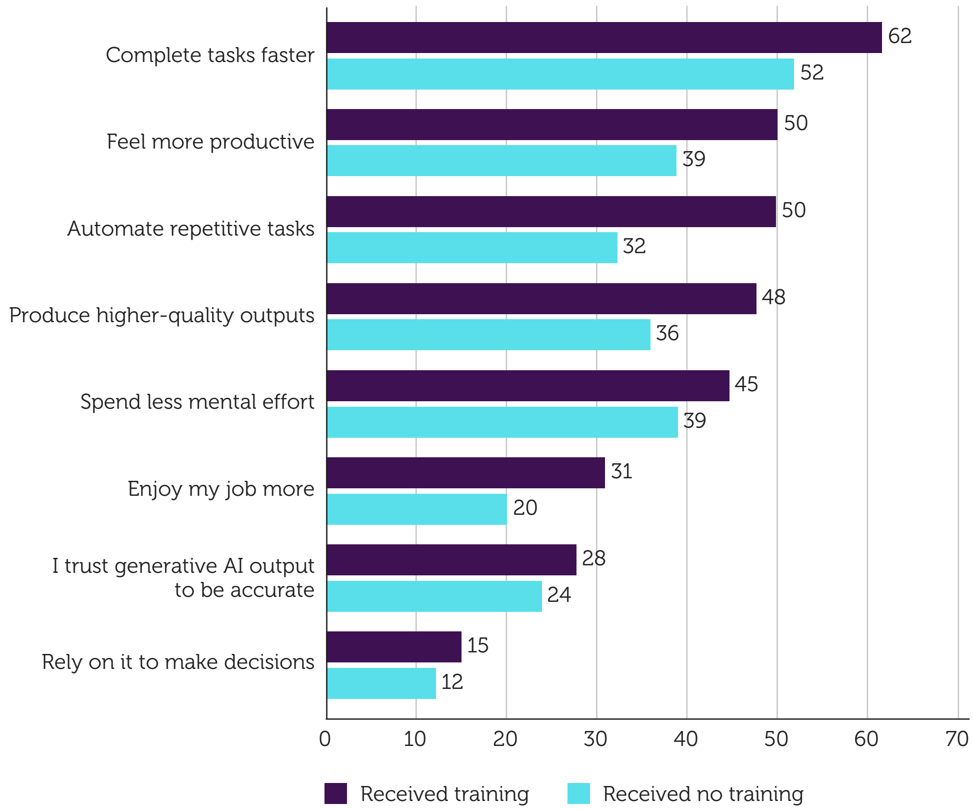
Figure 34: View on the impact of the use of generative AI, by how often AI is used (%)



Base: all who use AI tools as part of their work (n=2,351)

Furthermore, those who report having had training in generative AI use are also more likely to agree with the majority of these statements than those who had no training at all. The only two exceptions are 'I rely on it to make decisions' and 'I trust the output', where training received did not make a difference to employee views. This suggests that there is a link between training participation and employees' perceptions of the usefulness of AI to their jobs.

Figure 35: View on the impact of the use of generative AI, by whether they have received AI training (%)



Base: all who use AI tools as part of their work (n=2,351)

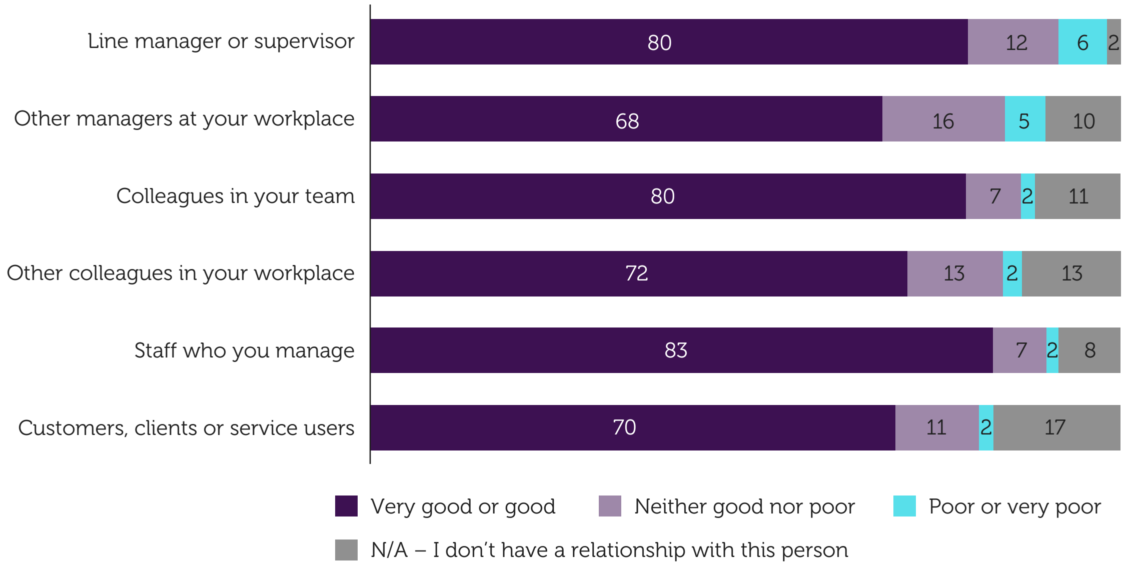
6 Relationships at work

Relationships in both our working and personal lives are a key part of our overall quality of life. Past research suggests that good relationships at work improve the way organisations function, with bad relationships negatively affecting performance. They also impact individuals' health and wellbeing, their motivation and commitment, as well as their retention.

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 36). There has been a slight improvement across both manager and colleague relationships across the series.

Figure 36: Quality of relationships at work (%)



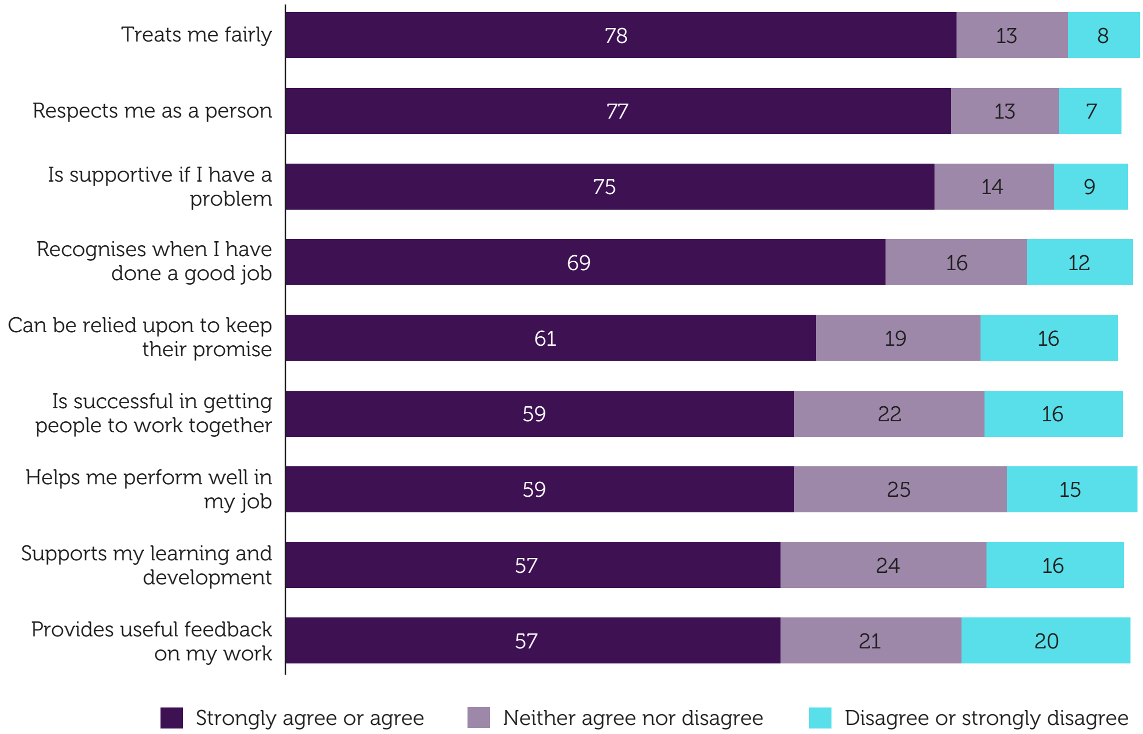
Base: all working adults (n=5,074) (for colleagues and customers), all with a line manager (n=4,392) (for line managers) and all who manage staff (for staff managed) (n=1,979)

We see no differences in employee/line manager relationships between sectors or organisational sizes, 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 a growing body of evidence that shows the importance of line management, not only to staff wellbeing, but also to their productivity. We have included additional questions in this year's *Good Work Index* and will be publishing additional analysis in this area later this year.

Figure 37: Relationships with managers (%)



Base: all with a line manager (n=4,392)

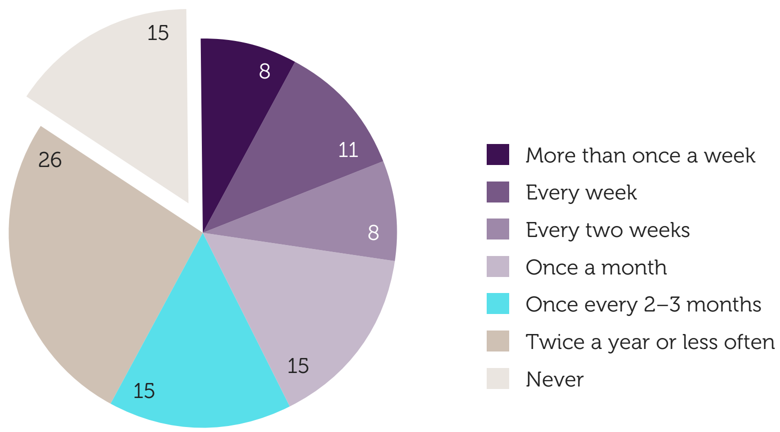
Overall results are largely positive, albeit with significant room for improvement in some areas. For example, fewer than six in 10 employees agree that their manager provides useful feedback, helps them perform well in their job or supports their learning and development. There are also differences in responses across different demographic groups. 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 38) 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. Seventy-one per cent found it adequate, 17% wanted to meet more frequently and 6% less frequently.

Interestingly, out of the 15% who never meet their manager at all to discuss performance, nearly half (49%) found this adequate, suggesting a serious disconnection from work structures.

Figure 38: Frequency of line manager meetings specifically to discuss performance (%)



Base: all with a line manager (n=4,392)

Conflict at work

Workplace conflict was one of the focus areas in the 2024 *Good Work Index*. 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 more than 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%)
- being shouted at or in a very heated argument (9%)
- verbal abuse or insult (8%)
- discriminatory behaviour because of a protected characteristic (5%).

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

We again find that incidence of conflict is considerably higher for disabled employees (34% experienced conflict, compared with 23% of non-disabled employees) and for women (28% vs 23%).

Being undermined or humiliated was reported by 15% of women (versus 10% of men) and 16% of disabled employees (versus 11% non-disabled). While only 5% experienced discriminatory behaviour, this too is higher for disabled employees (10%). Women were 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 (51%)
- discussion with my manager and/or HR (31%)
- discussion with someone outside of work (eg family, friend) (26%)
- informal discussion with the other person (22%)
- 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 – 32% felt it was fully resolved, 34% partly and 33% felt it was not resolved, although in some cases the process may have been ongoing.

7 Voice and representation

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.

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 55%, 45% and 45% of employees respectively. The availability of voice channels has not changed throughout the series.

Figure 39: Voice channels available to workers (%)

Base: all who are not self-employed (n=4,588)

Of ongoing concern is that a fifth (20%) of employees report having no voice channel at all. This is linked primarily to organisation size, with 38% of all employees working for organisations with fewer than 50 employees saying they had no voice channel, compared with 9% of those in organisations with 250+ employees. 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 across the UK.

Trade unions

One of the objectives of the ERA 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 to explore 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 (21%).
- There is no union for the type of work I do (15%).
- I am treated fairly by my employer (8%).
- A union would make no difference in a workplace like mine (8%).
- Being in a union would not bring me any advantages (6%).
- It costs too much (6%).
- I disagree with them in principle (5%).

In addition, we ask 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 47% 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, high workloads or conflict) 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.

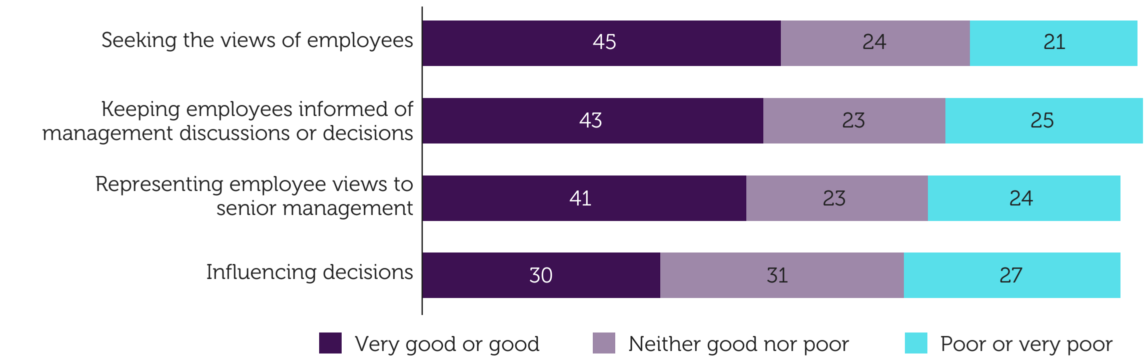
The survey data suggests that new rights giving trade unions access to workplaces for recruitment and organising purposes may not lead to a significant increase in union membership. For example, among the fifth (21%) of employees who say they are not members because there is no union or staff association, just over a third (36%) say they would be interested and the same proportion would be uninterested in joining a union.

That means fewer than one in 10 (7%) of all employees who are currently not trade union members are realistic immediate recruitment targets. Three-quarters 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

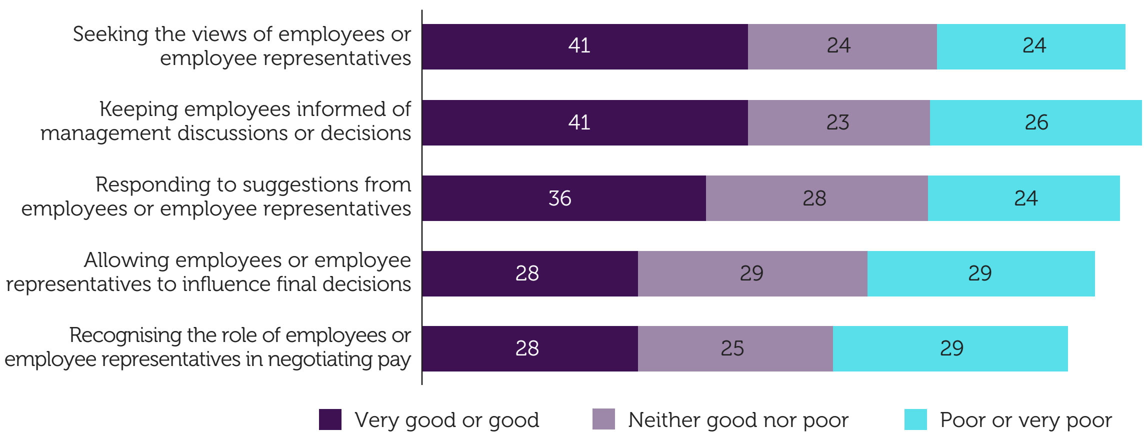
The availability of voice channels in workplaces itself does not tell us anything about their effectiveness or perceived quality. The survey therefore asks a series of questions that employees use to rate the quality of their employee representatives (if they have one) and their managers across several voice dimensions. The results are summarised in Figure 40 and Figure 41.

Figure 40: Employee ratings of their representatives (%)



Base: all with an employee representative (n=938)

Figure 41: Employee ratings of their managers (%)

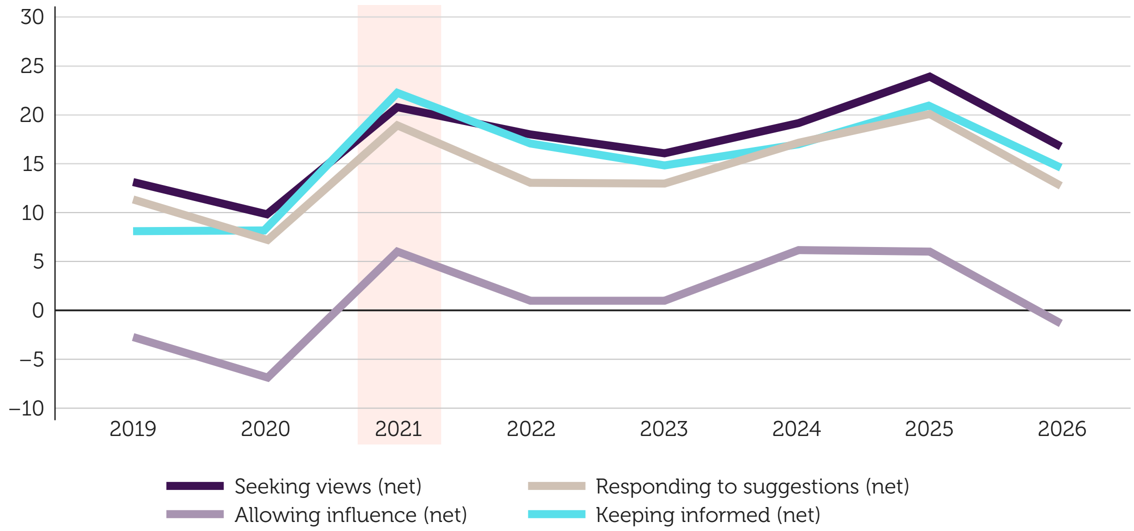


Base: all who are not self-employed (n=4,588)

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).

Management voice quality is an area where we have recorded statistically significant changes since the pandemic survey in 2021. 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 42, voice ratings have stayed elevated, but have fluctuated since. Most recent results show a sharp downward trend and should be a cause for concern.

Figure 42: Manager voice ratings across the *Good Work Index* series (%)



Base: all who are not self-employed (n=4,588 in 2026)

8 Health and wellbeing

The last dimension in our good work framework is health and wellbeing. The importance of good mental and physical health goes beyond individual wellbeing, with a clear negative relationship between poor health and job satisfaction or performance. For employers, there are also additional costs associated with higher sickness absence.

Mental and physical health

Over half of all employees report good physical and mental health – 61% rate their mental health as good and 63% 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 (70% of over-55s and 80% of over-65s said it was good).

When asked about specific health conditions, 45% of employees have experienced some form of physical health condition, while 46% 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 (33%)
- anxiety (30%)
- sleep problems (28%)
- depression (17%).

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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. Nearly two-fifths (37%) say work has a positive impact on mental health and nearly a third (29%) say the same about physical health. A quarter (25%) report negative impacts on mental health and 24% report 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 health. Nearly a third (31%) of them say work has a negative impact on their mental health and over a third (35%) report a negative impact on physical health.

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 43, correlations can be found with other job quality dimensions, too – experience of conflict, leadership and line management.

Figure 43: Drivers of work negatively impacting mental health (%)

Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

Subjective feelings in work

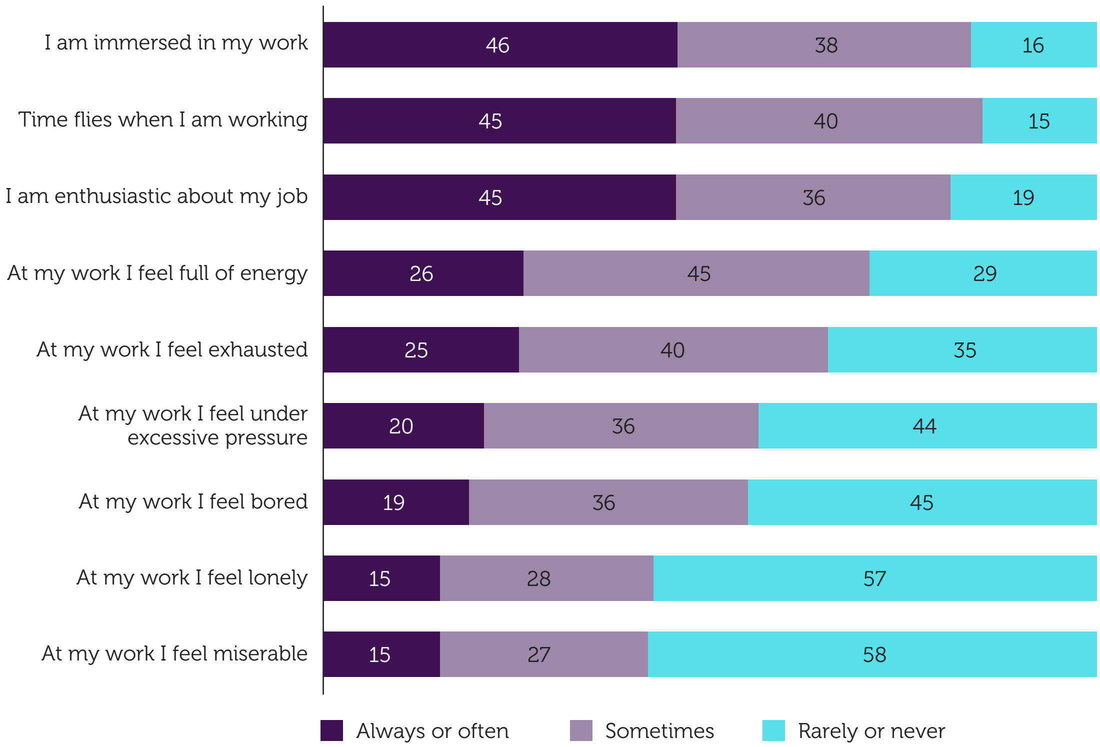
In addition to reporting physical and non-physical conditions and the overall impact of work on health, the survey also looks at the subjective feelings workers have about their jobs. These can be a good indication of the impact work has on individuals' mental health. Figure 44 summarises the answers 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 senior managers report higher stress levels (being under excessive pressure) and feelings of exhaustion than those without managerial responsibility.

In line with the above findings around workloads, we see 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 44: How workers feel at work (%)



Base: all working adults (n=5,074)

9 Conclusions and recommendations

The 2026 *Good Work Index* is structured around the CIPD's seven key dimensions of job quality. Now in its ninth year, it provides essential insights to policy-makers and employers around key aspects of good work and their impact on organisations. The report is based on an analysis of a sample of over 5,000 respondents across the UK, 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 – intended 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 from December 2025 to February 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, the extent to which employees have access to skills development opportunities and organisational leadership are some of the factors most associated with job satisfaction, performance and retention.

The report also reveals key evidence on the workplace factors associated with poor health, which should prove useful for the UK Government's Keep Britain Working policy programme, as it seeks to provide guidance for employers to help workers stay healthy and in work.

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, make sure to 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 ensure that a broad range of formal and informal arrangements are available to broaden your talent pool.
- Ensure that any changes to hybrid working policies are underpinned by solid reasoning and are 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.

Methodology

The data in this report comes from the ninth wave of the CIPD/YouGov *UK Working Lives* survey. This report is based on data from 5,074 UK employees (unweighted figure), collected between December 2025 and February 2026. To make the sample representative of the UK as a whole, quotas were used and subsequent weights based on ONS figures were applied to the dataset. The sample is representative of the UK workforce in: the intersection of gender by full- or part-time work status; organisation size within sector; industry; and age. We also refer to longitudinal data from previous years of the *CIPD Good Work Index*.

Appendix

Table 1: 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	0.491	0.537	0.296	0.272	0.277
Leadership	0.504	0.610	0.369	0.211	0.249
Voice channel availability	0.108	0.159	0.028	0.112	0.087
Trade union membership	0.022	0.014	0.077	0.022	0.026
Management voice quality	0.430	0.535	0.305	0.236	0.228
Representative voice quality	0.410	0.473	0.272	0.191	0.195
Manager relationships	0.420	0.435	0.240	0.219	0.242
Colleague relationships	0.313	0.296	0.188	0.196	0.174
Conflict experience	0.216	0.205	0.085	0.012	0.159
Meaningful work	0.490	0.496	0.428	0.310	0.243
Workloads	0.210	0.193	0.002	0.003	0.135
Work impact on mental health	0.562	0.422	0.270	0.155	0.266
Skills development opportunities	0.482	0.484	0.306	0.261	0.252
Career advancement prospects	0.406	0.449	0.264	0.241	0.230
Permanent/atypical contract	0.000	0.010	0.011	0.033	0.049

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