

A woman with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a white lab coat and blue gloves, is focused on her work in a laboratory. She is using a pipette to transfer liquid into a multi-well plate. The background shows laboratory equipment and a clean, professional environment. The image is framed by a large, stylized green shape.

**CIPD**

Report  
June 2024

# **Working Lives**

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# Scotland 2024

**About the CIPD in Scotland**

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

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

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

Report

# Working Lives Scotland 2024

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# 1 Foreword

The CIPD's *Working Lives Scotland* report is a valuable insight into how workplaces in Scotland are progressing on their fair work journey. This year's report shows once again the importance of good management and the need for effective employee voice in Scotland.

The report makes clear the degree to which the views voiced by workers are not always prioritised or acted upon. Workers on the whole prefer homeworking, but increasingly employers are moving away from this approach to organising work. We know that workers value learning and development opportunities, but these are becoming increasingly restricted across a range of workplaces. Workplace conflict is simply too prevalent across businesses in Scotland, harming both themselves and their workers – a clear sign that effective voice mechanisms are not sufficiently present. It is particularly worrying that women and disabled workers are more likely to experience workplace conflict and disabled workers report both higher rates of discrimination and poorer relationships with managers, impacting both their physical and their mental health.

So much of our life is spent at work and so much of our workplace experience depends on relationships between individuals within teams and with managers. Getting the fundamentals of fair work right creates workplaces that are both innovative and productive. Fair work therefore benefits employers, by increasing worker engagement, supporting collaboration and innovation, and facilitating good business outcomes. When workers begin to feel a lack of engagement, as the report suggests is happening in the public sector, fair work practices are the key drivers of positive change.

Ultimately fair work has a key role to play in supporting good outcomes for workers and employers and in shaping Scotland's economy, creating high value, innovative and productive workplaces, and supporting fairness and equality in wider Scottish society.



*Patricia Findlay*

**Patricia Findlay**



*Mary Alexander*

**Mary Alexander**

Co-Chairs, Fair Work Convention

## 2 Introduction

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

The succession of crises we experienced over the last five years has amplified the importance of job quality even further. From shifts to new ways of working as a result of the pandemic, through skills and labour shortages, to financial wellbeing during the cost-of-living crisis – the world of work has had to adapt and will continue to do so.

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

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

In the CIPD's view, good work:

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

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

## 3 Key findings

Our *Working Lives Scotland* survey is now in its fifth year – spanning periods of time just before, during the height of, as well as after the pandemic. It is unique in its insights around Scottish job quality changes and continuity over time. It supports a broader picture of job quality in the UK, provided by the *CIPD Good Work Index* research.

Alongside standing job quality measures we report on every year, there are several other key themes we are focusing on this year.

### **Workplace conflict**

- Over a quarter (28%) of all employees in Scotland experienced some form of workplace conflict, including being undermined, shouted at, insulted or discriminated against.
- Homeworkers are less likely to experience workplace conflict, but women and disabled employees report higher instances of conflict.
- Experiencing conflict at work has negative impacts on job satisfaction, health and wellbeing as well as task and contextual performance (going above and beyond).

### **Growing unease across the public sector**

- Falls in employee voice scores recorded in our 2023 survey have not improved. In fact, manager voice ratings have worsened considerably for public sector employees.
- Looking at our work centrality questions over time, we see signs of public sector employees growing increasingly detached from their jobs, with a higher proportion saying their job is just a way of earning money and no more.
- Similarly, there is a drop in the proportion of public sector employees saying they feel inspired at work.

### **Skills development and learning gaps**

- Persistent gaps in skills development for those on lower incomes are not closing, with less than half (44%) of those on the lowest incomes (under £20,000 per year) saying their jobs offer good opportunities to develop their skills.
- Over a fifth (21%) of those educated below degree level have not received any form of training over the last 12 months.
- Employees working in smaller organisations are considerably less likely to receive any training. A fifth (20%) of SME employees have received no training over the last 12 months, rising to 35% for employees in micro-businesses (fewer than 10 employees).

### **Back to the office**

- A gap has started opening between employee home and hybrid working preferences and actual working patterns.
- We see a gradual drop in the proportion of employees working fully or primarily from home – from a peak of 47% in 2021 to 39% in 2022, 31% in 2023 and 25% in 2024.
- Home and hybrid working preferences, however, have stayed relatively stable over the years, suggesting that employers who are asking employees to return to offices are increasing their risk of retention and recruitment challenges.

**Poorer job quality for disabled employees**

- There were additional challenges across several job quality measures for disabled employees, not least the above-mentioned incidence of workplace conflict (particularly pronounced in experiences of discriminatory behaviour).
- Highlighting the crucial importance of management, the report found that disabled employees generally report poorer relationships with their managers as well as rating them lower across several questions.
- Disabled employees also report a more negative impact of work on their physical health and poorer work–life balance across all three of our questions.

# 4 Respect

This chapter looks at job quality aspects like health and wellbeing at work, interpersonal relationships, and relationships with managers. It also examines issues in relation to work–life balance and workplace conflict. Most of these remained relatively stable throughout the pandemic and beyond, highlighting how persistent some job quality gaps are.

**Key findings**

- Twenty-five per cent of employees feel their work impacts negatively on their mental health, with 24% reporting negative impacts on their physical health.
- Those who primarily work from home report poorer relationships with colleagues, but better relationships with line managers.
- Twenty-eight per cent of all employees in Scotland experienced some form of workplace conflict, with negative impacts on job satisfaction, health and wellbeing, as well as task and contextual performance (going above and beyond).

**Work and its impact on mental and physical health**

The CIPD's previous job quality research has shown health and wellbeing as having the strongest relationship with job satisfaction and job enthusiasm out of all job quality dimensions. For example, in this year's *Working Lives Scotland*, 74% of those who say that work impacts positively on their mental health say they are always or often enthusiastic about their jobs, compared with only 23% of those who report a negative impact. In addition to its most direct impact on wellbeing, good mental and physical health can therefore impact individual, and by extension organisational, performance.



Our survey asked employees a set of questions about physical and mental health, the impact of work, as well as whether they had experienced specific physical or mental health problems. Overall, in 2024, 62% of employees described their mental health as good, with 59% describing their physical health as good – virtually unchanged over the last five years.

When it comes to how work impacts on health, 25% of employees said their work impacts negatively or very negatively on their mental health, with 24% reporting the same for their physical health. These numbers have also stayed consistent throughout our previous surveys. Looking at different groups of employees, disabled employees were more likely to say that work has a negative impact on their physical health, with over a third (34%) reporting this.

Some 57% of employees have experienced some form of physical health condition, while 45% have experienced a mental health condition over the last 12 months. As in previous reports, the most common reported conditions were:

- backache or other bone, joint or muscle problems (35%)
- sleep problems (27%)
- anxiety (27%)
- depression (17%)
- COVID-19 (16%) – the only significant drop (from 30%) year on year.

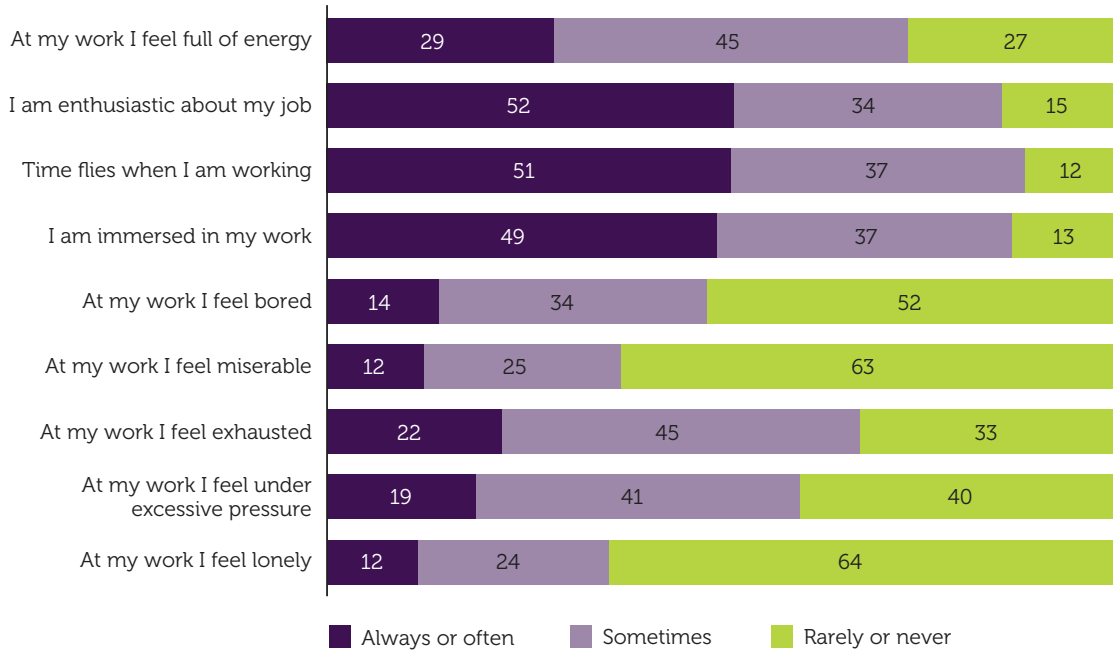
The survey again shows considerable differences by gender. Women were more likely to experience both physical and mental health conditions. More specifically, anxiety was reported by 32% of women versus 21% of men, sleep problems by 31% of women versus 23% of men, as well as musculoskeletal problems, where the difference is 39% of women versus 30% of men.

A supportive and open organisational culture should enable employees to discuss their conditions with their employer. Disappointingly, albeit unsurprisingly, the majority of employees did not discuss their condition, no matter which one it was. As many as 81% of those suffering from panic attacks did not speak to their employer about it. In the case of COVID-19, further underlining the declining salience of the issue, 50% of employees discussed it – a drop from 63% in 2023 and 77% in 2022.

In addition to reporting physical and mental health conditions, the survey also looks at the subjective feelings workers have in jobs. These can be a good indication of the impact work has on individuals' mental health in particular. Figure 1 summarises the answers to the question of how employees feel at their work.



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



There are some clear associations between occupations and management level across these questions. For example, a significantly higher proportion of senior managers reported higher stress levels – 26% of them feel under excessive pressure always or often, compared with those in board-level positions (10%) and those without management responsibilities (16%).

**Relationships at work**

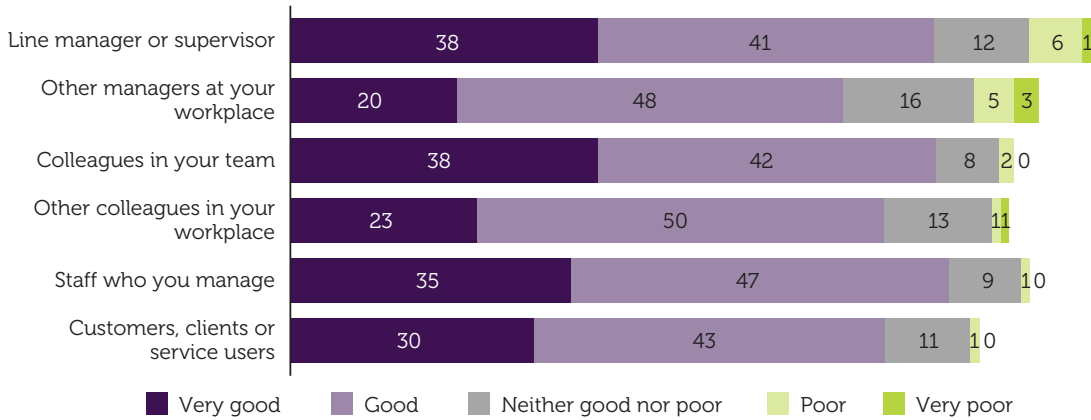
Research shows that good relationships at work improve the way organisations function, with bad relationships negatively affecting performance. Relationships at work matter to individuals’ health and wellbeing, to their motivation, commitment and performance, and to organisational functioning – directly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

In line with our survey series, employee views on relationships at work were overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority reported very good or good relationships with those the survey asks about, as summarised in Figure 2.

There are, however, some interesting differences that can be drawn out. Once again, we see that those who primarily work from home (especially full-time) report poorer relationships with their colleagues, but better relationships with managers compared with those who don’t work from home at all.

We again see positive workplace relationships associated with better job satisfaction, higher task performance (eg achieving the objectives of the job) and contextual performance (eg helping colleagues or making innovative suggestions).

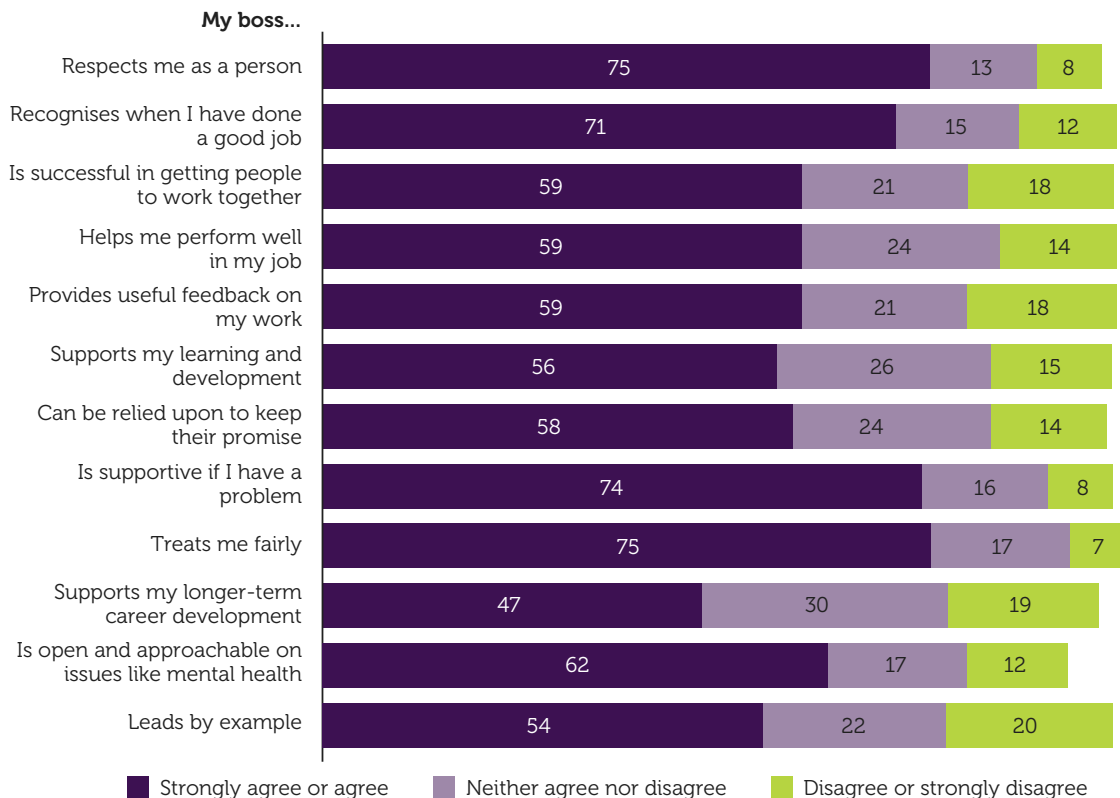
**Figure 2: Quality of relationships at work (%)**



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

In addition to the quality of relationships in the workplace, the survey includes a series of questions that focus specifically on the relationship with managers. Figure 3 shows a summary of the findings, with managers rated largely positively across all the questions, with the exception of career development. Home and hybrid workers responded more positively to all of the questions, but disabled employees responded more negatively to most – only 66% feel their boss treats them fairly, 64% say they feel respected and only 49% say they are getting help to perform.

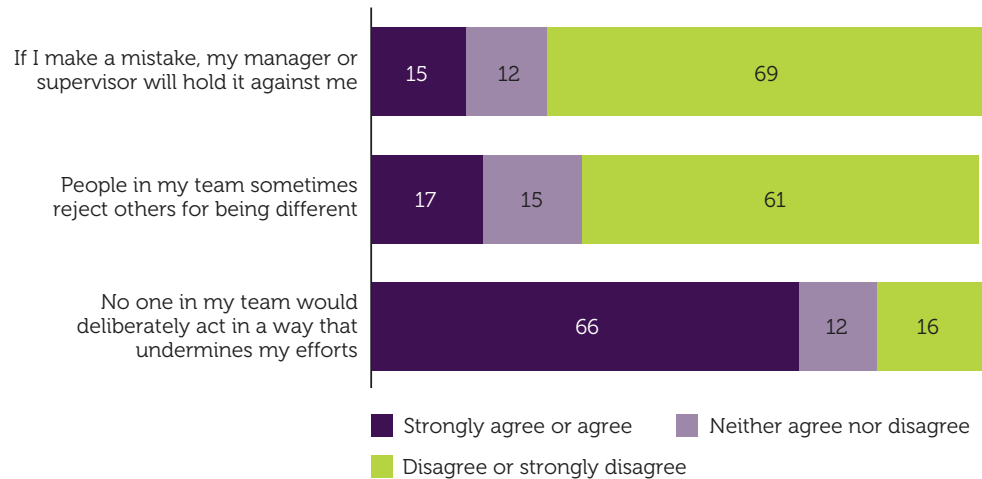
**Figure 3: Relationships with managers (%)**



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

Survey participants were also asked about ‘psychological safety at work’. This sought to uncover whether a ‘blame culture’ exists – where people are fearful about making mistakes or expressing their opinions because of negative consequences. Figure 4 summarises the results.

**Figure 4: Psychological safety at work (%)**



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

### **Workplace conflict**

Workplace conflict is one of the focus areas in the *CIPD Good Work Index 2024*. The 2024 survey reintroduced a series of questions around workplace conflict from 2019 to explore trends and differences across the workforce. We don’t have comparable data for Scotland, since *Working Lives Scotland* first ran in 2020, but an analysis of single-year data also reveals interesting findings.

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

- undermined and/or humiliated in a job (13%)
- shouted at or in a very heated argument (11%)
- verbally abused or insulted (11%)
- receiving discriminatory behaviour because of a protected characteristic (5%).

Incidence of conflict is considerably higher for women (35% experienced some conflict, compared with only 21% of men) and for disabled employees (39% experienced conflict, compared with 25% of non-disabled employees).

Similar differences were found when looking at specific types of conflict too, with being undermined reported by 18% of women (versus 9% of men) and 19% of disabled employees (versus 12% non-disabled). While only 5% experienced discriminatory behaviour, this too is higher for women (7%) and disabled employees (12%).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, conflict was much less likely for those who primarily work from home (19%) compared with those who don’t work from home at all (30%). Proximity to others in the workplace has an impact on our experience of conflict.

Those who experienced conflict reported considerably poorer relationships with their managers, rated them much more negatively and expressed a stark lack of trust and confidence in management. For example, while 54% of those not experiencing conflict said they trust the directors/senior management to act with integrity, only 31% of those who experienced conflict did. We find similar differences with individual management ratings ('manager leads by example'), where the comparison was 62% versus 37%, and management openness ('managers are good at responding to suggestions'), where it was 42% versus 22%.

Looking at the impact of conflict on job quality, we found strong negative associations with job satisfaction, wellbeing – especially the impact of work on health – as well as weaker associations with task and contextual performance (going above and beyond). For example, while 25% of those who experience conflict are dissatisfied with their jobs, only 8% of those who did not experience conflict are. Nearly half (49%) of those who experienced conflict say their work impacts negatively on their mental health, compared with 17% of those without conflict.

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

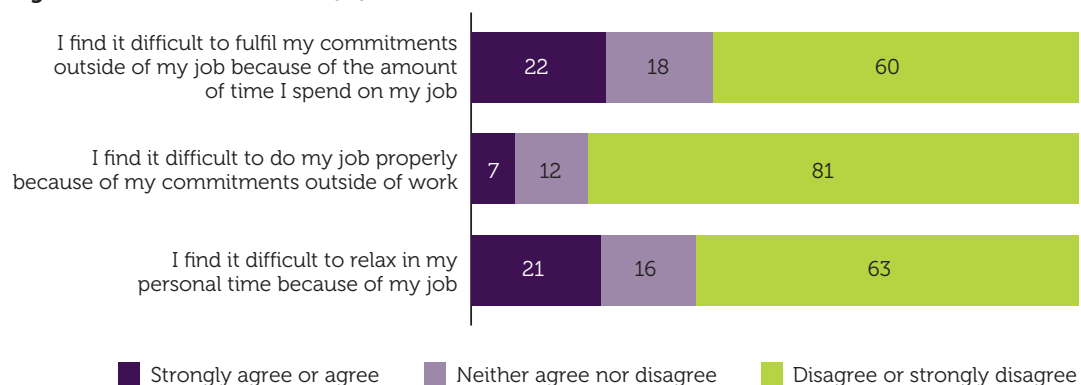
- I just let it go (35%)
- discussion with my manager and/or HR (22%)
- informal discussion with the other person (18%)
- discussion with someone outside of work (eg family, friend) (15%)
- I decided to look for a new job (10%).

Lastly, there was a relatively even split in answers as to whether the matter had been resolved. Some 36% felt it was fully resolved, 27% partly and 37% felt it was not resolved.

### Work–life balance

The boundaries between our working and personal lives, and the right balance between the two, are crucial to our wellbeing. The pandemic has brought these under the spotlight, with many having to combine their work with family responsibilities. While we don't see direct evidence of people moving jobs to boost work–life balance, the increase in home and hybrid working patterns and preferences is likely an indirect sign of the importance of this dimension. Figure 5 summarises the responses to a series of questions in the survey.

**Figure 5: Work–life balance (%)**



Unsurprisingly, factors like high workloads and management levels impact answers to these questions. Half of those who say their workloads are too high find it hard to relax in their personal time. Of those with management responsibilities, 28% say the same, compared with only 16% of those without any management responsibilities. Given the link between occupations and workloads/management, we also see that hybrid workers also find it harder to relax compared with those who don't work from home at all.

As in previous years, we find that caring responsibilities are a significant factor across the first two questions. Of those caring for children, 12% say they find it difficult to do their job properly, compared with just 5% of those with no caring responsibilities. Disabled employees also respond significantly worse to all three questions (31% on commitments outside of work, 12% on doing their job properly and 30% on difficulty relaxing).

## 5 Security

Employee pay, employee benefits and contractual arrangements are crucial parts of fair work. Security and stability in employment, in addition to a predictable income, are important job quality aspects 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

- We see year-on-year improvements in job satisfaction, but it remains unchanged and at the lowest for those earning up to £20,000 per year.
- There are signs of public sector employees growing increasingly detached from their jobs, with a higher proportion saying their job is just a way of earning money and no more.
- Around 15% of employees would like to work more hours than they do, but this rises to 25% for those on the lowest incomes.

### Pay and benefits

The survey distinguishes between 'objective' and 'subjective' measures of pay. Objective measures are relatively straightforward – an employee's hourly wage, weekly income or annual salary. However, this doesn't consider how an employee feels about how they're remunerated for the work they do – this is known as subjective pay.

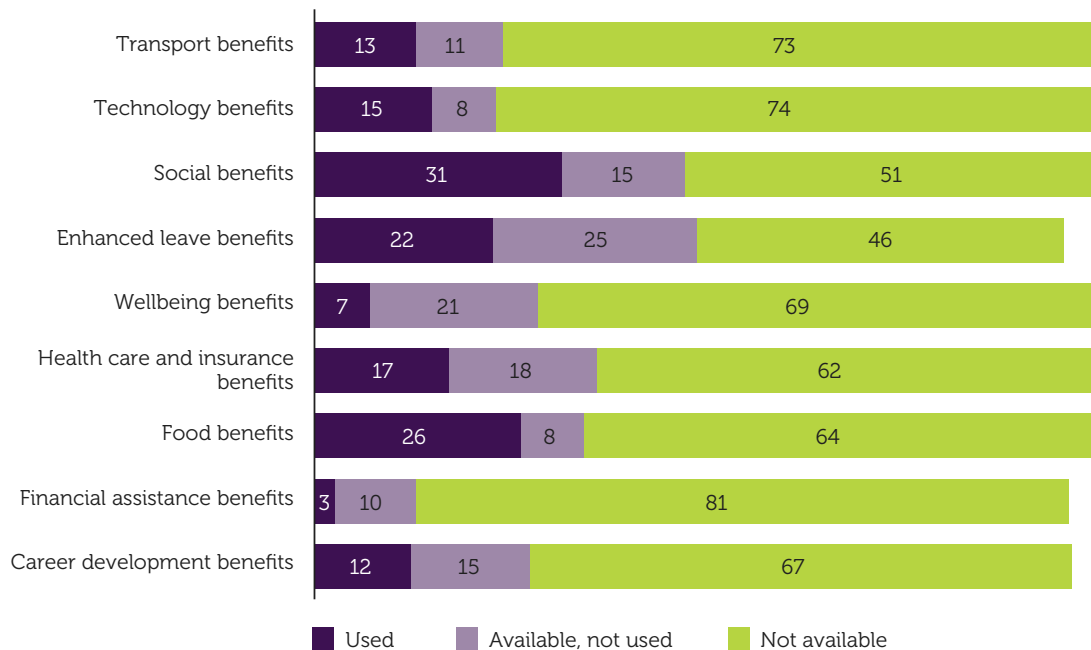
Consistent with previous *Working Lives Scotland* reports, both life and job satisfaction are lowest for those earning under £20,000 per year compared with those on higher income bands, especially those on the highest salaries. It is, however, important to note that while there is good correlation between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

In 2021, we saw a considerable drop in life satisfaction due to the impact of the pandemic. The 50% from 2021 rose back to 62% in 2022, 63% in 2023 and reached 67% in 2024 – comparable with the 2020 high of 69%.

Overall job satisfaction has increased from 63% last year to 73% this year, primarily driven by more positive responses from employees earning between £20,000 and £59,999 per year. However, it is important to highlight that job satisfaction remains unchanged and lowest for those on the lowest incomes, 60% of whom said they were satisfied with their jobs.

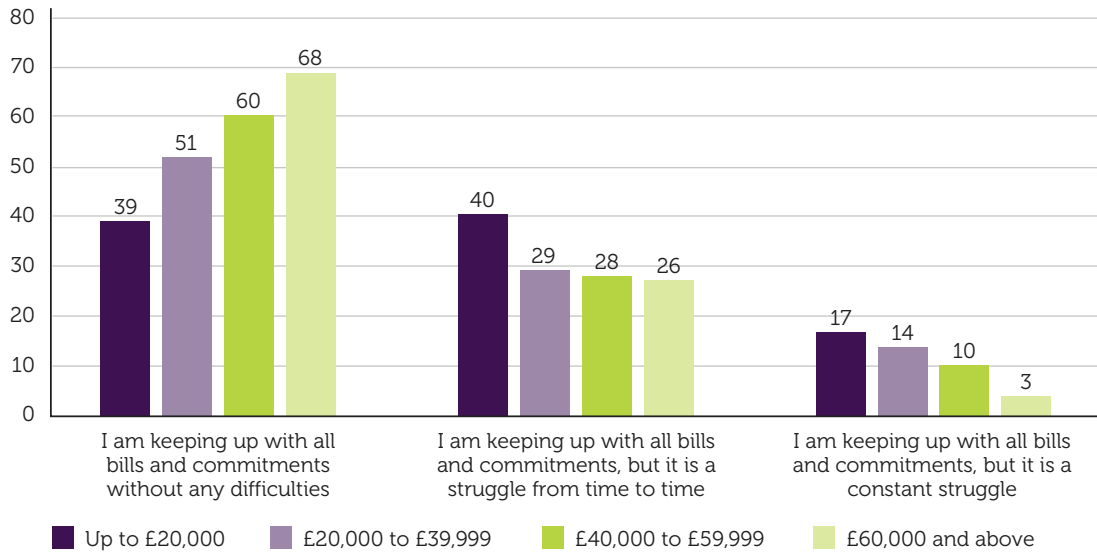
Reward packages are much broader than just salaries. Figure 6 shows a breakdown of a range of employee benefits across Scotland. Again, public sector employees reported better access to employee benefits, with the biggest differences in enhanced leave benefits – 67% of public sector employees had either used or had availability, compared with only 44% of private sector employees.

**Figure 6: Employee benefits other than pensions (%)**



Despite the falls in inflation, employees continue to struggle with the cost of living. We again asked employees about their ability to keep up with their bills and credit commitments and found no statistically relevant change in responses – only around half (52%) of all employees said they were keeping up with bills without any difficulties. There remain significant differences by income, as highlighted in Figure 7.

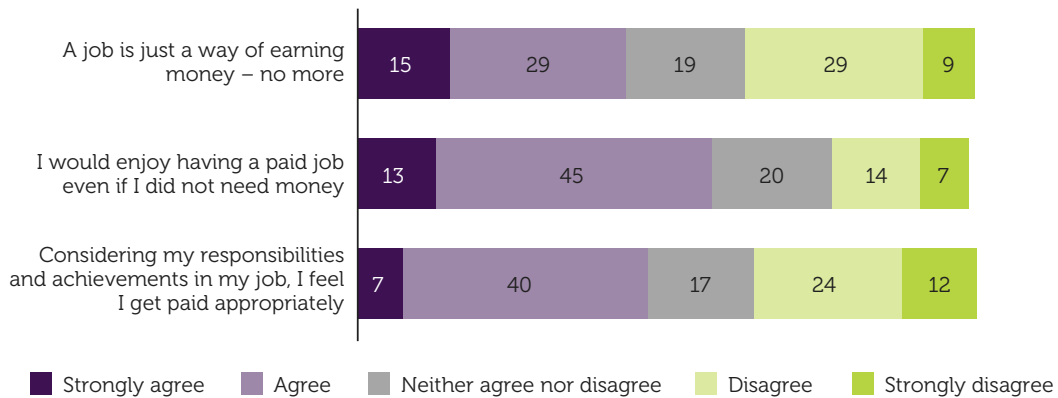
**Figure 7: Keeping up with bills and credit commitments, by income (%)**



**Subjective measures of pay**

In addition to objective measures of pay, *Working Lives Scotland* looks at subjective measures of pay and what we call ‘work centrality’ – what role work plays in employees’ lives. Figure 8 summarises the results. We found that 47% of employees felt they got paid appropriately for the work that they do. As in previous years, there is a positive correlation between this and reported income levels – those on higher incomes are more likely to feel they are paid appropriately, rising to 70% for those earning above £60,000 per year.

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

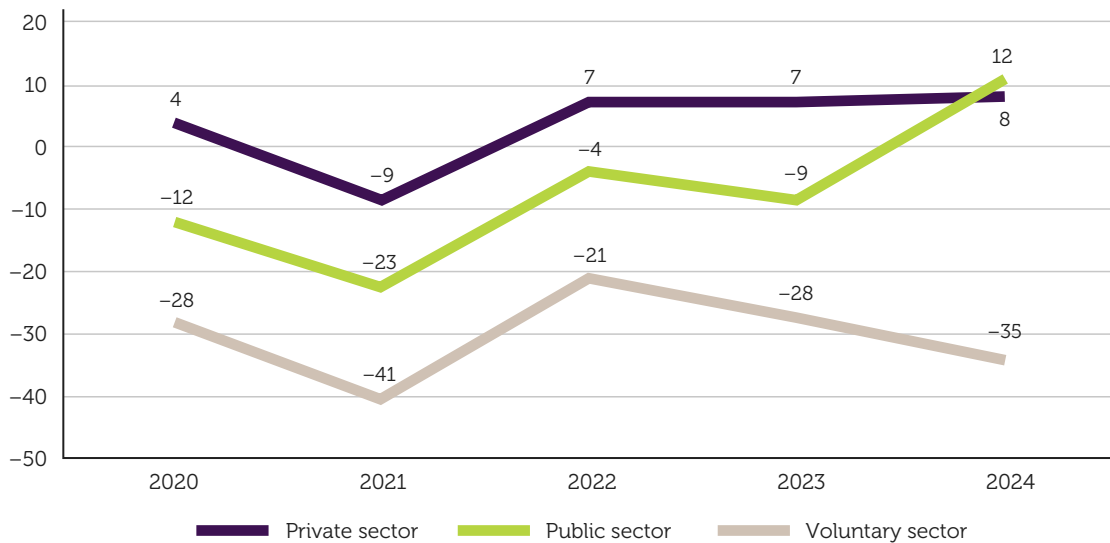


Our two work centrality questions measure the relative importance of work in our lives. Some 57% of employees stated they would enjoy having a paid job even if they did not need the money, and 44% said that a job is just a way of earning money, but no more. These are similar to the levels recorded last year. However, there are interesting differences across employee groups. On the question of whether a job is just a way of earning money, we found higher than average disagreement from women (42%) and older workers aged 55+ (47%), as well as those working in the voluntary sector (59%).



Looking at trends across our five-year series, we see signs of public sector employees growing increasingly detached from their jobs, with a higher proportion saying their job is just a way of earning money and no more. The strength of this can also be expressed by lower levels of disagreement with the statement, with more responding neutrally or 'don't know'. Combining 'agree' and 'disagree' answers and plotting them in a chart, as shown in Figure 9, illustrates the trend – higher numbers equal lower levels of work centrality.

**Figure 9: Work centrality across sectors over the last five years (% agree – % disagree)**

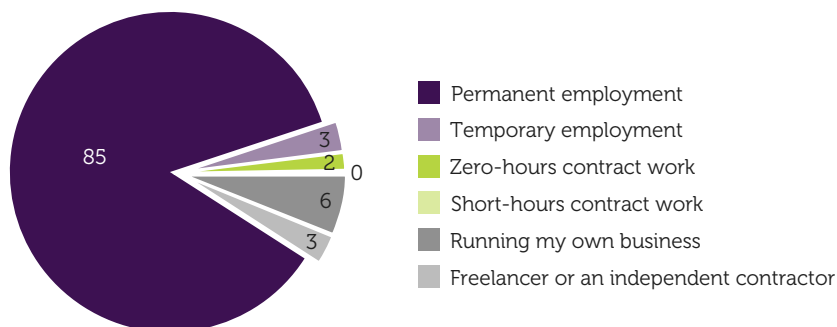


### Types of contract

Contractual working arrangements and the related issues of job and hours insecurity are aspects of job quality that have risen within the public policy agenda in recent years. While our survey includes questions on contractual type, the sample size for non-standard contracts is relatively small, so the level of analysis we can do for Scotland is limited. Our UK-wide *CIPD Good Work Index reports* use a larger UK-wide sample and provide interesting insight into UK-wide job quality in relation to non-standard contracts.

*Working Lives Scotland* asks about a range of contract types in Scotland. The breakdown of those surveyed in the report is presented in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Types of contract (%)**



Women were much more likely to work part-time than men (42% v 11%). This is widely attributed to caring responsibilities, which remained significantly gendered despite policy interventions. We also found disabled people less likely to be in full-time employment (53% v 68% of those not disabled).

Furthermore, in line with previous years, there was a higher percentage of self-employment and part-time employment among those aged 55 and above. Flexibility in working hours has been highlighted in CIPD [research](#) as a key factor in the retention and recruitment of older workers.

### **Job security**

In addition to pay levels and contractual arrangements (that is, objective measures), the survey asked two questions to assess employees' perceived job security (subjective measures). It asked whether employees think they are likely to lose their job in the next 12 months and whether they are likely to quit their job in the next 12 months.

Nearly a fifth (19%) of employees said they are likely to quit their jobs. There remains a strong link to job satisfaction, with 40% of those dissatisfied saying they would likely quit, compared with only 12% of those satisfied. Self-evidently, those with poorer job quality dimensions think about quitting more – for example, 26% of those who said their workloads are too high said they are likely to quit, as well as 32% of those who said their work impacts negatively on their mental health.

The persistently tight labour market is reflected in the findings around the 'likelihood to lose job' measure, with 62% of employees saying it was unlikely they would lose their job in the next 12 months. We no longer record statistically significant differences between income bands, highlighting the improvements in job security for the lowest paid. The findings again show that public sector employees feel more secure in their employment (73% unlikely), as well as those with longer tenures (67% unlikely for those with 10 or more years of service).

In addition to the two job security questions, we also measure employees' confidence in the labour market – asking about the difficulty of finding a job as good as the one they currently have. The answers here also reflect the tight labour market, with 32% of employees saying this would be easy – roughly the same proportion as last year. Public sector employees were more likely to say it would be difficult to find an equivalent job, as were disabled employees and those with longer tenures.

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

- better pay/benefits (27%)
- better work–life balance (27%)
- to increase job satisfaction (20%)
- being unhappy with leadership of senior management (20%).

### Underemployment and overwork

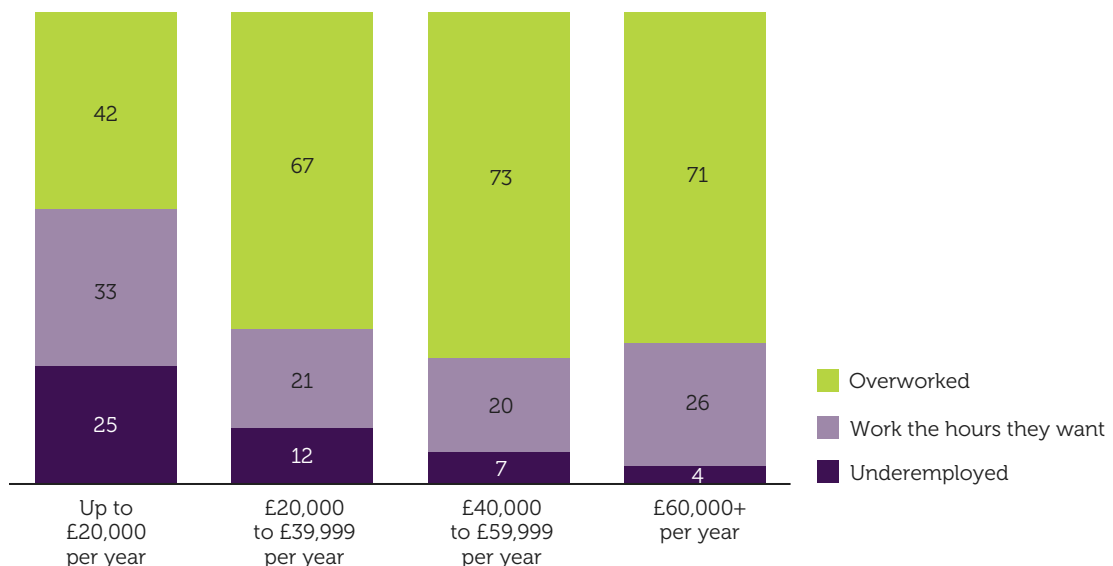
In addition to the objective measure of hours worked, the survey asked employees how many hours they would like to work, while ‘taking into account the need to earn a living’. This gives an indication of underemployment and overwork, which are elements of job quality. Just like most aspects of job quality, they differ by occupation and therefore income bands, as illustrated in Figure 11.

Underemployment, where employees aren’t working as much as they would like, is a source of insecurity in the labour market. Our results show that 85% of people work at least as much as they would like to, with around 15% saying they would like to work more hours than they currently do – virtually unchanged from last year.

On the other end of the scale, we can estimate overwork by measuring the difference between reported usual hours of work and preferred hours of work. The survey found that only 24% of employees work at least the hours they would like to, with 61% reporting some levels of overwork. Some 13% of employees say they work 15 or more hours more than they would like to.

The presence of overwork is likely to impact negatively on how people balance work with their personal lives. Indeed, those who report overwork respond significantly worse to our work–life balance questions. For example, 30% of those who said they would like to work fewer hours found it hard to relax in their personal lives because of their job, compared with only 7% of those who work the hours they want.

**Figure 11: Underemployment and overwork across income bands (%)**



# 6 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 can't provide insight around issues like recruitment, it does allow us to expose some differences in opportunities available to different groups of employees.

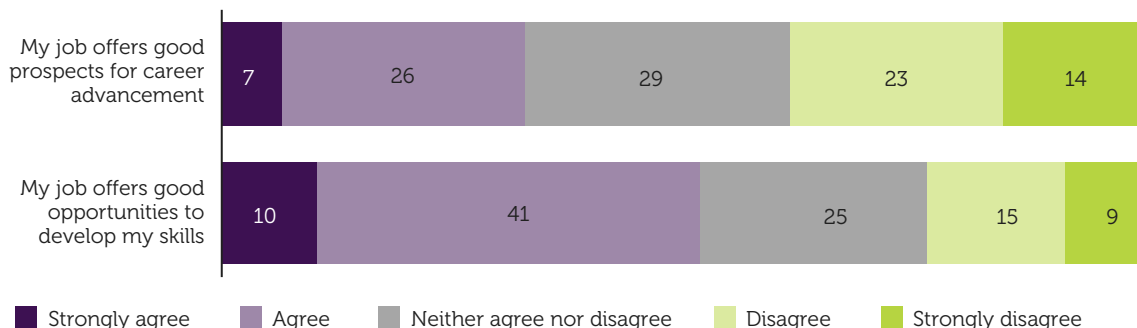
## Key findings

- A third (33%) of employees believe their job offers good prospects for career advancement, while 52% feel their job offers good opportunities to develop their skills.
- There are considerable gaps in the levels of training employees participate in, with 16% having received none in the last year. This is even higher for employees in smaller businesses.
- A gap has started opening between employee home and hybrid working preferences and actual working patterns. While proportions of those who primarily work from home are declining, preferences are broadly staying the same.

## Personal and career development

The importance of skills development to individual wellbeing, organisational productivity and the country's economy as a whole is well researched. Personal and career development opportunities form an important part of future job prospects, while being increasingly important in recruitment as well as in retention for employers. Figure 12 summarises the answers received across the two questions we ask.

Figure 12: Personal and career development (%)



We again found a positive relationship between rising incomes and reported opportunities for both skills development and career advancement. Of those earning more than £60,000 per year, 67% reported good skills development opportunities and 47% reported good career advancement options. This compares with only 44% and 23% respectively for those earning less than £20,000. These differences are linked to occupational classes, as highlighted in previous *Working Lives Scotland* reports. There is a persistent lack of skills development and perceived career progression pathways for those in lower-paid occupations.

### **Learning and development participation**

Another set of reintroduced questions relates to participation in learning and development over the last 12 months. The findings from the latest UK-wide Employer Skills Survey have shown that employers' investment in training has dropped over the last 10 years across all parts of the UK, which, given the importance of skills to our economy, is of concern. Our employee survey asked employees to select the types of training they took part in over the last year. Some 79% took part in some form of training, with the most common types being:

- on-the-job or in-the-flow-of-work training or learning (46%)
- online learning (42%)
- learning from peers (25%)
- blended learning (21%)
- in-house development programmes (16%)
- instructor-led training delivered off the job (15%)
- external conferences, workshops and events (11%).

Concerningly, 16% of all employees had not engaged in any form of training at all. In line with other research, there are clear differences here by organisational size, with 20% of SME employees not having had any training, rising to 35% for those working in micro businesses (with fewer than 10 employees).

Furthermore, only 2% of all employees say they received some training around emerging technologies such as AI. While those who received training found it overwhelmingly useful, the lowest proportion of usefulness was recorded by those engaging in online training.

### **Home and hybrid working**

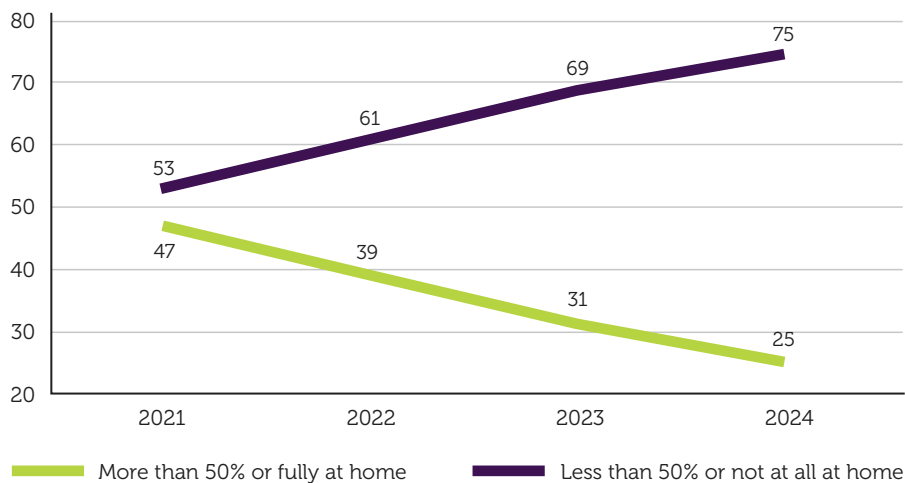
The most obvious impact of the pandemic has been the increase in home and hybrid working across Scotland and the UK as a whole. We continue to see nearly half of all employees (47%) work at least some of the time from home. There remain huge differences by income bands, reflecting the unavailability of homeworking across some industries and occupations.

**Figure 13: Home and hybrid working, by personal income level (%)**



Looking at longer-term trends, home and hybrid working levels remain considerably higher than before the pandemic, but there has been a clear gradual decrease in those who primarily work from home. Interestingly, we don't see a shift in individual preferences for ways of working, with an average of 14% wanting to work fully from home and another 19% wanting to work primarily from home across our post-pandemic surveys.

**Figure 14: Home and hybrid working since 2021 (%)**



In addition, 33% of Scottish employees said they are in jobs where they can't work from home at all. Another 13% said they did not want to work from home at all. Combined, that's nearly half (46%) of all Scottish employees for whom the benefits of flexibility can only be unlocked by looking beyond homeworking. This is crucial not only from an individual wellbeing perspective, but also from an organisational inclusion and fairness point of view.

### **Informal flexibility**

Informal flexibility – without a formal change in employment contracts – can also enable greater control over the way work interacts with the rest of our lives. We asked employees how difficult they would find taking some time off for personal or family matters.

The survey found that nearly two-thirds of all employees report good informal flexibility in their jobs, with 65% saying they would find it easy to take time off for personal or family matters. There is a direct correlation with income – employees with higher incomes reported more informal flexibility. This is due to lower-paid occupations generally reporting lower flexibility, illustrated by difference across homeworking too – 89% of those who primarily work from home would find taking time off easy, compared with only 50% of those not working from home at all.

Concerningly, over a quarter (27%) of those with childcare responsibilities said they would find taking time off difficult.

## 7 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 therefore provides a unique insight into these areas.

### **Key findings**

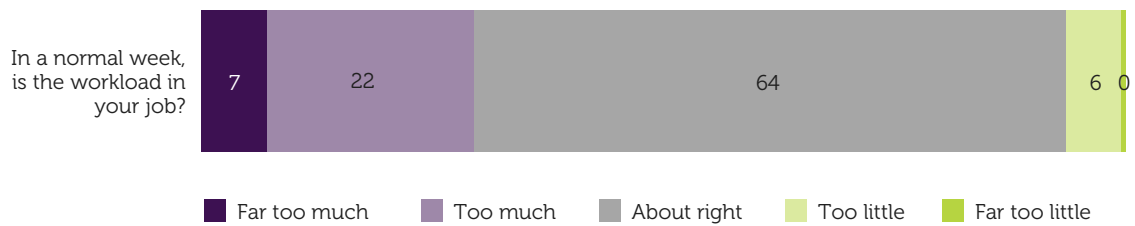
- Thirty per cent of all employees report their workload as too heavy in a normal week. Senior managers are more likely to report workloads that are too heavy.
- Public and voluntary sector employees are significantly more likely to feel their jobs are meaningful, but we see these weakening for public sector employees over time.
- A third of employees (33%) educated to undergraduate degree level feel they are overqualified for their job.



## Workload

When examining job quality, the intensity of work (how hard someone has to work to complete their tasks in a given time period) is just as important as the length of time spent at work (number of working hours). Our survey asked employees to rate their workload in a normal week. Figure 15 summarises the results and shows that for nearly a third (30%) of employees, their workload is too much or far too much.

**Figure 15: Workload (%)**



Just like other job quality elements, workload varies across occupational classes, but our survey shows that it is not aligned to income. In other words, those in lower-paid occupational classes (eg ‘caring, leisure, and other services’) are just as likely to report high workloads as those in higher-paid occupations (eg ‘professional occupations’). This shows that high workload is not confined to lower- or higher-paid occupations, and it is the nature of tasks in jobs that is to blame.

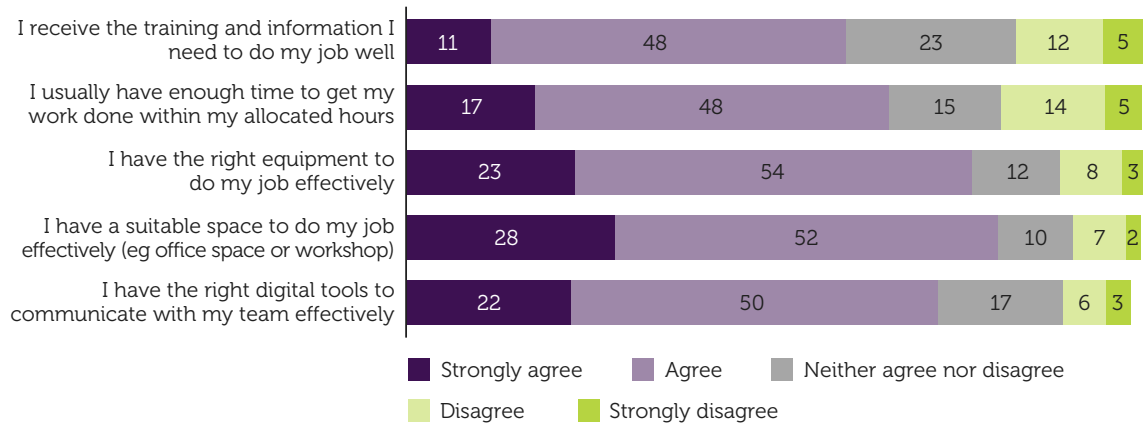
This year’s data again shows that 38% of senior or other managers are reporting too much workload, compared with 28% of board-level managers and 24% for those without management responsibility. People management is crucial to unlocking fair work, and we continue to find gaps in the level of training and amount of time managers say they have to manage their staff well. Over a fifth (21%) of those with management responsibilities disagreed that they receive the training and information they need to manage staff well. In addition, 24% said they don’t have the time they need to manage staff.

### **Adequate work resources**

Having the right resources to do our jobs is crucial to our performance and productivity. *Working Lives Scotland* asked employees to answer five questions in relation to adequate work resources and found that most employees report good access to training, equipment, premises and digital tools, as summarised in Figure 16.

As in previous years, the biggest gaps continue to be around training and time – 17% of employees said they don’t receive training and information to do their jobs well, and 19% said they don’t have enough time to get their work done. Those who are dissatisfied with their jobs as well as those who report high workloads responded more negatively to these questions – indeed, the lack of adequate resources is likely a contributor to high workloads and job dissatisfaction.

**Figure 16: Adequacy of work resources (%)**



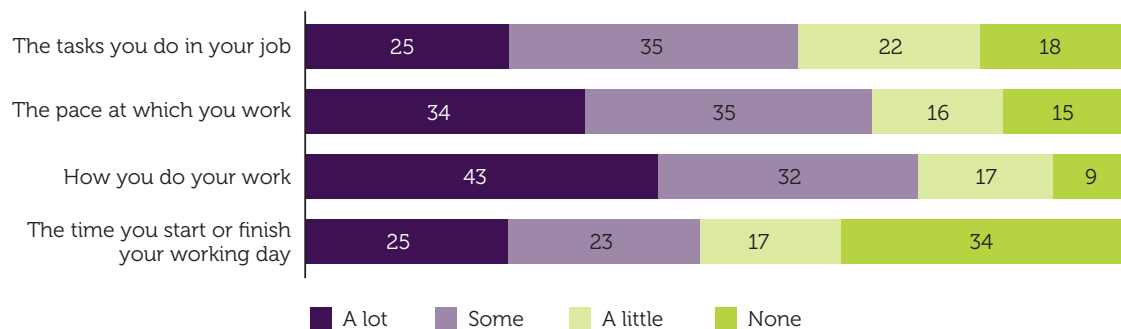
Note: Does not add up to 100% because of 'don't know' answers.

### Job autonomy and complexity

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

Figure 17 summarises the findings in relation to job autonomy. The fact that none of these meaningfully changed during the pandemic and afterwards provides evidence on how persistent job design is. Employees continue to have less autonomy when it comes to starting and finishing their working day compared with the other aspects of autonomy measured.

**Figure 17: Job autonomy at work (%)**



In line with previous *Working Lives Scotland* reports, we see a clear relationship between occupations, income bands and job autonomy. Those on the highest incomes report significantly more autonomy across all four dimensions, as summarised in Figure 18. Given the nature of such jobs, those working hybrid or fully from home also reported better job autonomy, especially on the question around working hours.

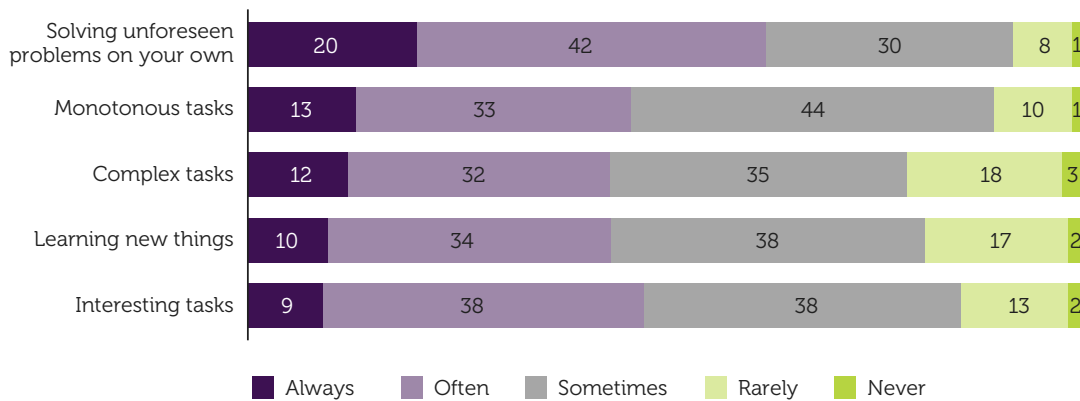
**Figure 18: Job autonomy across income bands (%)**



Note: Results shown are net answers of 'a lot' and 'some'.

Linked to job autonomy is the issue of job complexity. This looks at the nature of an employee’s job and whether it involves interesting or monotonous tasks as well as problem-solving. Figure 19 summarises the findings, which have also remained consistent over the last five years. Here, as with job autonomy, the main differences sit with income and occupation, with those on higher incomes reporting higher job complexity.

**Figure 19: Job complexity (%)**

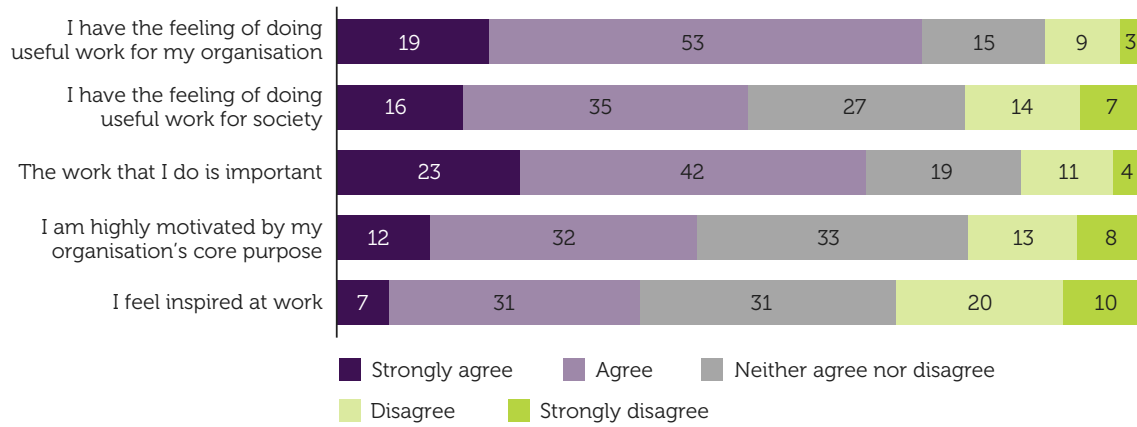


**Meaningful work**

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

Figure 20 shows a significant majority (72%) of employees feeling they are doing useful work for their organisation and 83% feeling that their work is important for their organisation. Following the significant increase during the pandemic, only around half (51%) of employees now say their work is useful for society – unchanged from last year.

**Figure 20: Feelings on meaningfulness of work (%)**



We see a very strong correlation with job satisfaction across all five questions, with a slightly weaker link to life satisfaction. Also, those in meaningful jobs reported better performance, particularly contextual performance that requires discretionary effort – for example, being more likely to help others, go above and beyond, or make innovative suggestions.

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

Concerningly, however, it seems that feelings of meaningfulness are declining across public sector roles. Not only do we find a drop year on year of those who say they feel inspired at work (from 46% last year to 32% this year), but there has also been an increase in those who outright disagree with the statement. Combined, this results in a combined drop of 22 percentage points from last year.

Similarly, using the same method, we see a steady decrease in public sector feelings of meaningfulness to society, while the private sector remains stable (albeit much lower and with a pandemic spike). While the sample sizes don't allow us to reach firm conclusions, given the findings around work centrality and voice elsewhere in this report, a picture of some discontent across the public sector is beginning to form.

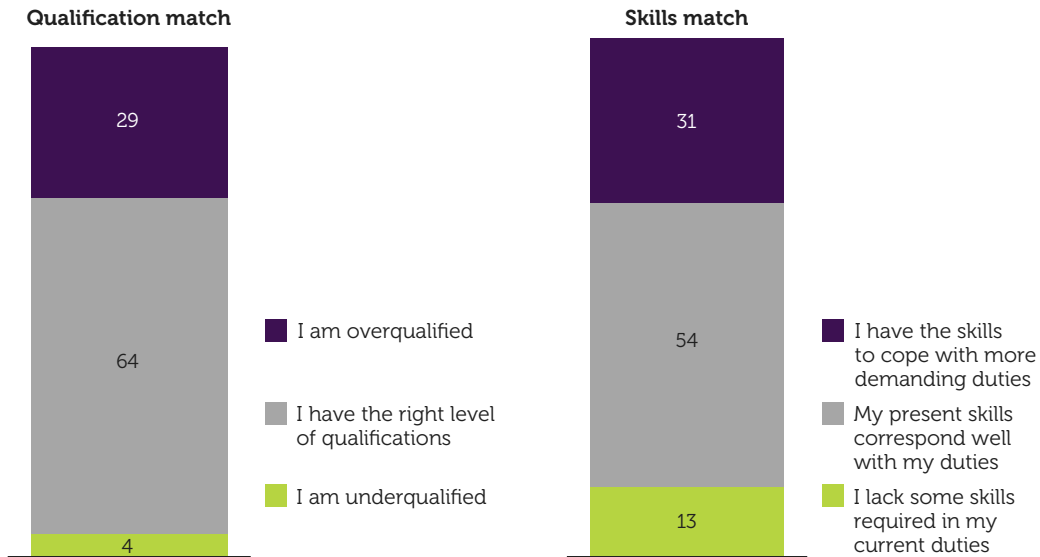
**Skills and qualification match**

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

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

We measure skills and qualification matches by asking employees whether they feel they have the right qualifications for their job and whether they have the skills to cope with their current duties, summarised in Figure 21.

**Figure 21: Qualification and skills matching (%)**



The incidence of overqualification differs according to the qualification levels, occupations and, in consequence, by income (as illustrated in Figure 22). Of those educated below graduate level, 23% feel overqualified, compared with 33% for those educated to undergraduate level and 29% to postgraduate level. Where we do have a large enough sample, we see that retail, hospitality and tourism reported some of the highest overqualification rates.

**Figure 22: Overqualification and skills underuse, by income (%)**



# 8 Effective voice

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

## Key findings

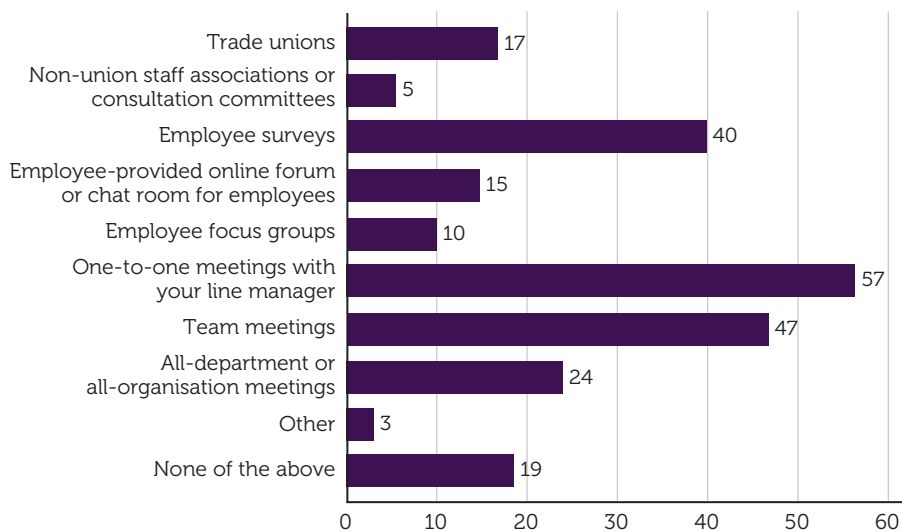
- Nineteen per cent of employees say they have no voice channel at work at all. The availability of voice channels is considerably better in the public sector.
- One-to-one meetings with managers and team meetings are seen as most effective for expressing views. Employee surveys are seen as least effective.
- There has been no improvement in overall voice scores from last year. In fact, managerial openness scores have dropped even further across the public sector.

## Voice channels

We asked employees to tell us about the availability of a range of voice channels in their workplaces. Figure 23 shows that – as in all our *Working Lives Scotland* reports – the most common voice channels are one-to-one meetings with managers and team meetings, available to 57% and 47% of employees respectively. Some 17% of employees reported the availability of a trade union in their workplace. These numbers have remained stable across all five of our reports.

A stubbornly high 19% of employees said they have no voice channel at all. We again see a link to organisation size, with 27% of all employees working in SMEs (2–249 employees) saying they had no voice channel at all, compared with 9% of those in organisations with 250+ employees.

Figure 23: Voice channels available to workers (%)



Furthermore, these differences by organisation size translate into significant differences in the availability of voice channels between the public and private sectors in Scotland. Of private sector employees, 22% reported no voice channels at all, compared with only 9% of public sector employees. This is because 87% of public sector employees work in organisations with more than 500 employees, compared with only 30% of private sector employees.

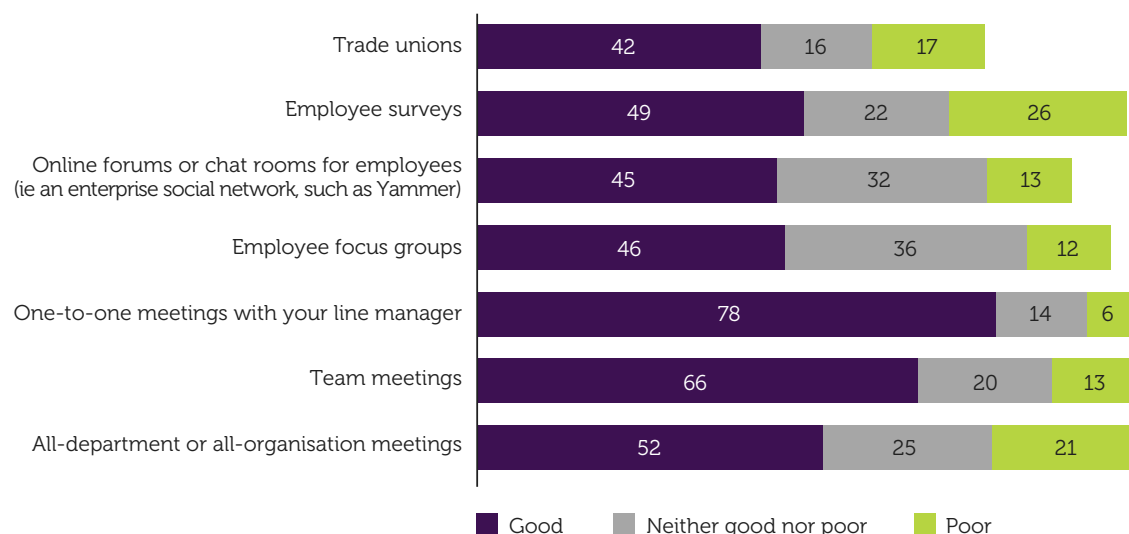
All of the channels examined have better availability in the public sector. The biggest differences in availability of the individual types of channel are observed in trade union channels (55% public sector v 7% private sector), employee surveys (53% public v 37% private) and team meetings (65% public v 41% private).

We again included a series of additional questions around employee voice in this year’s survey to ascertain the demand for voice channels as well as their use and perceived effectiveness. For those who said they did not have any voice channels at work, we asked them to select which ones they would use if they were available to them. Nearly half (49%) said none, indicating a concerning level of disengagement from their workplaces. The most popular channel was one-to-one meetings with managers (25%), followed by team meetings (16%) and employee surveys (14%).

Out of those who had channels available, the majority said they made use of them to express views to senior management, with more than 90% of employees having used manager meetings, team meetings or organisational meetings. Only 52% said they used their trade union, but their purpose is of course broader than just to express views to management.

Figure 24 summarises the perceived effectiveness of the voice channels that employees used, asking how good or poor respondents felt the channels were for expressing views to senior management. Employee surveys stand out as the poorest, followed by all-department or all-organisation meetings – highlighting that these can only be a part of effective voice in organisations.

**Figure 24: Perceived effectiveness of voice channels used (%)**



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

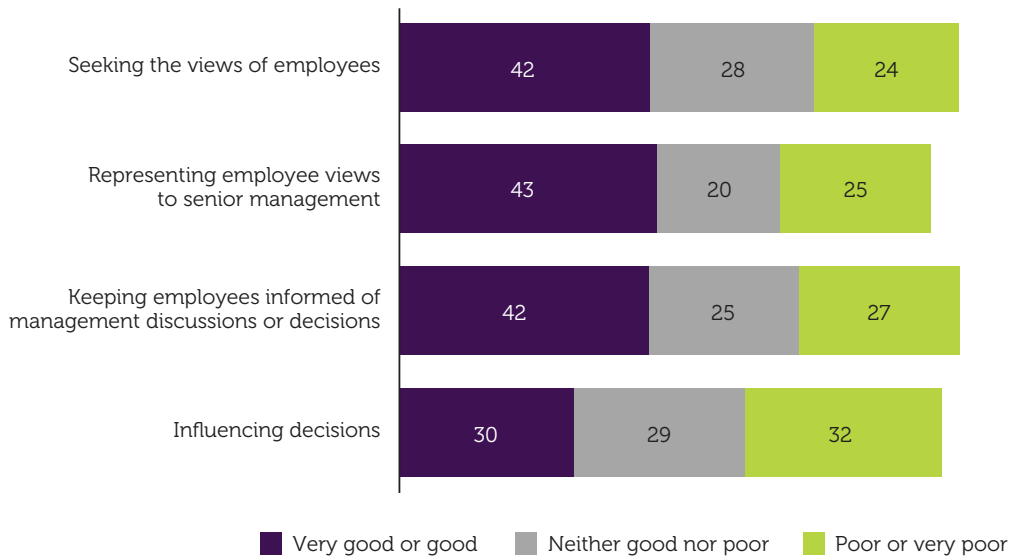


**Employee rating of their representatives**

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

The majority of employees rated their representatives relatively well, with 42% saying they keep employees informed of management discussions or decisions, 43% saying they represent employee views to senior management, and 42% saying they seek the views of employees. These are unchanged from last year. The fourth additional question here shows the gap between consultation and affecting change, with only 30% of employees agreeing representatives are good at influencing decisions – this is the same pattern as we see with managerial voice scores.

**Figure 25: Employee ratings of their representatives (%)**



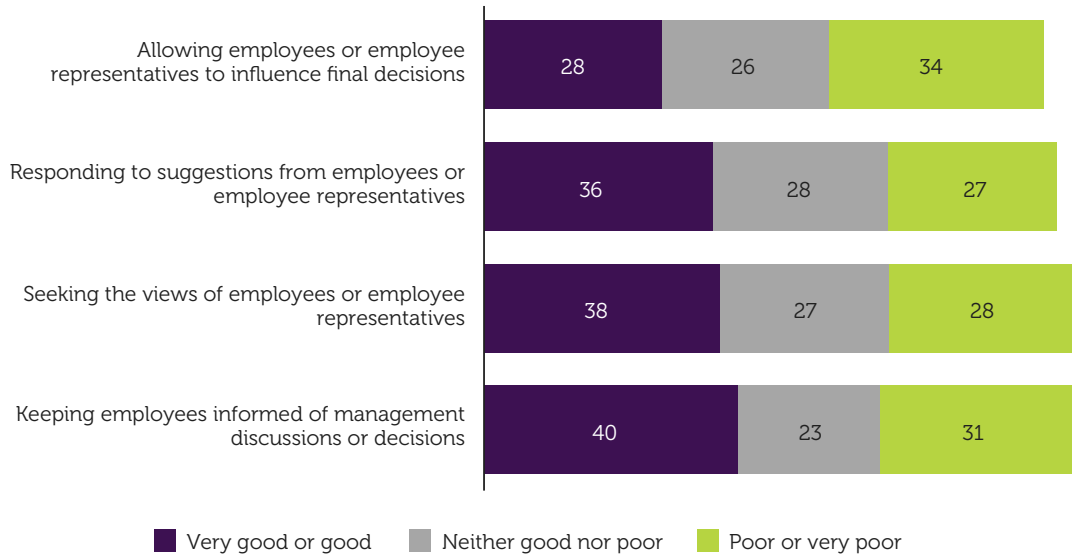
Note: Does not add to 100% because of ‘don’t know’ answers.

**Managerial openness**

For all employees in our survey (excluding the self-employed), we also measure what we call ‘managerial openness’ to measure voice effectiveness. Employees were asked to rate the performance of their manager across four different questions – whether they allow employees (or employee representatives) to influence final decisions, whether they respond to suggestions, whether they seek employee views, and whether they keep employees informed.

Figure 26 summarises the findings, which are comparable with the lows we found last year. Managers were again rated the poorest in the first of the questions, with only 28% of employees rating their managers as good or very good in allowing influence over final decisions – around a third (34%) rated them poor or very poor.

**Figure 26: Employee ratings of their managers (%)**

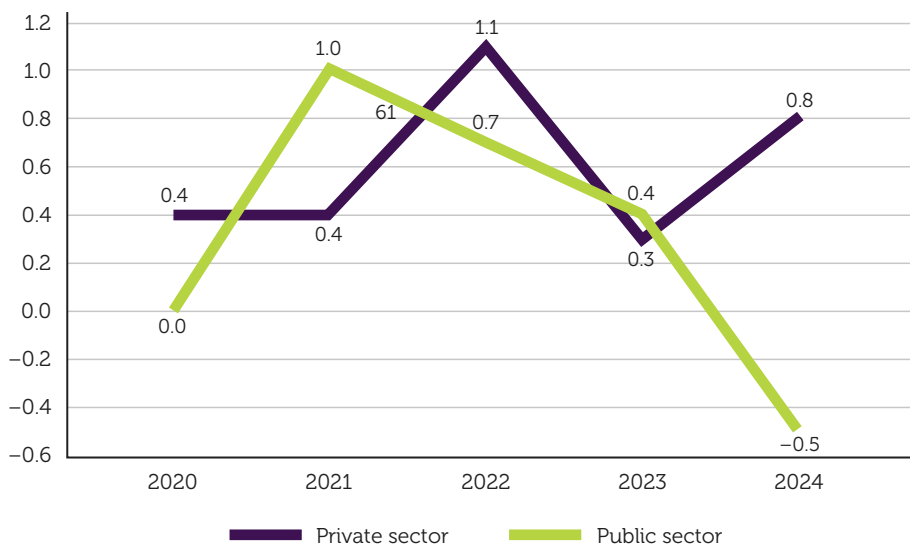


Note: Does not add to 100% because of 'don't know' answers.

Disappointingly, the findings are comparable with last year's survey, confirming that employee perceptions of voice have fallen from their improved post-pandemic levels. However, we also found a divergence in responses by sector. Aligned to some of our other findings in this report, managerial openness scores for public sector employees have continued to fall even further, having dropped to their lowest level recorded so far, as shown in Figure 27.

The survey ran not long after a period of widespread collective action across predominantly public sector workplaces – some of it long-running. Coupled with well-documented budgetary pressures across national and local government, it seems a feeling of discontent may have been heightened. We will not draw conclusions from one year of data, but the trends explored in this report should be of concern.

**Figure 27: Managerial openness scores over time, by sector**



# 9 Conclusions and recommendations

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

Our evidence shows that improving work for employees not only impacts their own wellbeing, but also their job satisfaction, enthusiasm and performance, supporting retention and recruitment. This in turn boosts organisational productivity and the country's economy as a whole. Some of these improvements do not require significant investment, but they start with an understanding of the scale of the problem.

## Respect

The impact of poor health on the labour market is of increasing importance to policy-makers, primarily due to its relationship with economic inactivity. But even for those in employment, the links between workplaces and our health are crucial. We continue to find around a quarter of employees reporting that their work is having a negative impact on their mental or physical health, with many reporting health conditions to which their work contributed.

While workplace relationships are overwhelmingly positive, challenges remain, in particular for remote workers and their relationships with colleagues. In addition, more than a quarter of all employees are reporting some workplace conflict.

## Recommendations

- ✓ Make employee health and wellbeing an organisational priority, including a focus on management training, to allow honest conversations around mental, physical, social or financial wellbeing.
- ✓ Ensure that disabled employees receive appropriate and relevant support, especially from their managers.
- ✓ Minimise scope for inappropriate behaviours through training and open organisational culture, while putting in place policies to manage and resolve conflict.

## Security

Job security remains high due to the tight labour market, and we no longer record differences across income bands. Job and life satisfaction are also very positive, although those on the lowest incomes respond slightly more negatively to both questions. Cost-of-living challenges remain, with only around half of all employees saying they can keep up with their bills without any difficulties.

While we don't see any significant changes in subjective measures of pay and work centrality year on year, looking at the five-year *Working Lives Scotland* time series suggests that public sector employees are growing more detached from their jobs, with an increasing proportion feeling their jobs are just for the money and no more.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Review your financial wellbeing policy and benefits packages to make sure those who need it most are supported.
- ✓ Train managers to have conversations around financial wellbeing and ensure they know how to signpost resources.
- ✓ Articulate and continually emphasise your organisational values to boost employee engagement.

### Opportunity

While home and hybrid working remains embedded across workplaces, there has been a steady decrease in those who primarily work from home, opening a gap between current ways of working and future preferences (which have stayed the same). Nearly half of all Scottish employees are either unable or do not want to work from home at all – it is crucial that flexibility extends beyond remote working.

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

### Recommendations

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

## Fulfilment

Job design elements are some of the most persistent job quality aspects – job autonomy or job complexity have not shifted over the last five years. Similarly, we also find workloads that are too high, and these are not confined to high- or low-paying jobs. We see good access to adequate resources, although around a fifth of all employees say they don't get enough training to do their jobs well.

The meaningfulness of jobs remains an aspect of job quality where public and voluntary sector workers continue to do significantly better, albeit with some signs of weakening for those across the public sector. We still see high levels of skills and qualification mismatches, which act as a break on productivity, but also impact individual wellbeing. A third of graduates feel overqualified for their roles, suggesting a mismatch between our skills development supply and labour market demand.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Understand skills mismatches within your organisation and provide opportunities for upskilling and career development for all staff.
- ✓ Ensure managers themselves are trained regularly, and that they have both the skills and time to manage their staff.
- ✓ Think carefully about job design and explore how job autonomy and complexity could be boosted across roles.

## Effective voice

Access to voice channels has remained relatively stable across all five *Working Lives Scotland* reports. Concerningly, a persistent fifth of all employees said they do not have any voice channels at work at all – with even bigger gaps for employees in the smallest of organisations – something that can be easily addressed without financial investment.

In addition to access to voice channels, there are disappointing findings around the *quality* of employee voice. The drops in scores we recorded last year have unfortunately remained. Disappointingly, and in line with some of the other findings in this report, managerial openness scores for employees in the public sector have dropped to record lows.

### Recommendations

- ✓ Look at the full range of voice channel options, as well as the perceived effectiveness thereof, and ensure your employees have access to and use the best channels for your organisation.
- ✓ Actively engage your employees more often and in the right way, while ensuring managers are trained to have regular, meaningful conversations.
- ✓ Do not just use employee surveys to tick the 'employee voice' box – they are not seen as effective and should be supplemented by regular, smaller and more direct conversations.

# 10 Appendix

## Background to the survey

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

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

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

## Survey design

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

The 2024 *UK Working Lives* survey was conducted between 8 January and 15 February 2024 and gave a sample of 5,496 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 fifth time, we have a boosted sub-sample for Scotland of 1,006, which has been weighted to be representative of all Scottish working adults (aged 18+).

## Good work and fair work

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

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



The survey we are analysing in this report examines 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.

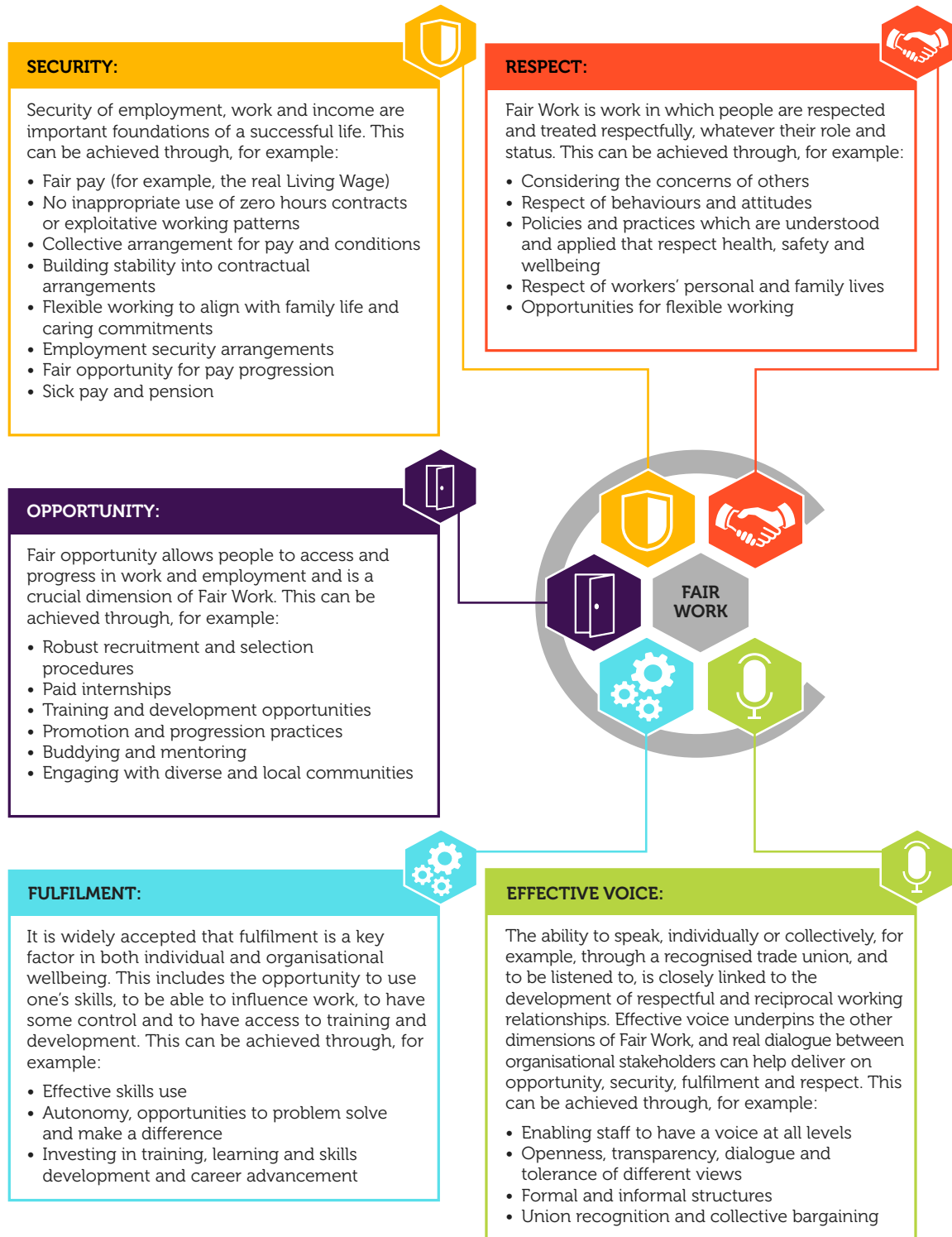
**Table 1: The CIPD's seven dimensions of job quality**

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



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

**The Fair Work Convention’s Fair Work Framework**



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



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