

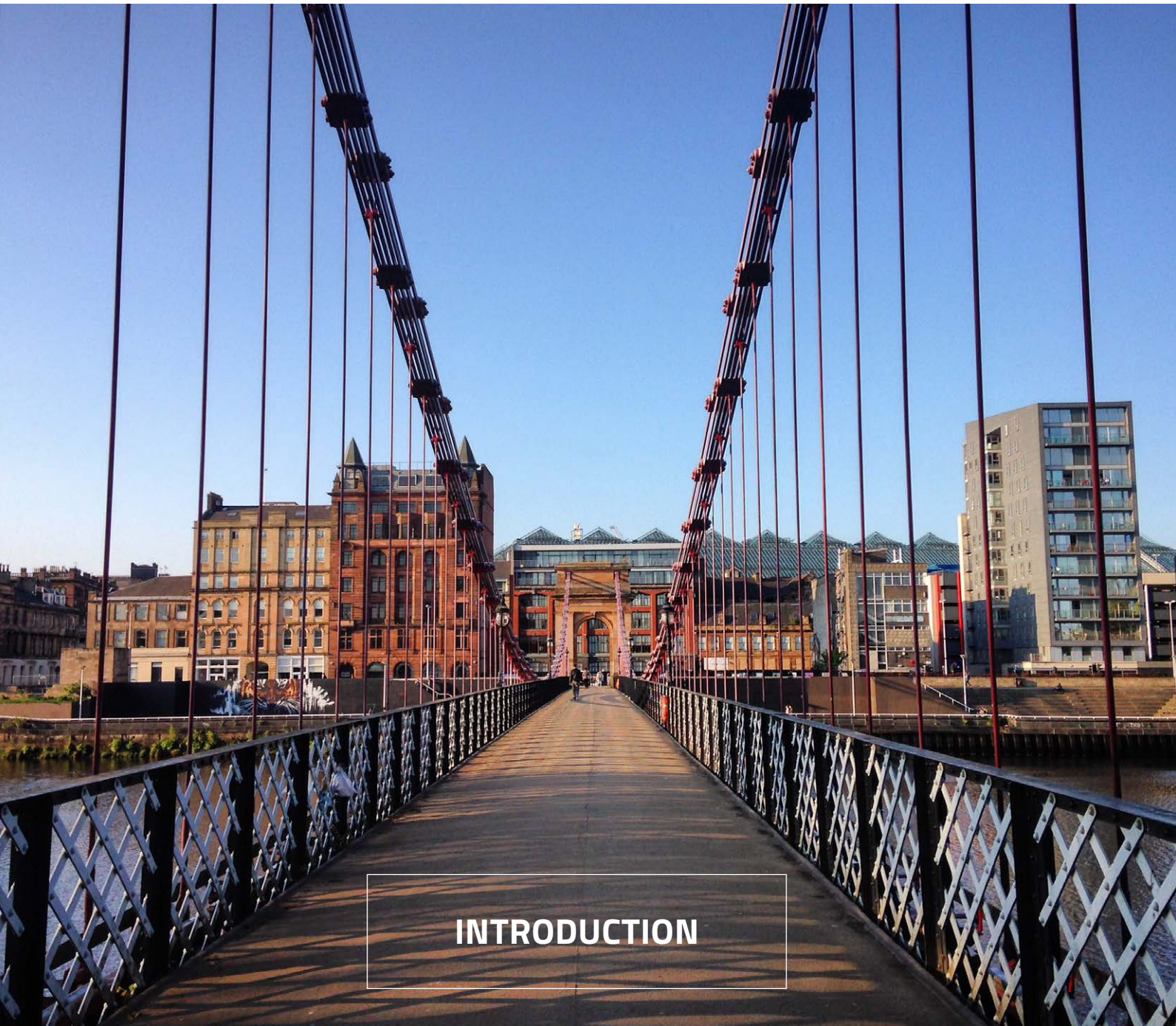
THE TIMEWISE SCOTTISH FLEXIBLE JOBS INDEX 2021

An annual index of the proportion of Scottish jobs
advertised with flexible working options

Research partner:

Gartner

Commissioned by:



INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT OF FLEXIBLE HIRING IN SCOTLAND

This is our third Flexible Jobs Index for the Scottish Government, examining the proportion of jobs that offer flexible working at the point of hire.

The report is part of the Scottish Government's drive to create a fairer jobs market, and follows a recent requirement, added to its Fair Work First criteria in October 2021, for public sector employers and those bidding for public sector contracts to offer flexible and family friendly working practices from day one of

employment. The Government has also developed a range of guidance and support to help Scottish employers across all sectors to adapt to increased flexibility.

This latest Index provides an update on progress in the Scottish jobs market in 2021, tracking changes in flexible recruitment and providing a benchmark against which employers can measure their own practice.

A ROUTE TO INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Flexible recruitment can give businesses a competitive edge in attracting new talent. Having tasted flexible working during the pandemic, workers are keen to hang on to it and are placing a high value on flex when they search for new jobs¹. And employers certainly need to play every card they can in the fight for talent – the recruitment market is in crisis, with recent research finding that almost half of Scottish employers have been finding vacancies more difficult to fill².

There is an inclusivity concern at play too, as the people who most need access to flexible jobs tend to be women (who are still regarded as primary carers, and include many lone mothers), older workers and those with health and disability issues. Without flexible jobs to apply to, they become trapped in their current roles, often below their skill level; many even quit the workplace altogether. Employers can reach out to this wider talent pool by offering flexible jobs from day one – and aside from filling vacancies, may see other improvements in the form of increased equality and a lower gender pay gap. There are potential socio-economic benefits for Scotland as a whole, too, as there is a risk that some people whose job prospects are limited by the lack of flexible opportunities will remain either locked out of work or trapped in low paid flexible jobs and stuck in poverty.

The benefits of flexible recruitment are clear. So why does progress remain slow?

A RETURN TO SLOW GROWTH, FOLLOWING THE BOOST RESULTING FROM THE PANDEMIC

In 2020, our Scottish Flexible Jobs Index saw flexible recruitment jump from 19% pre-pandemic to 24% by the end of the year. But in 2021, despite continuing off-and-on periods of enforced or recommended home-working, the rate has only increased to 27%. It is baffling that job adverts are not reflecting the massive switch to hybrid patterns that are now common practice in workplaces – research shows that in 2021, 67% of Scottish employees were working flexibly in some way³.

The gulf between high demand for flexible jobs and low supply is a sad loss to many employers – they may be missing out on many candidates who will only apply for work if they know they can have flexibility⁴.

TIME BASED FLEX IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS HOME-WORKING

The recent preoccupation with hybrid working has brought welcome change to many people in office based roles. But employers need to think about their frontline workers too, for whom home-working is not possible. Only 2% of job adverts in Scotland offer flexible hours (variable start and finish times) or flexible shift patterns, yet time-based solutions could give fairer access to flex for people in sectors such as health, social care, retail, hospitality, construction, logistics and manufacturing. If home-working for office-based roles continues to grow, we face the risk that the workforce will become divided into flexible working ‘haves and have nots’, with those in frontline roles being left behind and inequalities widening even more.

TIME FOR A STEP CHANGE

What is on offer at the point of hire has never been more out of kilter with what is happening in workplaces. And this at a time when the UK Government is consulting on the ‘the right to ask for flex from day one’.

The advantages of flexible recruitment in terms of talent attraction, worker well-being, inclusivity and a reduced gender pay gap should be carrot enough for employers. But with possible legislation coming down the line, it really is time to act now.

Of course, adapting to flex takes time and investment in training to get it right. Fortunately for Scottish employers, they have a Government which is committed to the social and economic benefits of fair flexible work, and will support their journey with a range of tools, guidance and case studies.

We hope this report will encourage more employers in Scotland to extend their flexible working practices to new hires, by clearly welcoming applications from flexible workers throughout the recruitment process.



Emma Stewart

Co-Founder and Development Director,
Timewise

FOREWORD

The opportunity to increase access to flexible working has never been greater than now. During the pandemic, many of us have had to work in ways that were once deemed to be too difficult or not possible. In many areas of the economy, Scottish businesses have adapted quickly and effectively to home-working and hybrid working.

The barriers to flexible working have been torn down by the pandemic, which has proved that it IS possible. And studies have shown that it is good for business and the economy: 67% of senior Scottish business leaders who offer flexible working say it has a positive impact on productivity and 66% reported reduced sickness and absenteeism.⁵

Holding on to the recent gains in flexible working makes good business sense. But it is also critical to a future workplace where work is fair, as a lack of flexibility is the root of much workplace inequality. For example, one of the primary drivers of the gender pay gap is women's disproportionate employment in low-paid part-time jobs (restricted by their high share of unpaid caring responsibilities). There is a clear link between in work poverty caused by low pay and/or low hours and child poverty.⁶ A greater supply of well-paid, quality flexible jobs can therefore enable women and carers to enter, progress in and retain employment. This will in turn increase household income and tackle child poverty – a key priority for the Scottish Government.

Flexible working can also support students, those approaching retirement, and those with long term health conditions; it can also promote good mental health and well-being.

Meanwhile, the business benefits in terms of staff retention have long been accepted. Flexibility supports existing employees to continue to work in some form rather than take sick leave, a career break

or leave their job altogether, thus keeping valuable skills and experience in the business, and avoiding the recruitment costs of replacing them.

And now flexible recruitment is coming firmly into the spotlight. It's no longer enough to offer flexibility to existing employees – businesses need to extend it to the point of hire to attract the widest possible pool of candidates. In January 2022 over 38% of Scottish businesses reported difficulties filling vacancies⁷; advertising jobs with options to work flexibly could go some way to alleviating the talent supply shortage. Yet this report shows that too few employers are taking this easy step to attract new staff.

This year, to address the broad impact of the Covid pandemic on Scotland's labour market and workplaces, we will refresh our Fair Work Action Plan. We will set out the steps needed to achieve our shared vision: that by 2025, people in Scotland will have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, well-being and prosperity. I believe that flexible working is an important part of that, and indeed it is already embedded as a criteria in the Scottish Government's landmark Fair Work⁸ First approach.

I thank Timewise for producing this report and all they do to promote flexible working. Making flexible opportunities clear in job advertisements would encourage more transparency, reduce stigma and increase applications from a more diverse pool of candidates. If we can utilise all the experience, skills and talent that Scotland's people have to offer, that can only be a good thing.



Richard Lochhead

Minister for Just Transition, Fair Work and Employment

AIMS, METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

AIMS OF THE INDEX

- To fill a knowledge gap in job market statistics in Scotland, by reporting on advertised flexible vacancies where flexible working is offered as a positive benefit to candidates. By updating the index annually, we are tracking progress in flexible recruitment.
- To use this insight to build a business and social case for employers in Scotland, to encourage change in recruitment practices. The index enables employers to benchmark their flexible recruitment practices against the averages for Scotland – by salary, role type, region and types of flexibility offered.
- To provide new data that can be used by Scottish labour market intermediaries, such as recruitment agencies, local authorities and business enterprise agencies, to influence employer action on flexible working and hiring

METHODOLOGY

The Scottish Flexible Jobs Index 2021 is based on analysis of over 340k job adverts from over 450 job boards. The data source is Gartner Talent Neuron, and jobs were filtered using 17 keywords relating to different forms of flexible working. Data adjustments have been made to exclude job adverts where flexible working is mentioned, but not as an employee benefit.

ANALYSIS PERIODS

Job adverts have been analysed across 2 periods, to identify any differences to the flexible jobs market during lockdown (differences were to be expected, for example in the proportion of job adverts offering home-working):

- 01 January to 25 April 2021 (this was a period of lockdown in Scotland, due to the pandemic)
- 26 April to 30 November 2021 (post lockdown, when business restrictions were lifted).

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A 'FLEXIBLE JOB'?

In this report, 'flexible job' means any advertised vacancy that is either part-time or offers home-working, flexible start and finish times, flexible shift patterns, remote working, term-time, or job-share. Additionally, jobs that use the catch-all terms 'flexible working' or 'agile working' were tracked; these tend to be full-time jobs where the employer is open to flexible working patterns by arrangement with the candidate. Zero hours jobs are not included in the analysis, as the aim is to focus on 'good' flexibility.

A NOTE ON SALARIES

Whenever a salary is mentioned in this report, it means the full-time equivalent salary. So, for part-time jobs, it means the salary that would be earned if the role were full-time, and not the actual part-time salary.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE OVERALL PICTURE

- The proportion of Scottish job adverts that offer flexible working as an employee benefit rose to 27% in 2021, from 25% in the second half of 2020.
- This modest increase follows a boost to flexible recruitment that happened during 2020, when the rate jumped to 25% from the pre-pandemic level of 19%, following enforced periods of 'home-working where possible'.
- Early signs therefore suggest a return to relatively small annual increments, rather than a rush for employers to embrace new ways of working.
- With fewer than 3 in 10 jobs offering flexible working, there is plenty of catching up to do to match what happens in the workplace, where 7 in 10 employees now work flexibly⁹.
- Recruiters are missing a trick, as candidates are increasingly looking for flexibility from the point of hire¹⁰. Failing to offer it means that a proportion of potential candidates will not apply¹¹.
- And many workers are excluded from the jobs market, as 7 in 10 jobs are closed to them. The groups who need flex most are those with caring commitments (mostly women), lone parents (also mostly women), older workers, and those with health conditions. So failing to offer part-time and flexible options at the point of hire creates setbacks to building an inclusive labour market.

DIFFERENCES BY SALARY

- Jobseekers' access to flexible working is highest amongst vacancies paid less than £20k (39% of such job adverts offered flex, the vast majority in the form of part-time work).
- Availability of flex then drops by almost half, to 21% for jobs paid £20k-£34k. This presents problems in raising living standards for people who need to work flexibly, as they become trapped in low-paid part-time roles and are unable to progress to the next level.

- Thereafter, the rate begins to climb again slightly, reaching a peak at 27% for jobs paid between £60k and £79k. However, part-time opportunities are very rare at this level, excluding people from the jobs market if they need to work reduced hours.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FLEXIBILITY

- The three most common forms of flexible working offered in Scotland are part-time (at 12% in the most recent period), the catch-all term 'flexible working' (10%) and home-working (8%).
- Offers of home-working are surprisingly low, given research findings that 63% of employers planned to increase their use of hybrid working, and 45% planned to increase their use of 100% home-working¹². Many employers are clearly not extending their new working patterns to candidates at the point of hire, or not thinking to say so in their job adverts.
- Offers of non-specific 'flexible working' are unhelpful to candidates, who are usually seeking a specific type of flex¹³. Employers would do well to be more explicit in their job adverts about what is possible for the role: part-time, home-working, or flexibility around hours.
- Flexibility around working hours is rarely offered in job adverts. There is huge scope for improvement here, as it's an important option for people in jobs where home-working is not possible – and 43% of Scottish employees work in such roles¹⁴. Flexibility around hours is also helpful for people with caring responsibilities or health issues.
- A two-tier jobs market of flexible haves and have-nots is revealed by disparities in the types of flex offered at different salary levels: part-time workers are virtually excluded from the jobs market at salaries above £35k; while low-paid jobs rarely offer softer forms of flex such as home-working, which can improve work-life balance without compromising on pay.

FLEXIBILITY BY ROLE CATEGORY

- Availability of flexible jobs varies by role category. Office-based roles have seen the greatest growth in flexibility over the last 2 years, because of increased home-working; for example finance (31% of job adverts now offer flex), HR (31%) and marketing (33%).
- Role categories where part-time or flexible shift patterns have been developed to cover long hours continue to have relatively high rates of flex; for example retail/sales roles (28%), medical/health (31%) and social services (35%). However, it's important to note that shift patterns do not always offer 'good' flexibility, as workers often have little input into them.
- Other roles which can't easily offer home-working are getting left behind. The ratio remains stubbornly low for construction (10%), maintenance/repair (11%) and manufacturing (8%). In addition to barriers to home-working, gender inequality may be at play here.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

- The availability of flexible jobs varies widely across Scotland, from 36% in Argyll and Bute to only 16% in Aberdeenshire (during the most recent, post-lockdown period).
- The wide variations may reflect different economic strengths of the different regions – for example cities with high proportions of professional office-based roles, or regions where tourism is strong and flex rates are led by the hospitality sector.

WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYERS DO?

- With the recruitment market in crisis, Scottish employers urgently need to consider new ways to attract candidates. Flexible recruitment should be high on their agenda, as many people now expect to be able to work flexibly and are actively seeking employers who will welcome this¹⁵.
- They also need to take early action to be ready for government directives on flexible recruitment, with the UK Government currently consulting on the 'right to ask for flex from day one', and the Scottish

Government already requiring it in its Fair Work First criteria, for public sector employers and those bidding for public sector contracts.

- Increased flexibility has now proved workable in many sectors, as a result of changed practices during the pandemic. In order to avoid reverting back, a proactive approach is needed which places flexible working at the centre of employer brand, including in job adverts and throughout the whole recruitment process. Employers also need to invest time and budget in management training.
- People in frontline roles must not be forgotten. For roles where home-working is not possible, employers can explore time-based flexibility, such as flexible start/finish times and giving people more input and advance notice into shift rosters. Having a degree of autonomy and control over working patterns is beneficial for everyone, and provides an attractive offer at recruitment.

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS DO?

- BEIS is currently consulting on the right to request flexible work from day one, and the Scottish Government's Fair Work First criteria now includes a requirement to offer flexible and family friendly working practices from day one of employment. Both are positive moves and provide a good 'stick' for flexible recruitment, but employers need a 'carrot' in the form of guidance, advice and support.
- Much support is available already, but many employers are unaware of it. Better signposting is needed; for example to resources provided by Timewise, Flexibility Works and CIPD Scotland, and to a new network of Fair Flex change agents available across Scotland to advise on how to improve working and hiring.
- Scottish policymakers could use some of the £10m allocated for the four day week trial (announced by the First Minister in 2021) to scope and trial other suitable forms of flexible working for frontline workers in sectors such as hospitality, construction, agriculture and social care; this would help create flexible opportunities where a 4 day week is not as viable.

YEAR ON YEAR GROWTH

Fig 1: PROPORTION OF SCOTTISH JOB ADVERTS OFFERING FLEXIBLE WORKING, DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF EACH YEAR

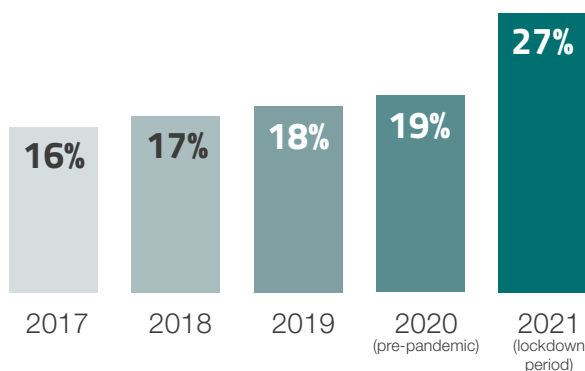
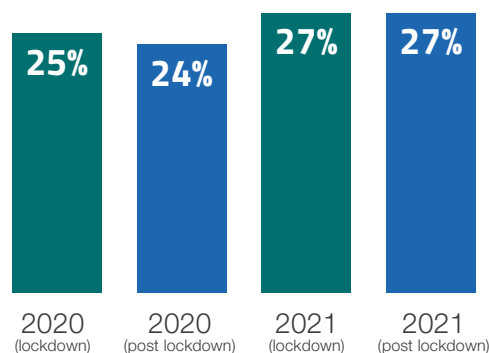


Fig 2: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERIODS OF LOCKDOWN AND EASED RESTRICTIONS, OVER 2020 AND 2021



KEY FINDINGS

- The proportion of job adverts that offered flexible working as an employee benefit had risen to 19% by the first quarter of 2020, before the impact of Covid-19 (as shown in figure 1), continuing the painfully slow progress in flexible recruitment over the previous 3 years.
- But by early 2021, following enforced periods of ‘home-working where possible’, the proportion of flex jobs had taken a significant leap to 27%. The lion’s share of the increase had happened early on in the pandemic, during the first lockdown of 24 March to 14 July 2020, when the flex jobs rate had already reached 25% (as shown in figure 2).
- Both in 2020 and in 2021, the periods of lockdown versus periods of eased/ no restrictions saw little difference in the proportion of flexible jobs (figure 2).
- However, there has been a modest increase in the level of flexible jobs in 2021 compared to 2020. 27% of job adverts (fewer than 3 in 10 jobs) now offer flexible working.

TIMEWISE INSIGHTS

- **Lower than expected increase in flexible jobs:** During the pandemic, many workplaces have transformed to offer extensive home-working and also increased flexible hours of work¹⁶. The proportion of job adverts that offer flexibility therefore shows a surprisingly low rate of growth.
- **A return to snail’s pace progress?** Following the boost forced by the pandemic, flexible recruitment seems to have settled down again at the new, higher level. The early signs suggest a return to relatively small annual increments, rather than a rush for employers to embrace new ways of working.



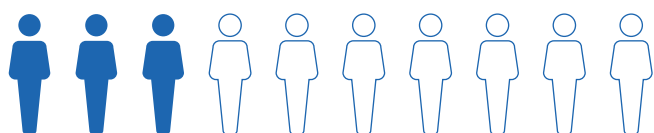
SUPPLY LAGS BEHIND DEMAND



7 in 10 people want flex



7 in 10 people work flex



3 in 10 jobs offer flex

7 in 10 Scottish workers want to work flexibly¹⁷ and by 2021, partly because of home-working during the pandemic, that same proportion were lucky enough to do so¹⁸. Multiple recent research studies¹⁹ indicate that flexible working is becoming an expectation rather than a wish, and that many people now seek it at the point of hire.

Yet against this high demand for flexible working, our Index shows that fewer than 3 in 10 jobs in Scotland are being advertised with options to work flexibly.

Supply of flexible jobs is less than half the level of demand.



TIMEWISE INSIGHTS

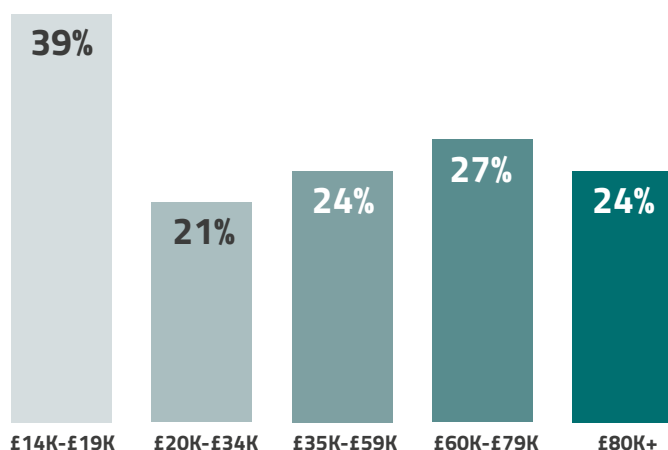
Flexible hiring is a key tool to boost job

applications: Multiple research studies²⁰ provide evidence that the vast majority of people want to work flexibly in some way, and that they are beginning to demand it at the point of hire. At the same time, research by Timewise has shown that failing to offer flexibility in job adverts means that some candidates will not apply²¹. That's an inexplicable strategy in the current recruitment climate, where jobs are plentiful and candidate applications are sluggish²².

Improving job mobility and equality: The low proportion of flexible jobs causes a block in job mobility for people who are only able to work if they can find a flexible role: 7 in 10 jobs are closed to them. The most disadvantaged groups are those with caring commitments (mostly women, and including lone parents), older workers, and those with health conditions. So failing to offer part-time and flexible options at the point of hire creates set-backs to building an inclusive labour market.

FLEXIBLE JOBS BY SALARY

PROPORTION OF JOBS ADVERTISED WITH FLEXIBLE WORKING, BY SALARY LEVEL



KEY FINDINGS

- Jobseekers' access to flexible working was significantly higher amongst the lowest paid vacancies – below £20k, 39% of job adverts offered flex (of which around 3 in 4 are part-time jobs). It's worth noting that this is a considerably higher rate than seen last year, when the rate was 30% from July to December 2020. The sudden increase may be linked to the expansion of low-paid flexible roles as the economy emerges from the pandemic, for example in sectors such as hospitality and retail.
- Availability of flex then drops by almost half, to 21% for jobs paid £20k-£34k.
- The rate then begins to climb again slightly, reaching a peak at 27% for jobs paid between £60k and £79k.

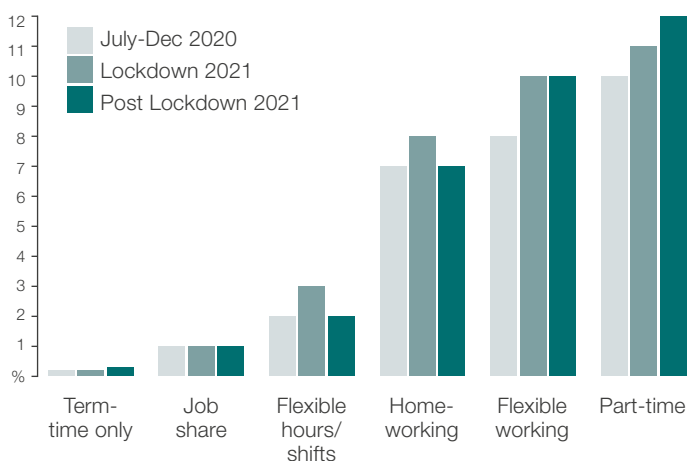


TIMEWISE INSIGHTS

- The huge drop in the availability of flexible working, for jobs paid above £20k, is a continuing concern. It presents problems in raising living standards for people who need to work flexibly, as they become trapped in low-paid flexible roles and are unable to progress to the next level.
- As will be seen later in this report, the high flex rate of 39% for jobs paid less than £20k is largely linked to the availability of part-time work at this level. Unequal access to different types of flexibility at different salary levels is a contributory factor to a 'two tier' workforce of flexible haves and have-nots.

WHICH TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARE MOST COMMON?

ANALYSIS BY SALARY LEVEL, FOR KEY FLEX TYPES



KEY FINDINGS

- In 2020, as in previous years, the two most common forms of flexible working offered in Scotland were part-time (at 10%) and the catch-all term ‘flexible working’ (8%). Most jobs offering ‘flexible working’ are full-time jobs where the employer is open to unspecified forms of flex, by negotiation with the candidate.
- Home-working had become a third significant form of flex by July-Dec 2020, doubling its rate to 7% following the impact of the pandemic.
- Since then, during 2021, there have been only marginal shifts in the prevalence of the three main forms of flex:
 - » Part-time has grown its share slightly, reaching 12% in the most recent period.
 - » Flexible working grew to 10% during lockdown 2021, but has remained the same since then.
 - » Home-working grew by one percentage point during lockdown, but then fell back again to 7%.

TIMEWISE INSIGHTS

Surprisingly low rates of home-working:

The incidence of home-working is low, given the huge shift that has happened in workplaces. CIPD research in April 2021 found that 63% of employers planned to increase their use of hybrid working, and 45% planned to increase their use of total home-working 5 days a week²³. Yet many employers are not extending their new working patterns to candidates at the point of hire, or not thinking to say so in their job adverts. In a world where many candidates are seeking home-working, employers are missing a trick.

Growth in part-time: The slight increases may reflect the types of jobs being advertised as Scotland recovers from the pandemic (part-time is relatively common in retail and hospitality roles).

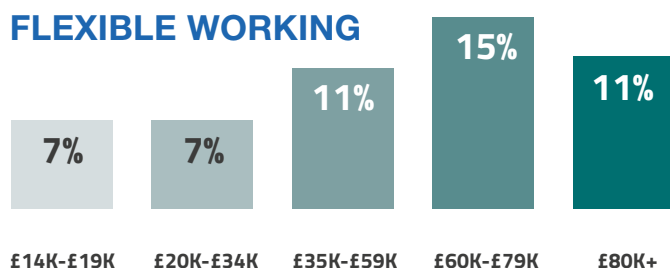
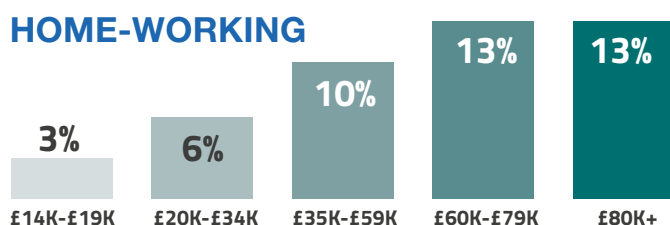
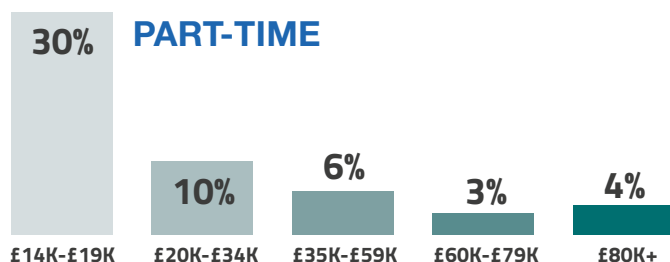
‘Flexible working’ is too generic a term:

Around 1 in 10 job adverts offer flexible working, but without specifying which type. While this is better than not mentioning flex at all, recent research by Timewise Jobs²⁴ found that generic statements are treated warily by many flexible jobseekers. This is particularly true for those who need flexibility due to caring responsibilities or health issues, who need to be confident that flexible working will genuinely be available, and want to know the specific type of flex on offer (eg part-time vs flexible hours).

Time based flex matters too: Flexibility on hours and flexible shift patterns are rarely offered in job adverts (only the health and social care sectors are an exception to this). With many people working in frontline roles in Scotland, being able to have some input and control over WHEN work is scheduled is a key consideration, as home-working is not an option. Timewise pilots have shown this has benefits for well-being and motivation levels²⁵.

DIFFERENCES IN TYPES OF FLEX BY SALARY LEVEL

ANALYSIS BY SALARY LEVEL, FOR KEY FLEX TYPES



KEY FINDINGS

Looking at snapshots of the three main types of flex, a startling picture emerges of disparity across salary levels:

- Part-time is common amongst the lowest paid jobs (30%), but falls by a full two thirds above £20k (to 10%) and is offered in only 3% to 4% of job adverts at £60k or more.
- Conversely, both home-working and flexible working are disproportionately offered at higher salary levels. Home-working is only an option in 3% of job adverts for roles paid less than £20k.

TIMEWISE INSIGHTS

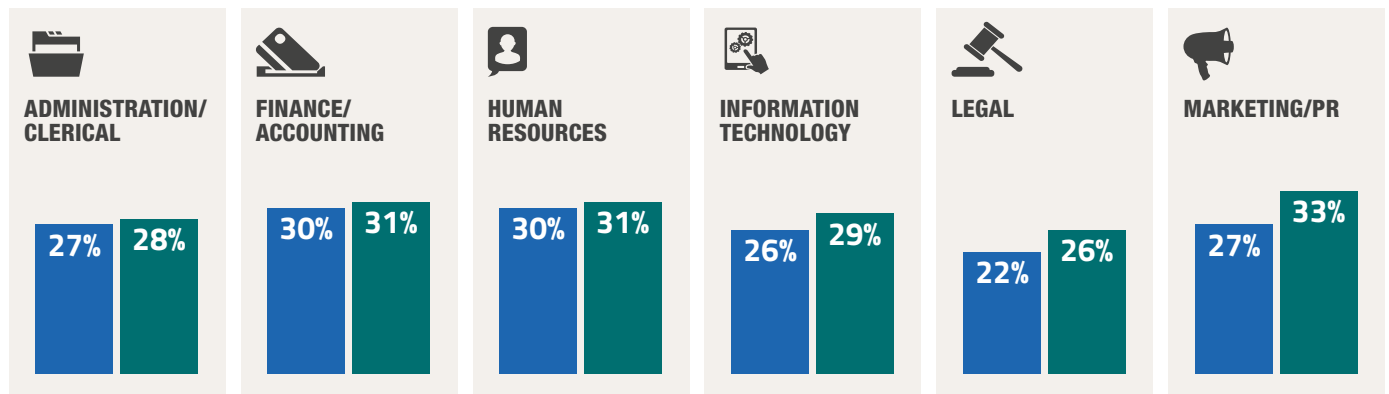
A two-tier jobs market of flexible haves and have-nots is revealed by the differences in types of flex offered by salary level:

- **Part-time pay penalty:** There is little scope for progression for people needing part-time work in Scotland, as it is rarely available at higher salary levels. And at low salary levels, mothers are often negligibly better off in work than not, due to childcare costs. Advertising more quality jobs as part-time could have a significant impact on both tackling child poverty and reducing the gender pay gap. It can also benefit employers, especially SMEs rebuilding their businesses, as it provides access to a wider local talent pool (predominantly women) whilst keeping a lid on the wage bill.
- **Home-working is for high earners:** Home-working is a softer form of flexibility than part-time, yet it supports work-life balance without compromising take-home pay. It is disproportionately available at higher salary levels. This disparity in the jobs market is mirrored in the workplace – research by the CIPD found that only 23% of Scottish workers on £20k or below have full or partial access to home-working, compared to 90% of those on 60k or above²⁶.
- **Bespoke job design is needed to improve access to flex:** There are clear operational constraints that explain why different types flex are offered for different roles, and this correlates with salary levels; low-paid roles often have fixed hours and locations, while higher paid roles are often more autonomous. However, it is possible to redesign roles and rosters to accommodate some form of flex for all roles, as Timewise pilots have shown²⁷.

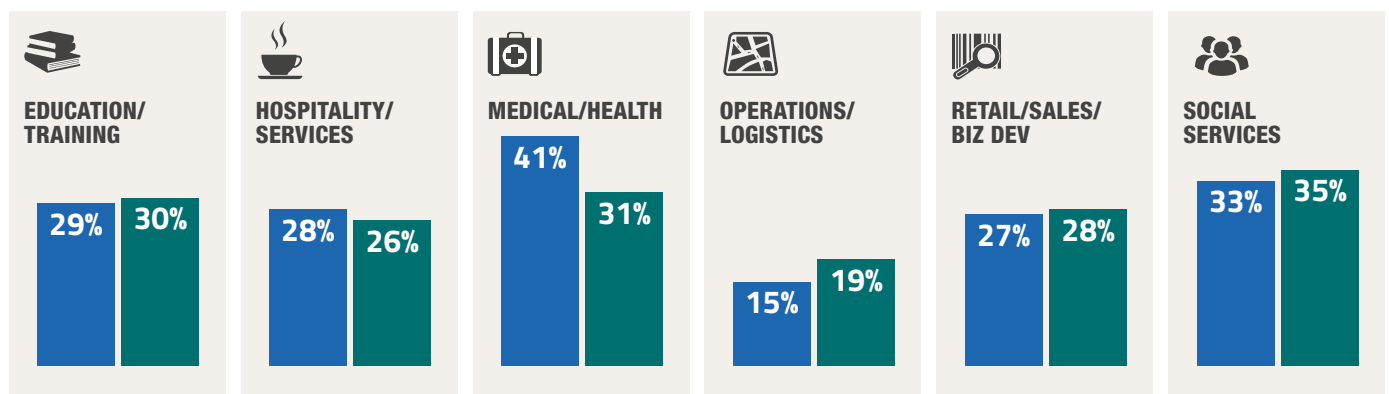
FLEXIBILITY VARIES WIDELY BY TYPE OF ROLE

PROPORTION OF JOBS ADVERTISED WITH FLEXIBLE WORKING, BY ROLE CATEGORY

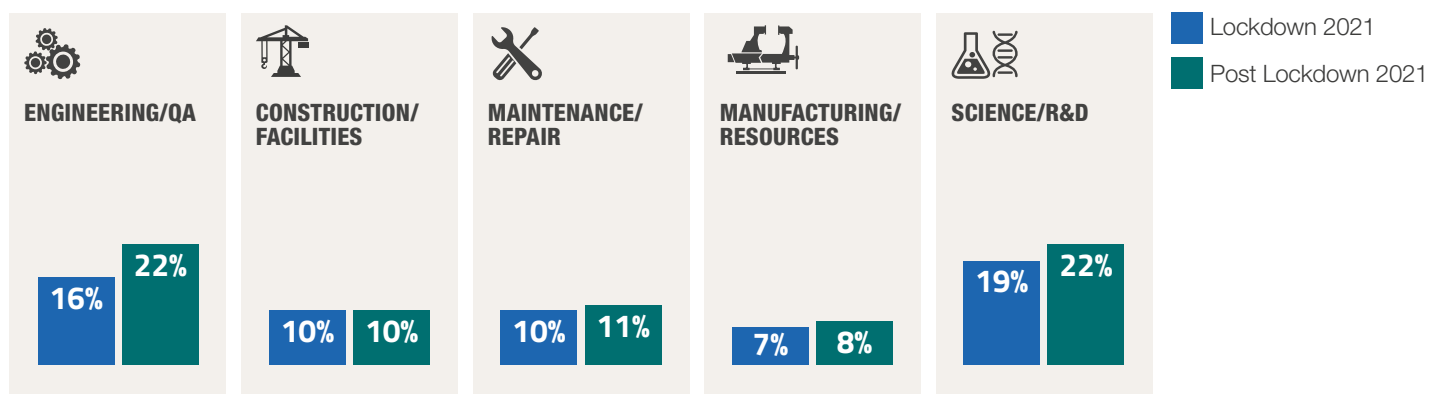
A) PREDOMINANTLY OFFICE BASED ROLES



B) 24/7 OR IRREGULAR HOURS ROLES, WHERE PART-TIME OR SHIFT ARRANGEMENTS ARE COMMON



C) NON-OFFICE ROLES WHERE FLEXIBLE OPPORTUNITIES ARE POOR



FLEXIBILITY VARIES WIDELY BY TYPE OF ROLE

KEY FINDINGS

Role categories are polarised in their availability of flexibility at the point of hire:

- Office based roles, which can easily adapt to home-working, have seen significant increases since the pandemic, and are generally on an upward trajectory. Within this group, only admin and HR appear to be flatlining. Finance shows the most rapid growth – up from 23% in 2020 to 31% in the most recent period.
- There have always been sectors with long or irregular working hours, where operational demands are met by flexible shifts or a jigsaw of part-time workers. The proportion of flexible jobs in these categories is generally at or above average, with small ups and downs between the different periods. The only exception is operations/logistics, where the flex rate is increasing rapidly, but remains below average (19% in the most recent period).
- A third group of non-office roles are being left behind, with stubbornly low rates of flexible jobs. Availability is particularly poor in construction, manufacturing and maintenance/repair. Engineering and science fare a little better (both with a rate of 22% in the most recent period).
- The high rate of 41% for medical/health roles during lockdown 2021 needs an explanation. This is a blip – the rate was previously 34% in 2020, and subsequently fell back to 31%. Medical/health is the largest volume category, accounting for over 1 in 5 of all job adverts in Scotland during lockdown 2021. What happens in medical/health therefore impacts the overall average flex rate for Scotland, which (if medical roles were removed from the mix) would have been 23% during lockdown, increasing to 26% thereafter (rather than being a flat 27% for both periods).

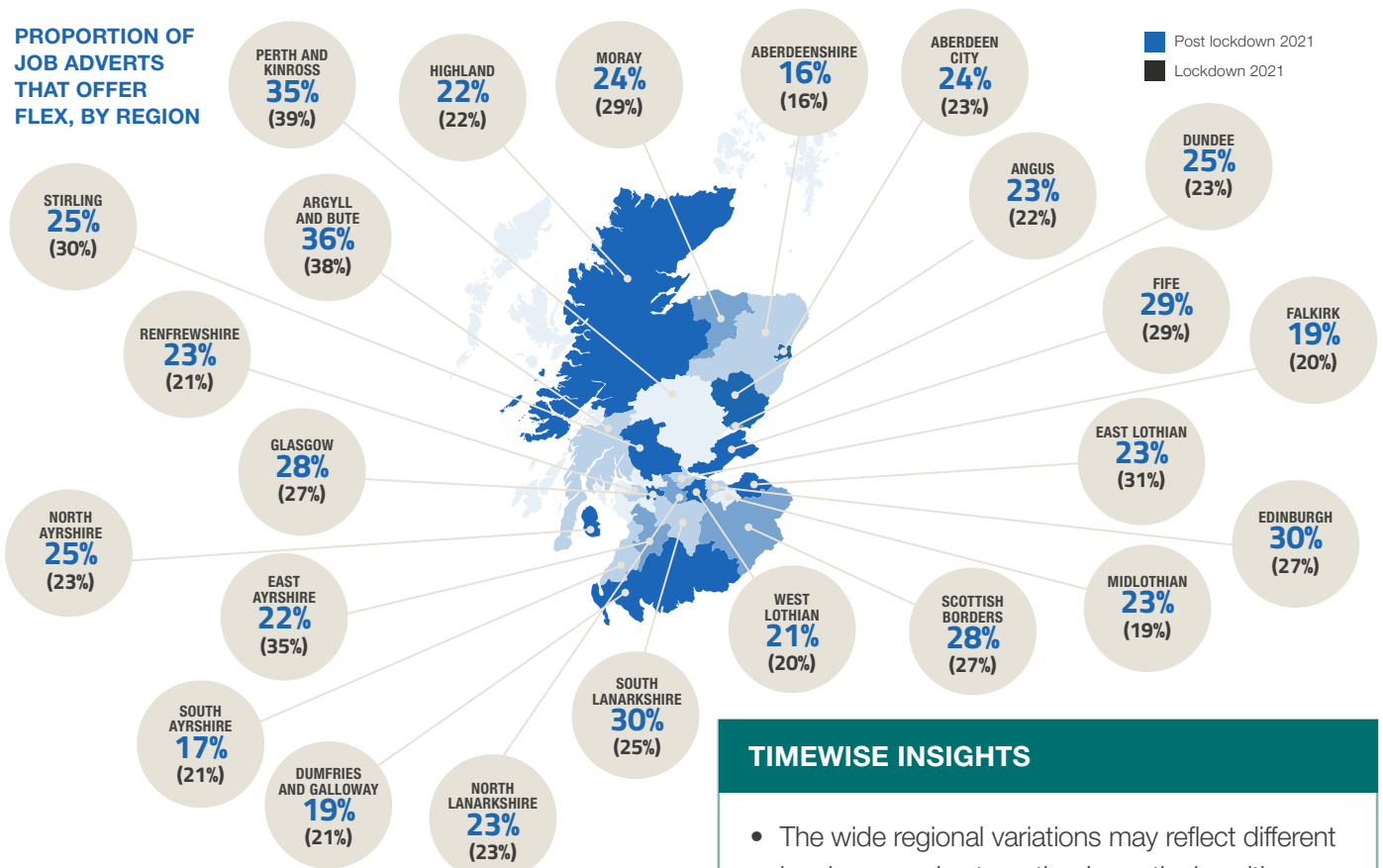
TIMEWISE INSIGHTS

Several factors may explain the low share of flexible jobs in some role categories:

- Amongst office roles, the comparatively slow growth in the flex rate of admin jobs may reflect the likelihood that role holders have less autonomy to work from home, compared to the professionals in other office categories. Anecdotal evidence has indicated an uncomfortable tendency for managers to work from home more often, whilst junior staff (who need to use office equipment regularly and often have less space at home) need to be in the office more.
- Poor rates of flexibility in several non-office role categories may be gender related, as women tend to need and request flexibility more often than men. Construction, manufacturing, maintenance/repair and logistics are all male dominated occupations. By contrast, non-office roles where women predominate have been adapted to accommodate part-time and shift arrangements (eg health, social care, retail sales).
- While medical/health and social care have high flex rates, largely because of the availability of shift work, it is important to note that shift patterns do not always offer 'good' flexibility, as they are often employer led rather than mutually agreed. Timewise research has highlighted staff difficulties with unpredictability of rotas, and lack of input into choosing shift times²⁸.
- Overall, we're heading towards a two-tier workforce, where certain roles can have flex and others can't. This will become a problem for employers, as employee discontent will impact recruitment and retention. Investment is needed to tackle cultural and operational barriers to redesigning working practices, which will require leadership buy in and manager training. Sector based pilots are a good way forward, to identify and trial viable flexible patterns²⁹.

REGIONAL VARIANCES

PROPORTION OF JOB ADVERTS THAT OFFER FLEX, BY REGION



KEY FINDINGS

- The availability of flexible jobs varies widely between the different areas of Scotland, from 36% in Argyll and Bute to only 16% in Aberdeenshire (during the most recent, post-lockdown period).
- Many of the regions have seen reduced availability of flexible jobs since the end of lockdown. These are mostly areas where health roles have a disproportionately high share of the jobs market. As noted previously, there was a significant blip in the availability of flexible health roles during lockdown, followed by a large drop; regions with particularly high shares of health roles would have followed suit.

TIMEWISE INSIGHTS

- The wide regional variations may reflect different local economic strengths. In particular, cities with high proportions of professional office-based roles will have benefited from the increases in home-working; areas where tourism is strong may have flex rates that are led by the hospitality sector.
- Another factor may be different attitudes to flexible working, for example at large city-based employers compared to smaller towns and villages.
- When looking at investment in job creation, as part of recovery strategies, policy makers and business groups need to consider these disparities in flexibility and seek to redress them. In areas where there is projected growth but low rates of flexible jobs, they could try to raise awareness of the importance of flexibility to a fair jobs market, and encourage or incentivise employers to unlock more roles to flex.

WHAT THE FINDINGS MEAN FOR THE SCOTTISH JOBS MARKET

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS, AND WHAT THEY CAN DO ABOUT IT

The benefits of flexible working have become increasingly clear, and a holistic approach (including from the point of hire) will be most effective. Employers can no longer afford to ignore flex, and need to tackle any barriers that remain in their organisation. Key arguments for flexible hiring include:

- The Scottish recruitment market is in crisis: in October 2021, almost half of Scottish employers were finding vacancies more difficult to fill³⁰. An imbalance between the demand and supply of staff has resulted in labour shortages, particularly in haulage, construction, tourism, hospitality, and food and drink. The reasons include strong demand for candidates across the board, Brexit, and the fallout from the pandemic (with some workers leaving the job market altogether). Forecasters suggest the candidate shortage is not going to ease anytime soon³¹, so employers will need to consider wider ways to attract candidates, especially where pay increases are not an option.
- Offering flexible working from the point of hire can give employers a competitive edge in the candidate market, as many people now expect to be able to work flexibly and are actively seeking employers who will welcome this³².
- Moreover, for many candidates with good skills and experience to offer, flexibility is not a choice: they need it, in order to balance work with caring or other life needs. Evidence³³ highlights that a high proportion of those who have been most detrimentally affected by the pandemic are older workers, women with caring responsibilities, and people with disabilities or health concerns. Flexible recruitment should therefore feature in employers' inclusion and diversity plans.
- Employers need to take early action to be ready for government directives on flexible recruitment. The UK Government has entered its consultation phase to introduce legislation on the 'right to ask for flex from day one'. And, as of October 2021, there is a requirement in the Scottish Government's Fair Work First criteria³⁴, for public sector employers (and those bidding for public sector contracts) to offer flexible and family friendly working practices from day one of employment. The direction of travel is clear, and employers urgently need to implement management training on job design, to scope flexible working during the recruitment process.
- There is a need to explore what kind of flex can be offered for frontline as well as office based jobs – especially in the context of those industries where Scotland is facing shortages. This means exploring start/finish times, and giving people input and advance notice into shift rosters. Changes like these can help create a fairer approach, where all workers feel they can access some form of flexibility.
- Findings from the BMG/Equality and EHRC poll³⁵ suggest that Scottish businesses with larger gender pay gaps than their competitors are at risk of losing out on talent and suffering reputational damage if they do not take action. Flexible working, including from the point of hire, is a key way to address the gender pay gap.
- It's important for job adverts to provide clarity by specifying which forms of flexible working are possible for the role: reduced hours (part-time), home-working (or a blend of home-working/ workplace), flexible shifts, flexible start and finish times, or other options such as compressed hours or annualised contracts. Generic offers of flexible working are too vague to be helpful to candidates.

- Increased flexibility has now proved workable in many sectors, through changed practices during the pandemic. If we are to ensure we don't revert back, then we need to challenge the assumption that it is still the responsibility of an employee or candidate to ask for flexibility. Employers need to

showcase their openness to flex as part of their employer brand, including in job adverts and throughout the whole recruitment process. They also need to invest time and budget in training, to equip managers with the skills to design flexible jobs and manage dispersed and flexible teams.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKERS

- For too long, lack of flexibility at the point of hire has been trapping people who need flexibility in their current roles. This is especially true for people (predominantly women) in part-time jobs, and is a structural driver for a wide range of societal challenges: people being locked out of work or trapped in low pay; people being unable to progress at their current employer; lack of job mobility; gender inequality and the gender pay gap; workplace inclusion for older people and those with disability or health concerns.
- The pandemic has created the opportunity for working practices to be reset, but not everyone is experiencing the benefits. The recent increases in flexible working have largely been of benefit to office workers and those on higher salaries. And there is a question mark over how beneficial some of the 'gains' have been – home-working has often brought its own form of stress, with a lack of boundaries affecting wellbeing.
- The current rise in job vacancies, with employers experiencing candidate shortages, creates new opportunities for those needing flex who have either dropped out of work due to the pandemic, or who have been out of work longer-term because of the lack of flexible roles. However, flexible opportunities remain uneven across different salaries and occupations; we need to ensure access to flex for all workers.
- Candidates also need support to negotiate flexible working when applying for the 7 in 10 jobs where it is not visibly on offer. This needs to be made available through intermediaries such as employability and careers services, and also from recruitment agencies.

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS DO?

- BEIS is currently consulting on the right to request flexible work from day one, and The Scottish Government's Fair Work First criteria now includes a requirement to offer flexible and family friendly working practices from day one of employment³⁶. Both are positive moves and provide a good 'stick' for flexible recruitment, but employers need a 'carrot' in the form of guidance, advice and support.
- Much support is available already, but many employers are unaware of it. Better signposting is needed; for example to resources provided by Timewise, Flexibility Works and CIPD Scotland, and to a new network of Fair Flex change agents available across Scotland to advise on how to improve working and hiring (the change agents are intermediaries from local authorities, enterprise agencies and recruiters, who have been trained by Timewise).
- Scottish policymakers could use some of the £10m allocated for the four day week trial (announced by the First Minister in 2021) to scope and trial other specific forms of flexible working, in order to include the creation of flexible opportunities for frontline workers in sectors such as hospitality, construction, agriculture and social care where a 4 day week is not as viable.

1. See, for example, research studies by [McKinsey](#), [Microsoft](#), and [Direct Line And](#) in Scotland specifically, [Research by Flexibility Works](#) found that 55% of workers were considering requesting more flexibility in future.
2. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/state-economy-november-2021/pages/5/>
3. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/working-lives-scotland-2021_tcm18-96771.pdf
4. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent>
5. https://www.flexibilityworks.org/about-flexible-working/#rslider_2
6. 68% per cent of those children in relative poverty after housing costs were living in working households. Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20 (data.gov.scot)
7. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/bics-weighted-scotland-estimates-data-to-wave-48/>
8. Fair Work First: guidance - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
9. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/working-lives-scotland-2021_tcm18-96771.pdf
10. See, for example, research studies by [McKinsey](#), [Microsoft](#), and [Direct Line And](#) in Scotland specifically, [Research by Flexibility Works](#) found that 55% of workers were considering requesting more flexibility in future.
11. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent>
12. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/flexible-working-lessons-from-pandemic-report_tcm18-92644.pdf
13. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent>
14. <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/trends/goodwork/working-lives-scotland>
15. See, for example, research studies by [McKinsey](#), [Microsoft](#), and [Direct Line And](#) in Scotland specifically, [Research by Flexibility Works](#) found that 55% of workers were considering requesting more flexibility in future.
16. [Research by CIPD](#), April 2021, found that 63% of employers planned to increase their use of hybrid working, and 45% planned to increase their use of 5-day per week home-working
17. [Flex For Life](#), by Flexibility Works, March 2021
18. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/working-lives-scotland-2021_tcm18-96771.pdf
19. See, for example, research studies by [McKinsey](#), [Microsoft](#), and [Direct Line And](#) in Scotland specifically, [Research by Flexibility Works](#) found that 55% of workers were considering requesting more flexibility in future.
20. Ibid
21. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent>
22. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/state-economy-november-2021/pages/5/>
23. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/flexible-working-lessons-from-pandemic-report_tcm18-92644.pdf
24. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent/Timewise, 2020>
25. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/improving-nurses-work-life-balance/>
26. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/working-lives-scotland-2021_tcm18-96771.pdf
27. For example, <https://timewise.co.uk/article/making-construction-a-great-place-to-work-can-flexible-working-help/> , <https://timewise.co.uk/article/improving-nurses-work-life-balance/> and <https://timewise.co.uk/article/modern-retail-nation-of-part-time-shopkeepers/>
28. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/improving-nurses-work-life-balance/> and <https://timewise.co.uk/article/caring-by-design/>
29. For example, <https://timewise.co.uk/article/making-construction-a-great-place-to-work-can-flexible-working-help/> , <https://timewise.co.uk/article/improving-nurses-work-life-balance/> and <https://timewise.co.uk/article/modern-retail-nation-of-part-time-shopkeepers/>
30. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/state-economy-november-2021/pages/5/>
31. https://www.natwestgroup.com/content/natwestgroup_com/en_uk/natwestgroup/news/2021/11/royal-bank-of-scotland-report-on-jobs-october.html
32. See, for example, research studies by [McKinsey](#), [Microsoft](#), and [Direct Line And](#) in Scotland specifically, [Research by Flexibility Works](#) found that 55% of workers were considering requesting more flexibility in future.
33. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-part-time-employees/> and <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8898/>
34. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/implementation-of-fair-work-first-in-scottish-public-procurement-sppn-6-2021/>
35. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-women-gender-pay-gap-action-plan/pages/14/>
36. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/implementation-of-fair-work-first-in-scottish-public-procurement-sppn-6-2021/>



Timewise works to unlock the flexible jobs market across the UK. We share market insights on flexible working and flexible hiring, deliver consultancy to help businesses attract and develop the best talent, and conduct research such as this annual Flexible Jobs Index for Scotland. We also run Timewise Jobs, a jobs board for roles that are part-time or open to flexibility.

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