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# FAIR WORK IN SCOTLAND: WORKERS' EXPERIENCES THROUGH COVID-19 SURVEY

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Summary of Results



## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Scotland's Fair Work Convention has published findings from their 'Fair Work in Scotland: Workers' Experiences through COVID-19' survey. The survey has revealed a mixed picture on fairness at work, access to sick-pay and support for carers during the pandemic.

In July 2020, a joint [statement](#) by the Scottish Government, COSLA, the Institute of Directors, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and STUC highlighted the value of fair work being placed at the core of the re-opening of the economy. The Statement outlined a series of recommendations for fair work practices to be adopted, which included:

- Facilitating effective employee engagement;
- Supporting all workers to follow public health guidance;
- Paying workers while they are sick, self-isolating or absent from work following medical advice relating to COVID-19;
- Facilitating flexible working arrangements, including homeworking;
- Protecting the health and safety of all workers – at work and travelling to and from the workplace;
- Providing workers with clear and comprehensive information on managing work-related risks; and
- Protecting the position of all workers, regardless of the nature of their employment.

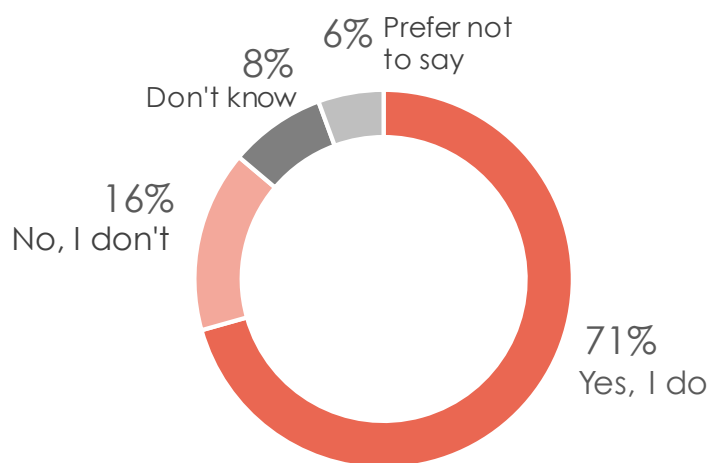
A survey of 1,050 adults has now been conducted (March 2021) by YouGov on behalf of the Fair Work Convention to examine the experiences of fair work practices by workers in Scotland. The results of the survey are summarised below.

### Fair Treatment

Results show 71% of workers reported they felt they had been treated fairly by their employer during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, 16% felt they had not been treated fairly.



**Figure 1: Proportion of workers who felt they had been treated fairly by your employer during the COVID-19 pandemic**



Base: 520

The proportion of those who felt they had been treated fairly is high amongst those with children (78% in all households with children) – particularly those with young children. However, the proportion decreases to 53% for carers of disabled, ill or elderly adults.

### **Balancing Work, Life and Caring Commitments**

The split in feelings of fair treatment amongst those with caring responsibilities is also seen when respondents were asked whether they had been able to balance work and caring commitments without losing any income or other entitlements.

Overall, 1 in 6 workers reported they had not been able to balance work and caring commitments without some losses, but this proportion varied by age of the person care is given to. While 15% of those workers who look after children said they had not been able to balance work and caring commitments without losing any income, this rose to 20% of carers of disabled, ill or elderly adults.

When asked specifically about work-life balance since the start of the pandemic, the picture is very mixed: 30% of all workers reported their work-life balance is now better than before the pandemic, while 30% of workers reported it is worse. Again, however, this changes for those with caring responsibilities: 40% of carers of disabled, ill or elderly adults reported their work life balance is now worse than before the pandemic, while 25% reported it is better.



Women were more likely to say they were not able to balance work and caring commitments (20% compared to 14% for men). There was, however, little difference between the changes in work-life balance between men and women.

## **Workload Pressures**

A total of 43% of workers reported their workload pressures had increased since the start of the pandemic. This proportion was the highest for full-time workers (49% compared to 34% for part-time workers).

The changes in workload pressures varied by social grade; while 38% of manual workers reported their workload pressures increased, this proportion rose to 48% of professional and managerial workers.

Those with caring responsibilities noticed a change in workload pressures too; while 43% of those who look after a child report their workload pressures increased, this proportion rose to 48% for carers of disabled, ill or elderly adults.

## **Protecting Workers' Finances**

In addition to workload pressures, respondents were also asked about financial pressures. The survey found almost half (48%) of workers in Scotland expected to receive less than their usual pay if they became sick or had to self-isolate due to Covid-19, rising to 55% for manual workers.

58% of professional and managerial workers reported that they would receive full pay if they were sick or had to self-isolate, while the figure dropped to 45% for manual workers. Manual workers were also the most likely to report that they would only receive statutory sick pay (21%).

Furthermore, 12% of all workers expected to receive no pay. However, this varied for certain groups; 25% of carers of disabled, ill or elderly adults reported they would receive no pay and 26% of part-time workers reported they would receive no pay.

13% of workers felt under pressure to breach public health advice (e.g. going to work when advised to self-isolate or shield etc.) because of fear of losing their income, job or business. The proportion rose to 17% for carers of disabled, ill or elderly adults.

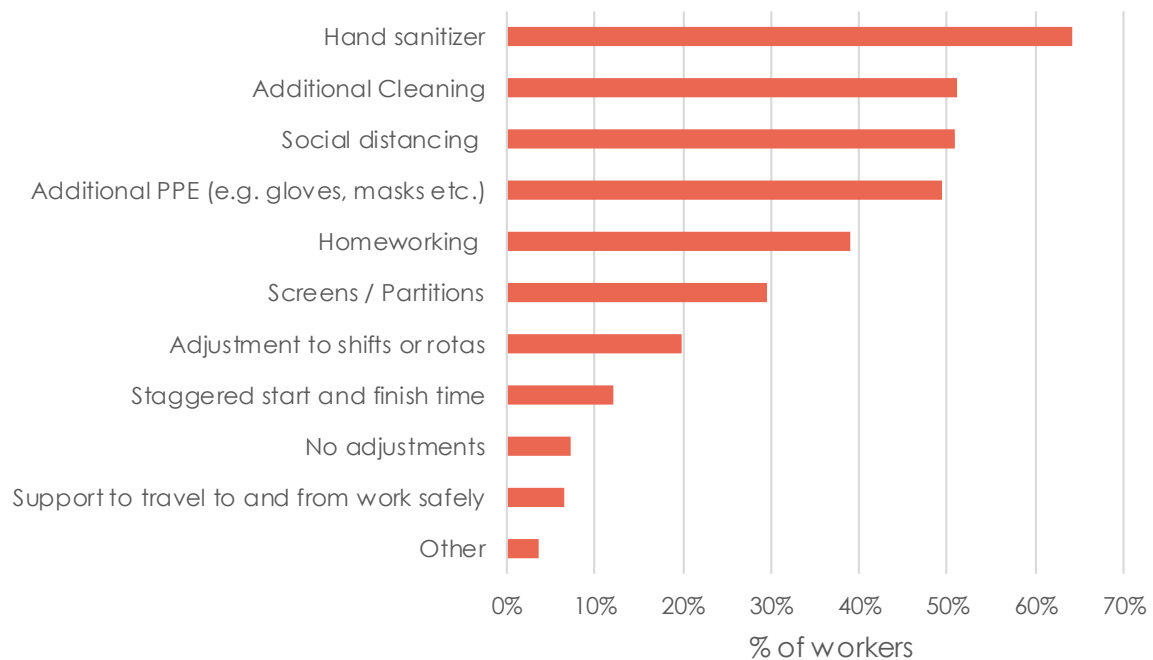
## **Adjustments to Support Workers**

Alongside asking about experiences, the survey also examined what adjustments were introduced in workplaces to protect the health and safety



of workers from the risks associated with COVID-19. Hand sanitizing, additional cleaning and social distancing were the most commonly introduced measures. However, 7% reported their workplace did not make any health & safety adjustments at all.

**Figure 2: Measures introduced to protect health and safety of workers**



Base: 540

### Facilitating Flexible Working

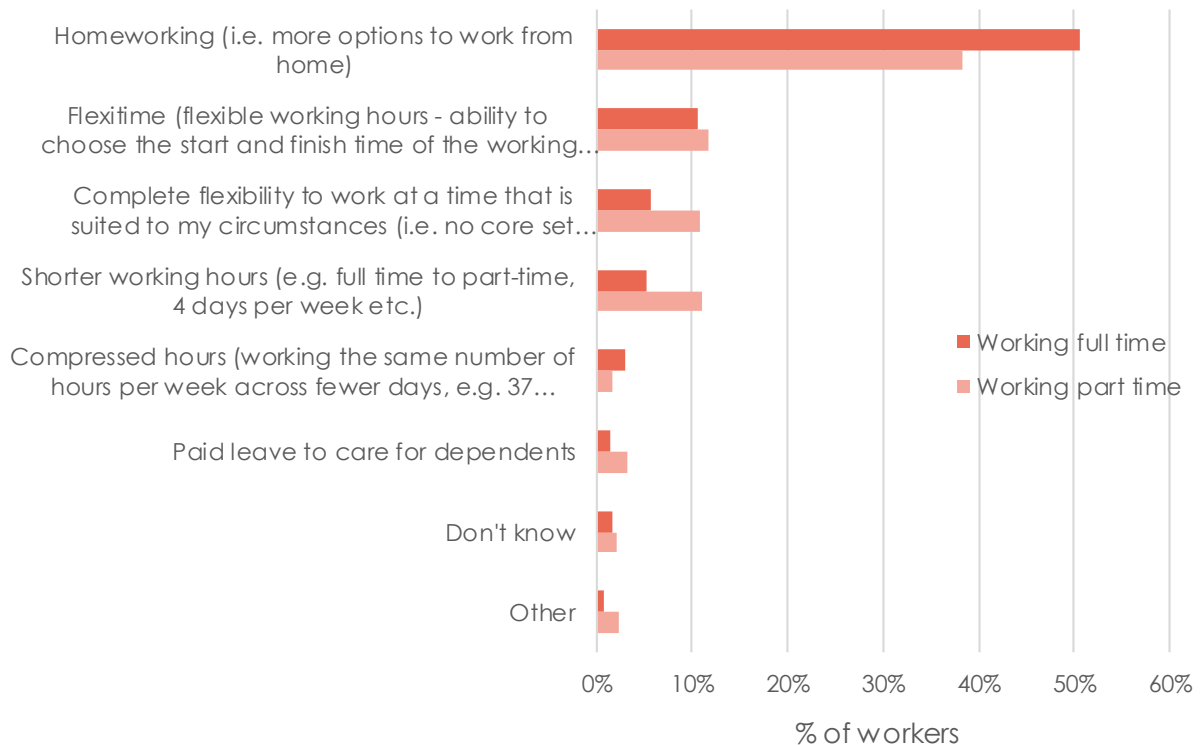
Respondents were asked which flexible working arrangements they had personally used to deal with the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, clear variations were seen dependent upon working status:

- 51% of full-time workers used homeworking, while only 38% of part-time workers worked from home;
- 50% of professional and managerial workers (50%) were able to access homeworking, while only 25% of manual workers had access to homeworking. Manual workers were also less likely to benefit from adjustments to shifts or rotas (17% compared to 22% of professional and managerial workers).
- 11% of part-time workers had complete flexibility to work at a time that suited to their circumstances, while only 6% of full-time workers reported the same;
- 7% of manual workers reported using flexible working hours, compared to 13% of professional and managerial workers.



1 in 4 (26%) workers reported they did not have access to any flexible working arrangements; men reporting to be more negatively impacted than women (28% of men compared to 23% of women).

**Figure 3: Flexible working arrangements used to deal with the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic**



Base: 540

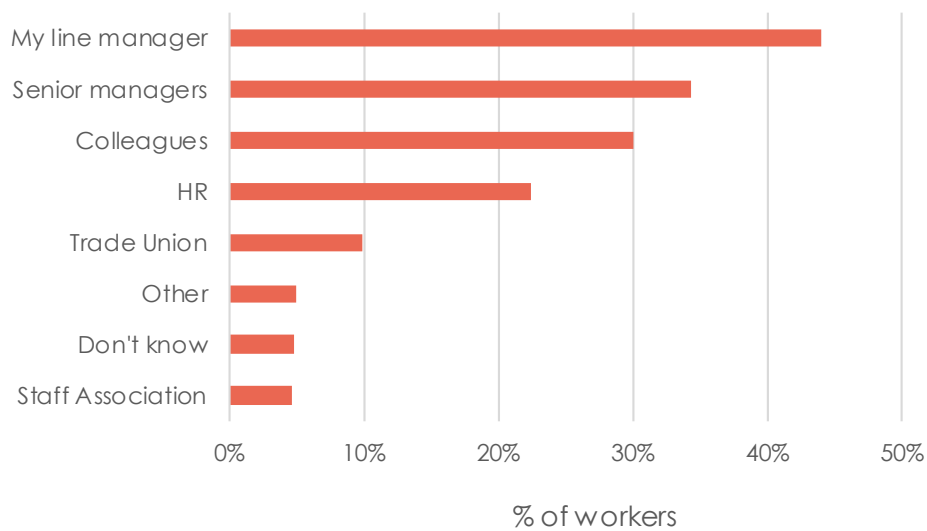
### Communication and Engagement with Workers

Effective employee engagement is a core element of strong fair working practices. As such, some encouragement can be drawn from the finding that only 11% of workers reported they were not kept informed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, however, nearly half (49%) of workers reported they had never felt involved in decision-making in their workplace, with a further 15% feeling less involved in decision-making than prior to the pandemic. Only 17% felt they had been effectively involved in decision-making since the pandemic

Most communication with workers during the pandemic came from a line manager (44%), senior management (34%) and colleagues (30%).



**Figure 4: Communication channels for workers**



Base: 540

## Conclusion

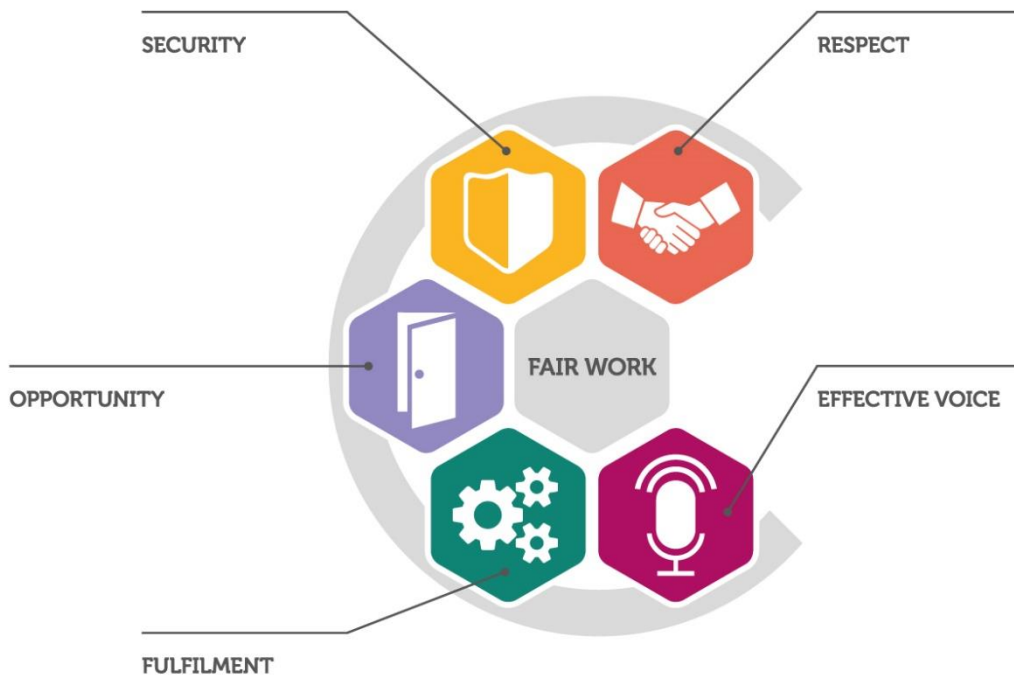
The survey finds a mixed picture on access to fair work during the pandemic. 71% of workers reported that they had been treated fairly at work, while 16% felt they had not been treated fairly. The survey also exposed differing experiences and access to fair work, with carers for disabled, ill or elderly adults, and skilled and unskilled manual workers experiencing the worst outcomes in a range of circumstances.

The survey also exposed differing access to sick pay, with nearly half of workers facing a loss of income if they were sick or had to self-isolate. While 13% of workers reported feeling under pressure to breach public health advice for fear of losing their income, job or business.

This variation in experience aligns with the findings of the Fair Work Convention's recent [Fair Work in Scotland report](#) and reinforces the reality that there is still work to do if Scotland is to become a Fair Work Nation by 2025.

*Note: All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,050 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th - 18th March 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Scottish adults (aged 18+).*





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