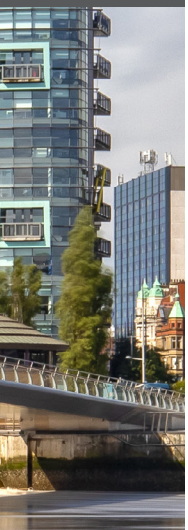# CIPD

*Championing better
work and working lives*

Working Lives Northern Ireland

A framework for measuring job quality

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. As a registered charity, **we champion better work and working lives** and have been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years.

We have more than 160,000 members across the world, provide thought leadership through independent research on the world of work and offer professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development. The **CIPD has around 3,900 members across Northern Ireland**. We sit at the heart of a proud, growing community of practitioners, members, partners, policy-makers and thought leaders in the world of work. We work with the NI Executive, its agencies and several academic, business and voluntary partners on a broad range of public policy issues.

We are key partners on multiple working groups and serve as a conduit to our network of members who both inform changes in policy and deliver them. **Our membership is spread across businesses from the public, private and third sectors and across businesses of all sizes**. This puts the CIPD in a strong position in the public policy sphere.

Report

Working Lives Northern Ireland

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① **Foreword**

It has now been almost two years since the outbreak of the global pandemic that is likely to become one of the defining moments of our generation. It has been a truly extraordinary time for all of us, but even more so for the HR profession. It was our profession that was called upon to navigate ever-changing regulations, respond to new restrictions and enable major changes to ways of working for tens of thousands of employees across Northern Ireland.

The CIPD is hugely proud of the achievements of our members. It has been difficult and there are more challenges to come as we transition to a 'new normal'. But we have stepped up and made a difference to employees' working lives because improving job quality is at the heart of what we do, regardless of whether we are in the middle of a pandemic or not.

This is our first *Working Lives Northern Ireland* report, building on work we have been doing UK-wide over the last few years. It offers the first comprehensive snapshot of job quality in Northern Ireland, just as we emerge from the strictest lockdown measures. And while we can't compare our findings with a previous survey, we can draw some conclusions on the underlying challenges and opportunities around job quality across the Northern Irish economy.

In line with previous research across the UK and in Scotland, we see concerning findings around the impact of work on wellbeing, challenges around work–life balance, and significant job design differences. Given the large shifts in ways of working due to the pandemic, it is also worrying that we see significant gaps in flexible working availability – something that employers will need to address if they are to avoid creating a two-tier workforce of those who can and can't work from home. Furthermore, we also highlight persistent barriers for employees with caring responsibilities or those with health conditions. Policy-makers and HR practitioners both have to play their part to improve this.

Working Lives Northern Ireland also offers a timely analysis of the different experiences of two new groups of workers during the pandemic – those who were forced to work from home due to the pandemic and those designated as key workers. We provide some interesting evidence, from the negative impact of work on physical health for homeworkers, to extensive workload for key workers. All these insights can be used by policy-makers and HR practitioners to make sure that we take the lessons learned from the last 20 months to create a better world of work.

Where there are challenges, there are also opportunities, and the pandemic is no exception. Our first *Working Lives Northern Ireland* report provides evidence that shows how this can be a catalyst for positive change. More and more policy-makers are starting to listen to what our profession has been saying for many years – that good work and good people practice is central to achieving inclusive growth and improving productivity for all employees and employers. We hope this report, and our conclusions and recommendations, can help drive this change.

Lee Ann Panglea
Head of the CIPD in Scotland
and Northern Ireland

② **Key findings**

Working Lives Northern Ireland, the CIPD's first dedicated job quality report in the country, provides a snapshot of the experiences of and attitudes to aspects of work of Northern Irish employees. It is built around the seven dimensions of good work conceptualised by the CIPD nearly five years ago: pay and benefits; contracts; work–life balance; job design and nature of work; relationships at work; voice and representation; and health and wellbeing.

We do not draw direct comparisons with UK-wide findings (as the equivalent surveys ran months apart), but it is worth noting that we did not see anything unexpected in the Northern Irish findings. While we do not have comparable pre-pandemic data, we know from the CIPD's 2021 _Good Work Index_ and _Working Lives Scotland_ reports that the impact of the pandemic on job quality was not as stark as many expected. There is no reason for us to believe this was any different in Northern Ireland.

What this report does highlight are the inequalities and trade-offs in job quality, significant differences by gender, age or caring responsibilities, and some of the key underlying factors that impact employees' experiences of good work – primarily occupation and, by extension, income. We do also draw out a few interesting differences by homeworking and key worker status, given the contrasting experiences of the last 20 months for these groups of workers. Lastly, we also looked at employee attitudes to COVID-19 in the workplace and future working preferences, finding that while part-time homeworking seems to be here to stay, other types of flexible working need to be boosted for the third of employees whose jobs can't be done from home.

COVID-19
- Employee preferences point to a hybrid future for those who can work from home, with homeworking some of the time the most popular option. However, almost a third (32%) of all employees work in jobs that can't be done from home.
- Key workers report worse job quality across many indicators, although – perhaps understandably – they score better on questions around meaningful work.
- Homeworkers have seen some benefits, but also drawbacks, with those working fully from home reporting poorer relationships with colleagues and a more negative impact of work on health.

Pay and benefits
- There is correlation between life and job satisfaction and pay levels.
- 37% of all Northern Irish employees feel they are not getting paid appropriately, rising to 50% for the lowest earners.
- Public sector employees report much more generous employer pension contributions compared with private sector employees.

Contracts
- We see a link between job security and pay, with those on higher salaries reporting higher levels of job security.
- 12% of all employees say they would like to work more hours than they currently do.
- Those in the lowest occupational groups are reporting the highest levels of underemployment.

Work–life balance
- Nearly a third (31%) of all employees say they find it hard to relax in their personal time because of their job, rising to 40% for those with adult caring responsibilities.

- There are significant gaps in the availability of formal flexible working arrangements for employees in Northern Ireland.
- Employees who work flexibly report higher job satisfaction, are more likely to be motivated by their organisation's purpose and have better skills development opportunities.

Job design and nature of work
- 40% of all employees report their workload as too high in a normal week. Those with longer organisational tenures, key workers and those not working from home at all are more likely to report workloads that are too high.
- 12% of those working fully from home say they don't have a suitable space to do their job effectively.
- Skills and career development opportunities are significantly lower for those in lower-paid jobs, as well as older workers.

Relationships at work
- We find better relationships with colleagues for those working from home only some of the time and those not working from home at all compared with those working fully from home.
- Nearly a fifth (18%) of employees feel their boss would hold it against them if they made a mistake. A similar proportion (19%) believe that people in their team sometimes reject others for being different.
- 26% of all employees experienced at least one type of conflict at work, with 15% saying they experienced two or more types.

Voice and representation
- Over a fifth (21%) of employees say they have no voice channel at work at all.
- The availability of voice channels differs significantly by organisation size and, consequently, between the public and private sectors in Northern Ireland.
- Employees who work flexibly rate their managers significantly better than those not working flexibly, underlining the importance of good management to enabling flexible work.

Health and wellbeing
- Nearly a third (31%) of employees feel their work impacts negatively on their mental health, with 28% reporting negative impacts on their physical health.
- A worrying 45% of all employees report going to work despite not being well enough to do so. This is even higher for those with adult caring responsibilities (61%), with disabilities (64%) and for key workers (52%).
- Nearly a third (31%) of employees always or often feel exhausted at work, with 28% saying they feel under excessive pressure.

③ Introduction

The CIPD's purpose is to champion better work and working lives, and supporting job quality is at the heart of what we do. We believe that good work is fundamental to individual wellbeing, supports a fair society, and creates motivated workers, productive organisations and a strong economy. Our members have been making this case within their organisations for many years, just as the CIPD has been championing good work to public policy-makers. With increased interest in job quality in Northern Ireland, this report offers a timely analysis of some of the challenges and opportunities around improving people's working lives.

We measure good work across seven different dimensions. From pay and contractual stability, to work–life balance issues to health and wellbeing in the workplace, this report is a comprehensive look at job quality in Northern Ireland. The last 20 months have indeed put these themes into stark relief.

The ripples from the biggest societal disruption in recent history will be felt for many years to come. Our report focuses on the underlying inequalities and trade-offs in job quality, but it also offers some insights around the impact of the pandemic. We hope that policy-makers, employers and people professionals across Northern Ireland can use its findings to make sure that working lives of the future are happier, resilient and productive.

Background to the survey

This is the first iteration of the *Working Lives Northern Ireland* report, which builds on work carried out by the CIPD over the last few years through our *Good Work Index* and *Working Lives Scotland* reports. All of these use the UK Working Lives (UKWL) survey to present annual measures for the seven dimensions of job quality.

The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of job quality in Northern Ireland. Through analysis of our own survey data we can examine a broad range of issues, some of which are not captured by official statistics. Where we can, we highlight statistically significant differences in gender, age or sector and occupational class (SOC 2020). Given the COVID-19 context, we also look at differences between key and non-key workers as well as those who work from home and those who do not.

It is important to emphasise that we do not draw out detailed comparisons with the UK as a whole or Scotland, even though the respective reports use virtually the same survey questions. The reason for this is that the surveys ran at very different points in the year (January vs August) and we know that this can significantly impact the results. That being said, we have not seen any dramatically different findings around some of the structural inequalities in job quality.

Since this is the first time we've collected dedicated data for Northern Ireland, we are also unable to draw out trends and any changes to job quality over time, for example as a result of the pandemic. However, we do know from the *Good Work Index* and *Working Lives Scotland* that job quality has not changed significantly since the onset of the pandemic – at least not yet. In other words, we can be relatively confident that the findings presented here are not just a pandemic one-off, but instead highlight structural issues that need to be addressed.

Lastly, we need to keep in mind that this is a survey of working adults and the job quality metrics measure their experiences. This means that, for example, those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic – and by definition their job quality dropped the most – are not captured here. Neither does the survey reach the unemployed or the economically inactive (a particularly pronounced problem in Northern Ireland), both of which should be important groups for policy-makers and practitioners tackling inclusion, opportunity and inequality to consider.

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 was based on this body of work and further consultation with academics, HR experts and government officials.

The resulting UK Working Lives survey, conducted for the CIPD by YouGov, has now run UK-wide four times, with a boosted sample for Scotland in 2020 and 2021. For the purposes of *Working Lives Northern Ireland*, we decided to run the same core survey to allow us basic analysis across all seven dimensions of good work. The survey was conducted between 10 and 24 August 2021 and gave a sample of 1,000 workers. The survey was carried out online and the figures have been weighted and are representative of all Northern Irish adults in work.

Conceptualising good 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 _Good Employment Charter in Manchester_. In Scotland, the _Fair Work Convention_ published its _Fair Work Framework_ in 2016, which has served as the basis for policy-making since then.

More recently, two developments have put job quality on the agenda in Northern Ireland. First, Belfast City Council is in the process of developing its own _Inclusive Growth City Charter_ (Belfast Business Promise), with the CIPD a part of the external working group. Second, the NI Executive's Department for the Economy intends to introduce a _Better Jobs Pledge_, tying public funding and procurement to job quality improvements for medium and large businesses. *Working Lives Northern Ireland* therefore offers a timely contribution to this emerging debate.

This report was written around the CIPD's seven dimensions of job quality or 'good work', which have been based on a significant body of research and have since been picked up by other organisations working in this space. In the CIPD's view, good work:

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

The survey we are analysing in this report has been _developed_ with this perspective in mind. It analyses both objective and subjective measures as well as universal and relative aspects of work. This is important, because job quality is not static – what works for some employees will be unacceptable to others.

Objective measures look at things that should be unbiased, for example, salary levels or different types of contract. Subjective measures, on the other hand, include things that reflect opinions or feelings – whether work is fairly rewarded, whether it is meaningful, job satisfaction or quality of relationships at work. In addition, we also look at measures that

are universal and will improve job quality for anyone (for example, mental and physical health), but also at aspects that are relative and will differ between employees (for example, part-time employment). To get an accurate picture of job quality we need to look at all of these in the round.

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

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

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.

4 COVID-19 and job quality

Even 20 months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are still only beginning to understand its full impact on our personal and working lives, families and communities. Indeed, as we have seen across the CIPD's other job quality reports, there has been little change to the headline good work indicators – something that may yet change as government support unwinds and new ways of working are embedded.

However, despite the relative stability of the headline indicators, we know the impact of the pandemic was not uniform. Swathes of employees were put on furlough, many lost their jobs and others continued to work – either as key workers under the most challenging of circumstances or as homeworkers, regardless of whether they had the space or desire to do so. Our data allowed us to analyse some of these inequalities. In particular, we were keen to see whether there were any differences to be found between key workers and those not in key worker roles and those who have been able to work fully from home compared with those who had not. After all, the 'new normal' – our post-pandemic working lives – will grow out of our experiences throughout the crisis.

The differences and inequalities are noted throughout the report, but we highlight some of the most interesting findings in this first chapter too. In addition, we look at employee attitudes towards a range of COVID-19-related questions, including how they feel their

employer responded to the crisis. Finally, we also explore homeworking in particular and ask employees to tell us their preferences for the future, based on their experience throughout the crisis.
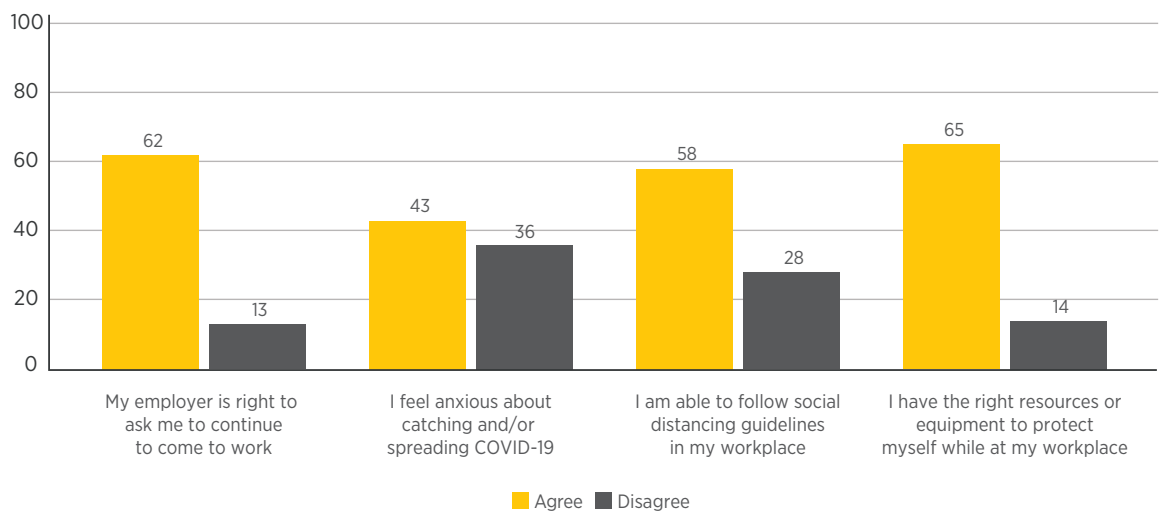
Key findings

- Employee preferences point to a hybrid future for those who can work from home, with homeworking some of the time the most popular option. However, almost a third (32%) of all employees work in jobs that can't be done from home.
- Key workers report worse job quality across many indicators, although – perhaps understandably – they score better on questions around meaningful work.
- Homeworkers have seen some benefits, but also drawbacks, with those working fully from home reporting poorer relationships with colleagues and a more negative impact of work on health.

COVID-19 workplace attitudes

The pandemic has had an unequal impact across different industries and occupations. Overall, 64% of all employees in our survey said they need to attend their normal place of work to some extent – this is higher than the percentages we found across the UK in our January survey and is a reflection of a gradual relaxation of restriction throughout summer. The significant differences by occupation mean that we see considerable differences by indicators like social grade (where 81% of C2DE employees need to attend their normal place of work), education level (79% of those below graduate level) and salary (82% of those earning less than £20,000 per year).

Our survey asks employees a range of questions to ascertain their attitudes and experiences towards COVID-19 in the workplace. The headline findings are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: COVID-19 workplace attitudes (%)

Legend: Agree (yellow), Disagree (dark grey)

Statement	Agree	Disagree
My employer is right to ask me to continue to come to work	62	13
I feel anxious about catching and/or spreading COVID-19	43	36
I am able to follow social distancing guidelines in my workplace	58	28
I have the right resources or equipment to protect myself while at my workplace	65	14

We see that the majority of employees feel their employer is right to ask them to continue to come to work, with only 13% disagreeing with their employer's choice. This number rises significantly for those who are dissatisfied with their job, with just under a quarter (24%) disagreeing with their employer.

Just over two-fifths (43%) of all employees say they feel anxious about catching and/or spreading COVID-19. We see that those with underlying conditions are more likely to be

anxious about the disease – 52% of those with a non-physical condition and 47% of those with a physical condition report being anxious, compared with just 25% of employees without any underlying conditions. As employers gradually start bringing employees back into the workplaces, these concerns should be kept in mind, with health and safety measures a priority.

Concerningly, 14% of employees say they don't have the right resources or equipment to protect themselves while at their workplace and over a quarter (28%) say they are unable to follow social distancing guidelines there.

Key workers and working from home

Our working lives have seen significant disruption during the pandemic. Not only have almost half of all employees across the UK had to work from home – whether they wanted to or not – we have also seen millions defined as key workers, most obviously those working in health and social care, but also food production, transport, logistics and many more.

Both of these distinctions – homeworkers versus non-homeworkers and key worker versus non-key worker – span a broad range of occupations and industries, with varying experiences of good work dimensions, not limited to pay and reward. Understandably, aspects of job quality will differ significantly between these workers, and we draw some of them out through the report. Where possible, we control for occupational, gender and industry differences in analysis, but these three remain important determinants of an employee's job quality.

Given the role of key workers during the pandemic, and the universal praise those working in these roles have received, it has been interesting to see how dimensions of job quality differ for them. Our survey shows that key workers fared poorly compared with those in non-key roles across many good work dimensions. Key workers were more likely to be in lower-paid occupations and record poorer subjective pay (whether employees feel they get paid appropriately). Key workers also scored lower on issues like presenteeism, workload and job autonomy. On the other hand, they responded better on questions around meaningful work, especially as to whether they felt their jobs made a difference to society – this should not come as a surprise.

The forced shift to homeworking has led to much speculation over the impact on employees' productivity, wellbeing and job quality in general. Our survey finds some positives, but also some drawbacks for homeworkers when it comes to job quality. For example, homeworkers respond positively to questions around management quality and employee voice, which may be a reflection of the additional focus on communication during the pandemic. On the other hand, we see homeworkers report worse relationships with colleagues and more negative impacts of work on physical health. Overall, it is important to emphasise that there is a difference between homeworking mandated by law and homeworking as a form of flexible working chosen by an employee. For many employees, fully working from home was not a universally positive experience – as we see in the next section.

Future of work

We are only beginning to see long-term changes to the way we work as a result of employer and employee experiences during the pandemic. While it is true that employer attitudes towards homeworking shifted compared with the attitudes measured at the outbreak of COVID-19, we need to look beyond homeworking as we transition to a new normal.

It is important to emphasise that not every job can be done from home, not everybody can work from home and, of course, not everybody wants to work from home. This report provides some interesting insight on this too. As expected, we see significant differences in homeworking by occupation, management level, salary or social grade.

The incidence of homeworking is significantly higher across higher-level occupational classes – 47% of those in 'professional' and 'associate professional' occupations worked fully from home, compared with 5% of those in 'elementary' occupations. While 80% of board-level managers worked fully or partly from home, this number falls to 41% of those without any management responsibility. If we look at social grades, 71% of those in C2DE didn't work from home at all, compared with only 32% in ABC1. Finally, the differences by salary are even starker, as summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: How often do you work from home? By salary (%)
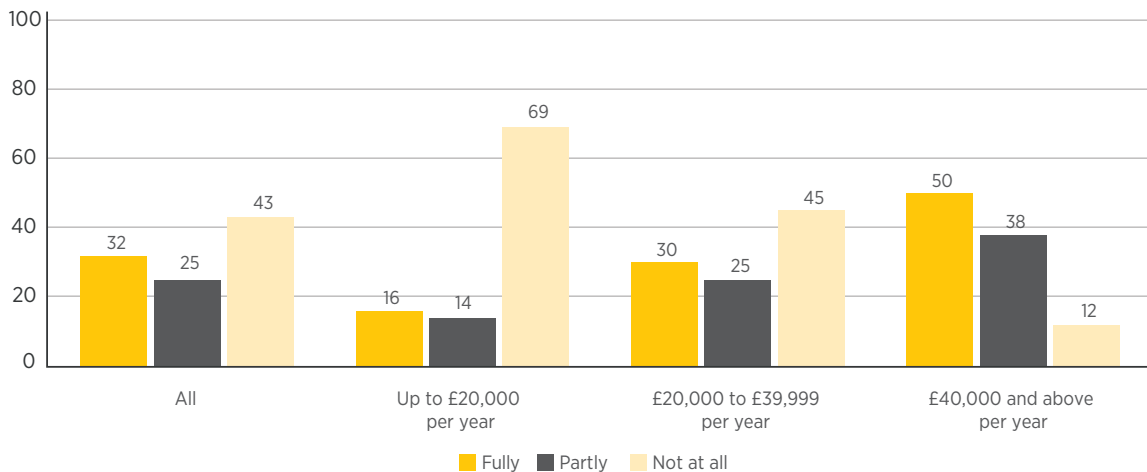
Employees' experiences throughout the pandemic will have an impact on their preferences for their post-pandemic ways of working. Our survey asked employees, 'Once social distancing measures and other COVID-19-related restrictions are fully relaxed, how often, if at all, would you like to work from home?' We found that 32% of employees said their job could not be done from home – rising to 52% for those earning less than £20,000. This underlines the importance of other forms of flexible working (for example, flexi-time, compressed hours, job-sharing) to be made available by employers.

The overall findings are summarised in Figure 3 and point to a majority preference for working from home some of the time.

Figure 3: Once COVID-19-related restrictions are fully relaxed, how often would you like to work from home? (%)

COVID-19 and job quality
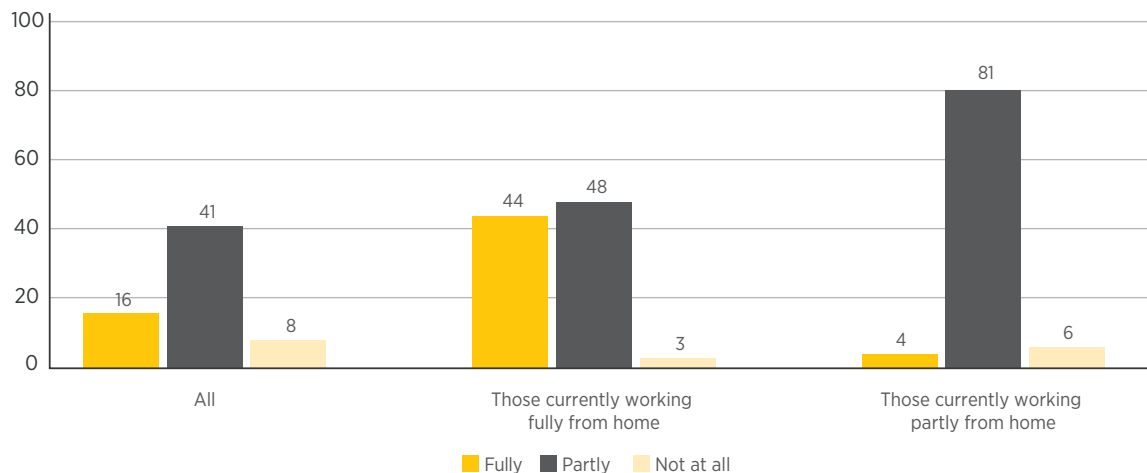
Forty-one per cent of all employees would like to work this way in the future, rising to 81% among those currently working that way. Almost a quarter (24%) of all employees would like to work from home two or three days a week.

Looking only at those who currently work from home all the time, working partly from home in the future is their preference too – nearly half (48%) of all of these workers would like to work that way. Twenty-three per cent of these employees would like to work from home three days a week.

5 Pay and benefits

The first good work dimension we explore is pay and benefits. This covers both objective pay (how much someone actually earns) and subjective pay (whether they feel their pay is appropriate), in addition to a broad range of employee benefits and employer pension contributions. In addition to contractual stability, covered in the next chapter, pay and benefits is an important aspect of job quality that directly impacts on individuals' and their families' quality of lives.

Key findings
- There is correlation between life and job satisfaction and pay levels.
- 37% of all Northern Irish employees feel they are not getting paid appropriately, rising to 50% for the lowest earners.
- Key workers are more likely to say that they aren't paid appropriately, compared with those in non-key worker roles.
- Public sector employees report much more generous employer pension contributions compared with private sector employees.
- Employee benefits are more readily available to employees in the largest organisations, with the exception of social benefits.

Objective pay and job satisfaction
When thinking about employee pay and its impact on job quality, it is important to distinguish between objective and subjective measures of pay. Objective measures are straightforward – an employee's hourly wage or annual salary. However, this doesn't account for how an employee feels about how they're remunerated for the work they do – this is known as subjective pay. Measuring objective pay using a survey has limitations, where pay can include complex reward schemes or an employee's reluctance to disclose information, for example. This is reflected by 34% of employees choosing not to respond to this question in our survey.

Out of those who did respond, the survey found a median gross annual salary of £26,177, which is slightly over the Northern Irish median of £23,043 recorded in the latest official statistics. The survey results show a significant gender pay gap (£6,000) in the median gross annual salary, in line with official statistics. Furthermore, if the data is broken down by occupation (SOC 2020), there is consistency with official statistics, which show a link between occupational classes and annual median pay.

We first look at correlation between pay and life/job satisfaction and the results are perhaps self-evident – both life and job satisfaction are higher for those earning £40,000 and above per year compared with those on lower salary bands. Of course, while there is good correlation between salary and job satisfaction, some highly paid jobs exhibit several qualities that may be considered negative – for instance around workload, work–life balance and stress, as explored in following chapters.

We also see that job satisfaction is considerably higher than life satisfaction for employees across all salary bands. This may be a reflection of the pandemic impacting employees' life satisfaction, but it certainly underlines that job quality is only a partial factor in the quality of one's life.
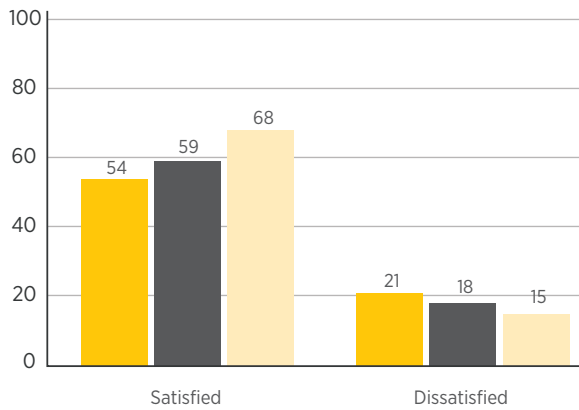
Figure 4: Life satisfaction, by salary (%)

Figure 5: Job satisfaction, by salary (%)
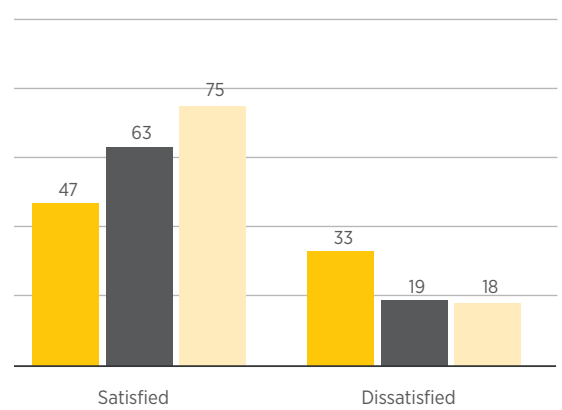
Legend: Up to £20,000 per year ■ £20,000 to £39,999 per year ■ £40,000 and above per year

Subjective measures of pay

In addition to objective measures of pay, *Working Lives Northern Ireland* also considers subjective measures of pay and what we call 'work centrality' – what role work plays in employees' lives. Results show that 45% of Northern Irish employees feel they get paid appropriately for the work that they do, with 37% disagreeing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we see a positive correlation between this and reported salary levels – those on higher salaries are more likely to feel they are paid appropriately – 68% of those earning over £40,000 agree (21% disagree), compared with only 38% of those earning under £20,000 (50% of whom disagree). These differences are borne out across occupations as well as by key worker status, with key workers scoring lower on subjective pay.

Our two work centrality questions measure the relative importance of work in our lives. Fifty-seven per cent of employees stated they would enjoy having a paid job even if they did not need the money and 45% say that a job is just a way of earning money. We see considerable differences by age across these two questions, with the oldest workers being the most positive about work. Nearly half (46%) of those in the oldest age bracket (55+) disagree that a job is just a way of earning money and 62% of these employees say they would enjoy having a paid job even if they did not need the money.

Figure 6: Subjective measures of pay and work centrality (%)
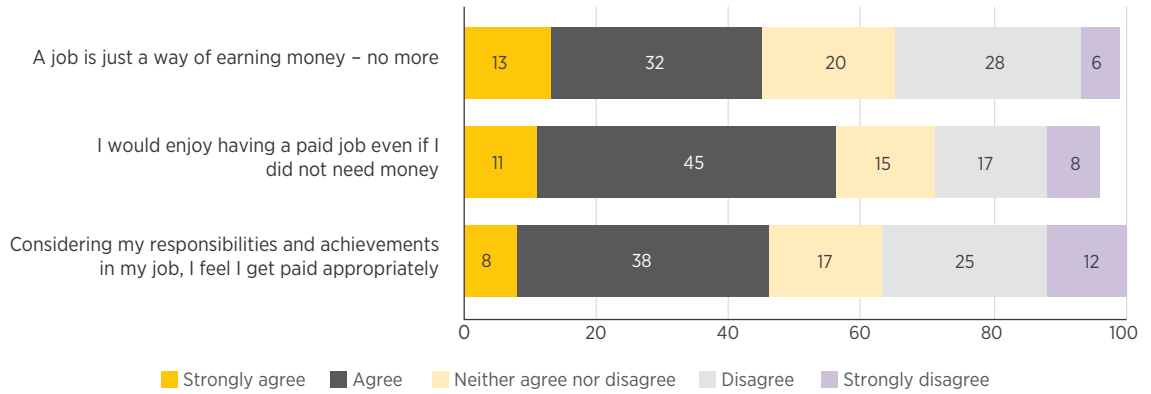

|	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A job is just a way of earning money – no more	13	32	20	28	6
I would enjoy having a paid job even if I did not need money	11	45	15	17	8
Considering my responsibilities and achievements in my job, I feel I get paid appropriately	8	38	17	25	12

Note: does not add up to 100% due to 'don't know' answers.

Pensions and other employee benefits

In addition to pay, our survey also looks at employer pension contributions and other employer benefits that may be available. Turning to pensions first, Figure 7 shows the reported employer contributions across the survey. Even though 3% is now the legal minimum for employer contributions, 7% of respondents reported receiving less than that. It is worth noting that a significant 37% of respondents did not know how much their employer contributed.

Breaking the figures down, we see that higher salary bands tend to attract higher contributions, which could be a reflection of employers, particularly large employers, incentivising higher employee contributions from those on higher salaries. We find much more generous contributions for public sector employees (median 9% vs 5% for the private sector), with a tenth (10%) of public sector employees reporting contributions of 16% or more, compared with only 1% of private sector employees.

Figure 7: Employer pension contributions (%)

less than 3%	3–4%	5–7%	8–10%	11–15%	16% or more
7	19	21	7	6	4
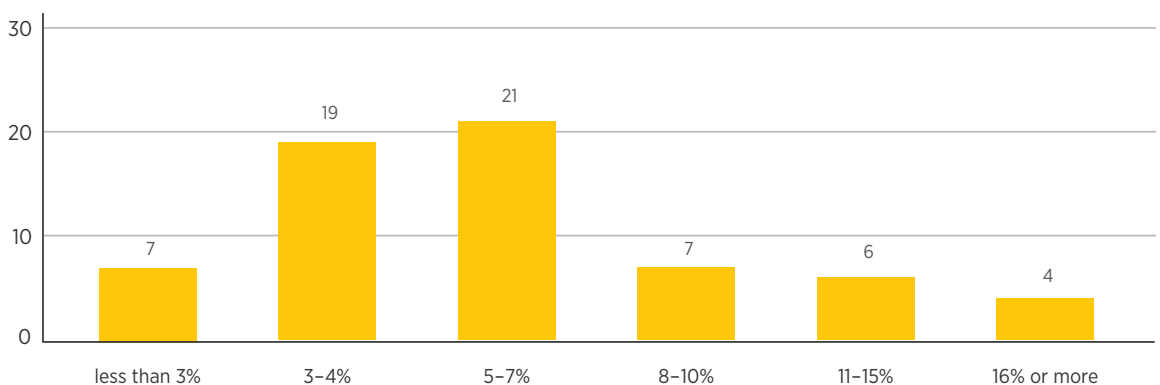
Working Lives Northern Ireland also examines a range of employee benefits other than pensions. It asked employees about the availability of the following nine types of benefit:

- social benefits, which include parties and other social events
- enhanced leave benefits, including paid bereavement leave, emergency eldercare support, or more than the legal minimum of 20 days' paid annual leave (excluding bank holidays)
- food benefits (free or subsidised food or drink)

- transport benefits such as free or subsidised parking, rail season tickets and/or a company car
- health care and insurance benefits, which include death in service or life assurance, flu jabs, dental or health insurance
- career development benefits (for example, paid study leave or professional subscriptions paid)
- financial assistance benefits (for example, relocation assistance or homeworker allowance)
- wellbeing benefits (for example, subsidised gym membership, massage or exercise classes)
- technology benefits (for example, mobile phone for personal use or home computer).

The availability of other employee benefits varies considerably, as summarised in Figure 8. The survey found that employees report the highest availability of enhanced leave benefits (54%), followed by health care and insurance benefits (43%), with financial assistance benefits the least available (82% unavailable). We see that benefit options are more readily available to employees in the largest organisations (250+), with the exception of social benefits, which are less likely to be available to them. The difference is particularly pronounced in enhanced leave benefits, which are available to 70% of employees working in 250+ organisations, but only 38% employees in smaller organisations (with 2–250 employees).

Figure 8: Employee benefits other than pensions (%)
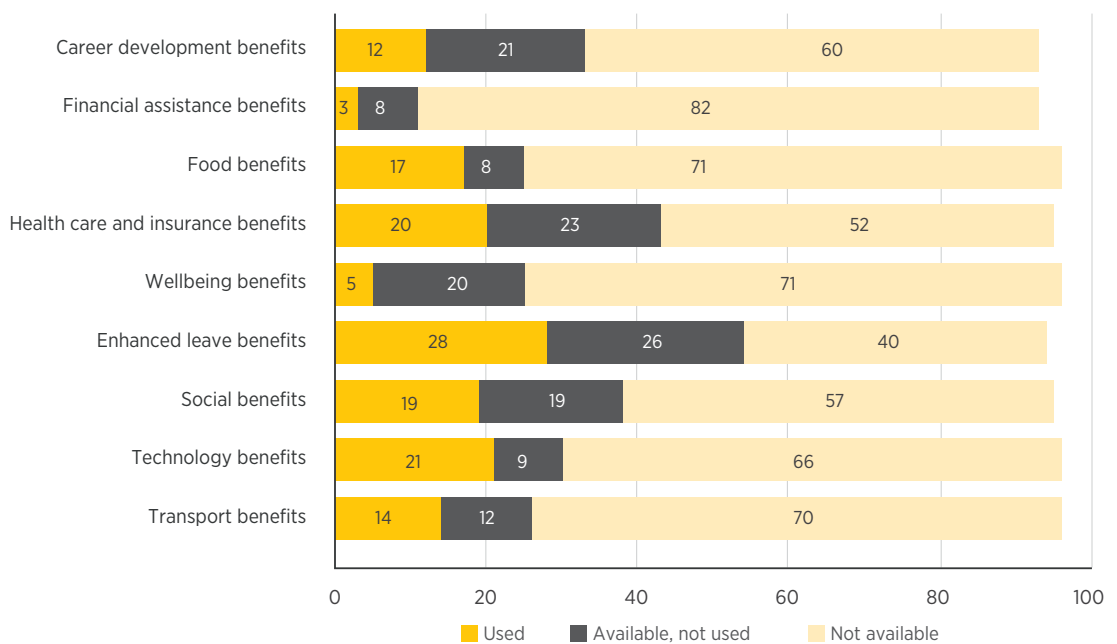
Note: does not add up to 100% due to 'don't know' answers.

The CIPD in Northern Ireland is part of the Coalition of Bereaved Workers, which has been making the case for the introduction of paid bereavement leave to all employees bereaved of a close relative in Northern Ireland. We have therefore added specific questions around paid bereavement leave into the survey. We found that 17% of all employees have paid bereavement leave available and have used it, with another 26% who have availability, but have not used it. The availability differs considerably by organisational size, which is reflected in the split between the private and public sector – 40% of employees in the private sector have paid bereavement leave available, compared with 55% of public sector employees.

⑥ Contracts

The second good work dimension we look at is contracts. This covers issues like the type of contract and contractual stability, job security and underemployment – where employees work fewer hours than they would want. Of course, job security concerns are linked to times of economic crisis, so these themes have been high on the agenda during the pandemic.

Key findings

- We see a link between job security and pay, with those on higher salaries reporting higher levels of job security.
- The self-employed report much higher levels of job satisfaction – 78% say they are satisfied, compared with 62% and 57% for those working full-time and part-time respectively.
- Public sector employees, older workers and those with longer tenures report lower levels of confidence in the labour market.
- 12% of all employees say they would like to work more hours than they currently do.
- Those in the lowest occupational groups are reporting the highest levels of underemployment.

Types of contract

Contractual working arrangements and the related issues of job and hours insecurity, as well as underemployment, are aspects of job quality that have risen within the public policy agenda in recent years, not least in Matthew Taylor's _Review of Modern Working Practices_ and subsequent policy pledges. Most recently, the Supreme Court _Uber_ ruling as well the CIPD's own research highlighted the importance of reforming and modernising the law around employment status.

While our survey included questions on contractual type, the sample size for non-standard contracts was very small, so the level of analysis we can do for Northern Ireland is limited. Past iterations of the _Good Work Index_ use a larger UK-wide sample and provide interesting insight into UK-wide job quality in relation to non-standard contracts.

Working Lives Northern Ireland covers a wide range of contract types to give an accurate representation of work in Northern Ireland. The breakdown of those surveyed in the report is presented in Figure 9 – it shows that 87% of employees are in permanent employment, 4% run their own business and 1% are on zero-hours contracts.

Figure 9: Types of contract (%)

Legend:
- Permanent employee
- Temporary employment
- Zero-hours contract work
- Short-hours contract work
- Running my own business
- Freelancer or an independent contractor
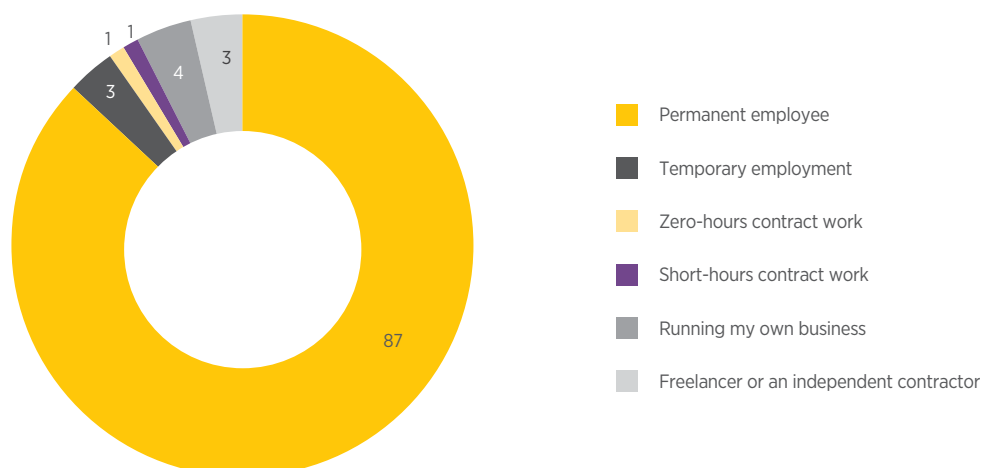
There are significant differences in the patterns of full-time and part-time employment. In line with official data, the survey shows that women are much more likely to work part-time than men (33% of women vs only 9% of men). This has widely been attributed to childcare and elderly care responsibilities, which remain significantly gendered. We also see people with disabilities less likely to be in full-time employment (59% vs 78% of those without disabilities), which we know from past research is linked to their underemployment.
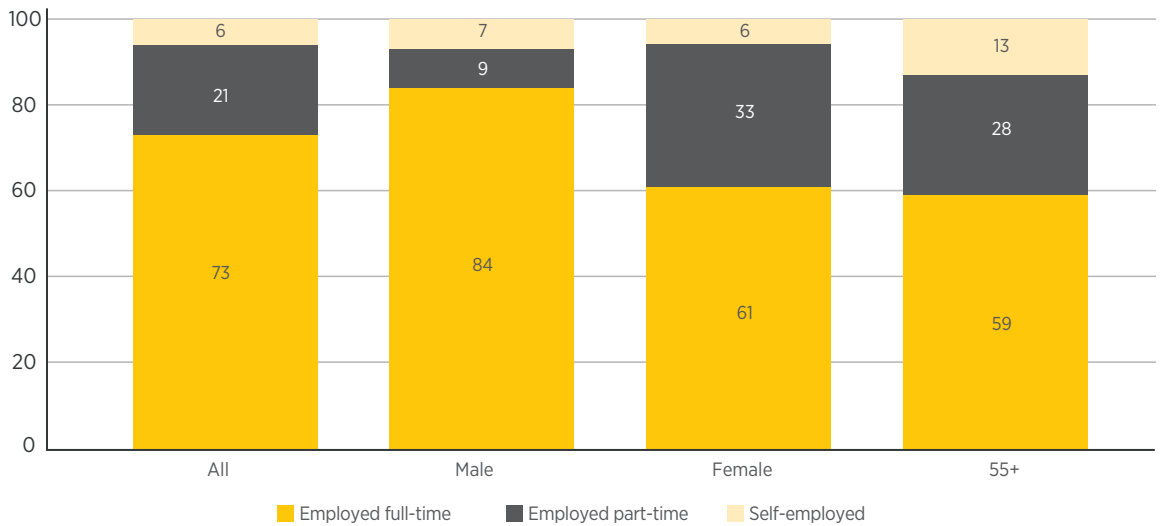
Furthermore, we also see that those in the oldest age bracket (55+) are more likely to work part-time or be self-employed. This has an impact on older workers' job satisfaction, as we record much higher levels of job satisfaction among the self-employed – 78% say they are satisfied, compared with 62% and 57% for those working full-time and part-time respectively.

Figure 10: Employment status (%)

Legend: Employed full-time, Employed part-time, Self-employed

	All	Male	Female	55+
Self-employed	6	7	6	13
Employed part-time	21	9	33	28
Employed full-time	73	84	61	59

Job security

Our survey also looks at the issue of job security – primarily a subjective measure – in addition to objective measures like pay, benefits and contracts. The survey asks employees whether they 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. This is an area where the pandemic may have an impact, although from our UK-wide and Scottish reports, we know that the biggest change was in employees' likelihood to quit – in times of economic turbulence, people tend to put big moves on hold.

Overall, we find that 63% of those surveyed said they think it was unlikely they would lose their job, and 60% thought it was unlikely they would quit. Breaking the results down by sector, we see that public sector employees feel significantly more secure in their employment, with a 14-percentage point difference compared with employees in the private sector on the likelihood-to-lose-job measure – 73% of public sector employees say they are unlikely to lose their job, compared with 59% of private sector employees. Job security also increases with higher salary bands, which is in line with past research on insecure low-paid employment.

Figure 11: Likelihood to lose job, by salary (%)
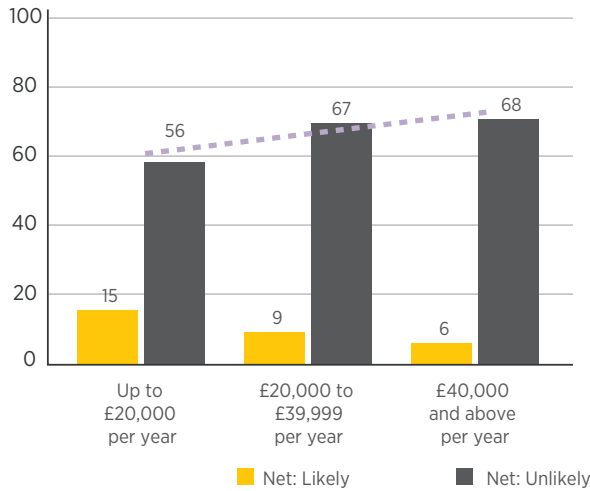
Figure 12: Likelihood to quit job, by salary (%)

Figure 11 data:
- Up to £20,000 per year: Net: Likely 15, Net: Unlikely 56
- £20,000 to £39,999 per year: Net: Likely 9, Net: Unlikely 67
- £40,000 and above per year: Net: Likely 6, Net: Unlikely 68

Figure 12 data:
- Up to £20,000 per year: Net: Likely 26, Net: Unlikely 54
- £20,000 to £39,999 per year: Net: Likely 17, Net: Unlikely 66
- £40,000 and above per year: Net: Likely 12, Net: Unlikely 67

Legend: Net: Likely | Net: Unlikely | Linear (Net: Unlikely)

Confidence in the labour market

Another aspect of job security measured in the survey is employees' confidence in the labour market. The survey asked: 'How easy or difficult do you think it would be for you to find another job at least as good as your current one?' We found that 44% of Northern Irish working adults say they would find it difficult, with 28% saying it would be easy. Public sector employees were more likely to say this would be difficult compared with private sector employees – 59% versus 40%.

We also see interesting differences by age in the survey, with labour market confidence declining sharply by age. Twenty-three per cent of those aged 55+ say finding a job at least as good as their current one would be very difficult, compared with only 6% for those aged 18–34. This is linked to organisational tenure – only 21% of those who have worked for their current organisation for more than ten years say it would be easy to find an equivalent job, compared with 43% for those with less than two years' service.

Underemployment

In addition to the objective measure of hours worked, the survey asked employees to subjectively report 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 (covered in the next chapter), which are key elements of job quality.

Figure 13: Underemployment (%)

Figure 13 data:
- None (work at least as much as I'd like): 88
- Up to 5 hours underemployed: 4
- More than 5, up to 10 hours underemployed: 3
- More than 10, up to 15 hours underemployed: 3
- More than 15 hours underemployed: 3
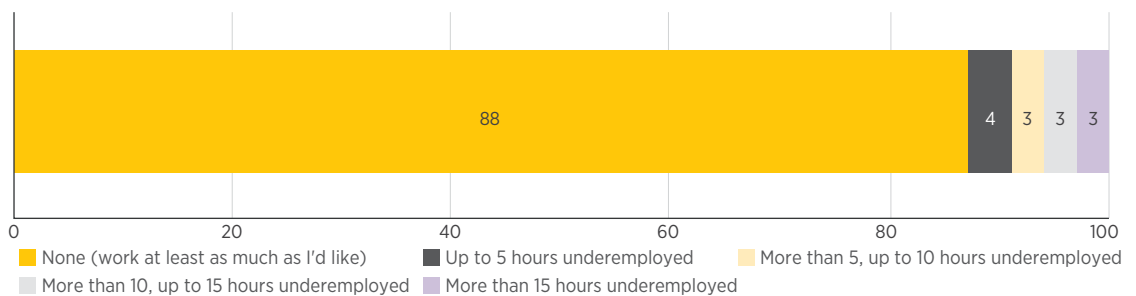
Looking at the difference between the number of hours usually worked per week and how much an individual would like to work per week, we can estimate an employee's level of underemployment. Results showed that 88% of people work at least as much as they would like to, with around 12% saying they would like to work more than they currently do. This is roughly in line with ONS data that estimates underemployment at around 10% across the UK. Six per cent of all employees say they would like to work more than ten hours on top of what they currently do.

Looking at the figures in more detail, we see that those working full-time are much less likely to report underemployment (6%) compared with those working part-time (32%) and the self-employed (23%). Those educated to below degree level are also much more likely to say they are underemployed – 19% compared with 10% for those educated to undergraduate level and 6% for those educated to postgraduate level.

Lastly, and in line with previous research, those in lower occupational classes are more likely to report underemployment. For example, 23% of those in 'elementary' and 'sales and customer service' occupations say they would like to work more hours.

⑦ **Work–life balance**

The pandemic has thrown work–life balance issues into sharp relief. Not only has the shift to homeworking threatened to further blur the lines between working and personal lives, but the nationwide lockdown also put additional pressures on those with caring responsibilities. The dangers of the so-called 'always-on' culture, which sees emails and messages dealt with outside of regular office hours, have also been exacerbated. On the other hand, employees and employers discovered that additional flexibility, often with less commuting time, can work well for them. We explore some of these issues in this chapter.

Key findings
- Nearly a third (31%) of all employees say they find it hard to relax in their personal time because of their job, rising to 40% for those with adult caring responsibilities.
- 64% of employees report working more hours per week than they would like to.
- There are significant gaps in the availability of formal flexible working arrangements for employees in Northern Ireland.
- Key workers are finding it more difficult than non-key workers to arrange taking an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters.
- Employees who work flexibly report higher job satisfaction, are more likely to be motivated by their organisation's purpose and have better skills development opportunities.

Balancing work and personal life
Finding the right balance between personal and working lives is crucial to our wellbeing. On one hand, work commitments can spill over into our personal lives, and on the other, our personal commitments can impede on the ability to do our jobs properly. We tease out these subjective measures through a series of questions in the survey.

Nearly a third (31%) of all employees say they find it hard to relax in their personal time because of their job. This rises to 54% for those who say they have excessive workloads, compared with only 16% of those who say their workload is about right. Twenty-eight per cent of employees say they find it difficult to fulfil commitments outside of their job because of the amount of time spent on the job, suggesting that there is some spill-over of paid work into personal lives. Conversely, 8% of employees said that they find it difficult to do their job due to commitments outside of work.

As one would expect, there are significant differences in responses across the occupations. For example, 'managers and senior officials' are finding it harder than average to relax – 46% versus a 31% average. On the other hand, less than a quarter (24%) of those working in 'admin and secretarial occupations' say they find it hard to relax, and only 18% of the same employees say they find it difficult to fulfil commitments outside of their job.

Figure 14: Balancing work and personal life (%)

	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I find it difficult to relax in my personal time because of my job	31	21	48
I find it difficult to do my job properly because of my commitments outside of work	8	16	76
I find it difficult to fulfil my commitments outside of my job because of the amount of time I spend on my job	28	21	51
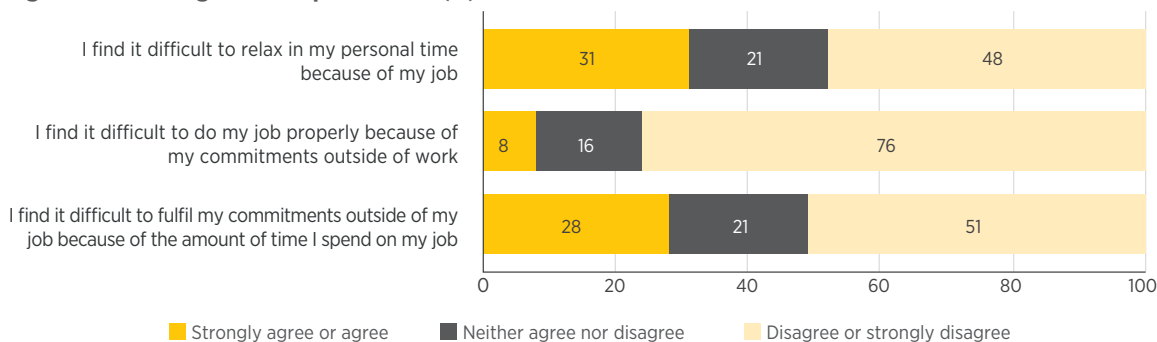
Furthermore, caring responsibilities are a significant factor across the three questions. Fourteen per cent of those caring for adult relatives say they find it difficult to do their job properly, compared with just 4% of those with no caring responsibilities. They also find it more difficult to relax in their personal time because of their job – 40% of those with adult caring responsibilities say this, compared with 30% of those without any caring responsibilities.

Overwork

In the previous chapter we looked at levels of underemployment. On the other end of the scale is overwork, measured as the difference between reported usual hours of work and preferred hours of work. The presence of overwork is likely to impact negatively on how people balance work with the rest of their lives. The survey found that only 24% of employees work at least the hours they would like to, with 64% reporting some levels of overwork. One per cent of employees said they work 15 or more hours more than they would like to. As with underemployment, there were some clear differences by occupation. The top three occupational classes reported the highest levels of overwork, with 78% of 'managers and senior officials' saying they would like to work fewer hours.

Figure 15: Overwork (%)

None (work the hours would like to)	Up to 5 hours overworked	More than 5, up to 10 hours overworked	More than 10, up to 15 hours overworked	More than 15 hours overworked
27	16	21	11	11
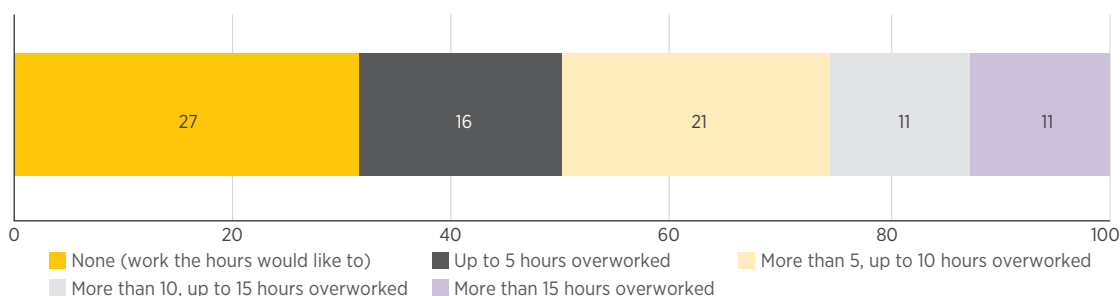
Availability of flexible working

Before the pandemic, the incidence of flexible working has been increasing very slowly, despite government intervention. The last 20 months have been described as the largest homeworking experiment this country has ever seen, and evidence – from employers and employees – suggests that the impact on ways of working is likely to be permanent to a degree. In the first chapter of this report we saw that employee preferences point to a hybrid future, and our own research shows this matches employer expectations too.

However, it is important to emphasise that there are many different forms of flexible working, and it is crucial that homeworking does not become synonymous with flexible working – not all jobs can be done from home, not everybody can work from home and not everybody wants to work from home. Our previous analysis of official ONS data shows a drop in all forms of flexible working arrangements (apart from homeworking) since the onset of the pandemic.

Working Lives Northern Ireland looks at formal arrangements, but also at so-called informal flexibility, which we know is a lot more common. On the formal side, we examined six types of arrangements. Flexi-time (choosing the start and finish time of each day) and compressed hours (working the same number of hours per week but over fewer days) are flexible working arrangements that focus on the organisation, rather than reduction, of work time. Reduced hours, job-sharing (one full-time job shared between part-time workers) and term-time working are arrangements that focus on the reduction of work time. Finally, working from home or teleworking focuses on flexibility in work location.

As one would expect, the most used form of flexible working in 2021 is working from home, used by 47% of all employees and available to another 5% on top of that. However, the data also shows significant gaps in the availability and usage of other forms of flexible working arrangement. In total, 65% of those asked work flexibly in some form, with a third (33%) having started working this way due to the pandemic.

Breaking the figures down, we see notable differences in the availability of flexible working between the public and private sectors, with greater availability in the public sector for every single flexible working option. The findings also show a significant gender difference in the usage of reduced hours (used by 15% of women and 6% of men), which past research suggests may be due to caring responsibilities.

Figure 16: Availability and use of flexible working arrangements (%)

Note: does not add up to 100% due to 'don't know' answers.

Work–life balance
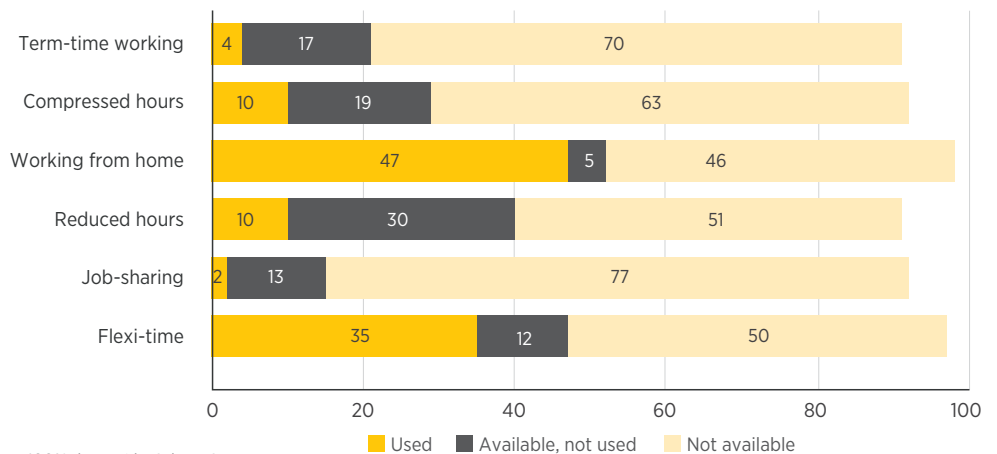
Informal flexibility

Formal flexible working arrangements are not the only kind of flexibility that employees can have in the workplace. Informal forms of flexibility enable greater control over the way work interacts with the rest of our lives, without requiring formal requests, approval and associated contractual changes. Informal flexibility was analysed by asking employees how difficult they would find taking some time off for personal or family matters.
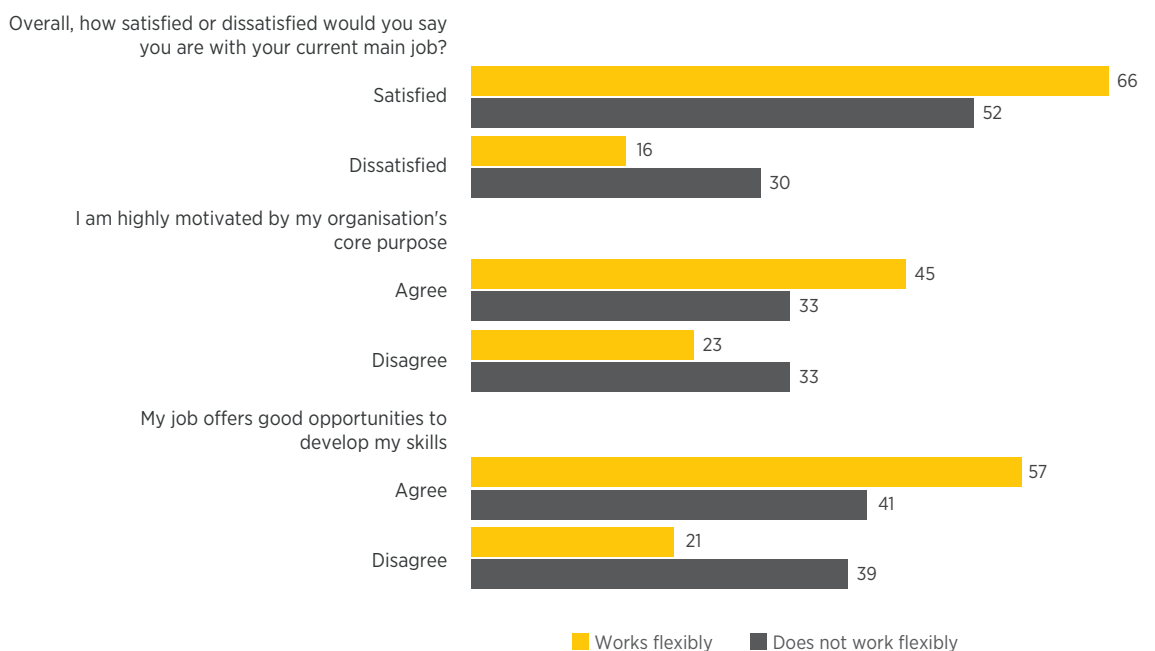
The survey found that over half of all employees report good informal flexibility in their jobs, with nearly two-thirds (62%) saying they would find it easy to take time off for personal or family matters. We saw a direct correlation with salary bands – employees in better-paid jobs reported more informal flexibility. This is due to lower-paid occupations generally reporting lower flexibility, with employees in 'caring, leisure, and other services', 'sales and customer services' and 'elementary occupations' finding taking time off the most difficult. Looking at key worker status, we found that key workers report much poorer informal flexibility too – 32% of key workers say taking time off would be difficult, compared with 14% for those not in key worker roles.

Flexible working and job quality

The CIPD has long argued that there is a positive relationship between flexible working and job quality, with an impact on employee productivity. *Working Lives Northern Ireland* provides some evidence in relation to this. Figure 17 shows a breakdown of answers given to three qualitative questions by those who work flexibly and those who do not.

Our survey shows that those who work flexibly are more likely to be satisfied with their job, more likely to say they are highly motivated by their organisation's core purpose and more likely to say their job offers good opportunities to develop their skills. When analysing the possible impact of other variables (for example, occupation, age, salary, industry or sector) on these results, flexible working arrangements remain a statistically significant factor across all three questions.

Figure 17: Flexible working and job quality (%)

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with your current main job?

- Satisfied: Works flexibly 66; Does not work flexibly 52
- Dissatisfied: Works flexibly 16; Does not work flexibly 30

I am highly motivated by my organisation's core purpose

- Agree: Works flexibly 45; Does not work flexibly 33
- Disagree: Works flexibly 23; Does not work flexibly 33

My job offers good opportunities to develop my skills

- Agree: Works flexibly 57; Does not work flexibly 41
- Disagree: Works flexibly 21; Does not work flexibly 39

■ Works flexibly   ■ Does not work flexibly

(8) Job design and nature of work

The next dimension of job quality we look at is job design and the nature of work. This covers a broad range of issues, from job autonomy and complexity, through skills development and overqualification, to workloads and personal meaningfulness of work. Jobs that match employee skillsets are linked to performance and any mismatch can point to labour market inefficiencies. Fulfilling work that employees feel is aligned to a valuable purpose, as well as the level of control over one's daily tasks, is associated with job satisfaction. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of research that shows that encouraging learning, growth and self-determination at work leads to higher performance and wellbeing, whereas monotonous and demeaning jobs are associated with boredom, passivity and loss of productivity.

Key findings

- 40% of all employees report their workload as too high in a normal week. Those with longer organisational tenures, key workers and those not working from home at all are more likely to report workloads that are too high.
- 12% of those working fully from home say they don't have a suitable space to do their job effectively.
- Employees in better-paid jobs, those with longer tenures and those working flexibly report higher levels of job autonomy.
- 30% of employees feel they are overqualified for their job, rising to 46% of those in the lowest-paid jobs.
- Skills and career development opportunities are significantly lower for those in lower-paid jobs, as well as for older workers.

Workload

Previous chapters looked at issues like working hours, overwork and underemployment. However, in addition to concerns over the *length of time* spent in work, the *relative intensity* of work (how hard someone has to work in order to complete their tasks in a given time period) is increasingly significant to our understanding of the quality of work. Our survey therefore asks employees to rate their workload in a normal week. Figure 18 summarises the results and shows that two-fifths (40%) of employees report their workload as too much or far too much.

Workload, like other elements of job quality, varies across occupational classes. We found that employees classed as 'managers, directors and senior officials', or who work in 'caring, leisure, and other services' and 'process, plant and machine operatives' report the highest workload. 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.

Figure 18: Workload (%)

Far too much	10
Too much	30
About right	53
Too little	4
Far too little	1
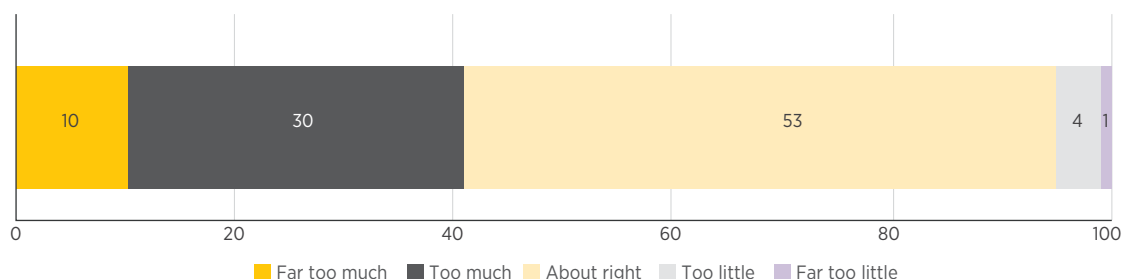
Looking beyond occupational classes, our data showed that 47% of senior or other managers are reporting too much workload, compared with 26% of board-level managers and 37% of those without management responsibility. The CIPD's 2018 *UK Working Lives* report discussed this phenomenon, saying it could reflect the existence of a 'squeezed middle' of middle-level managers and professionals performing supervisory tasks alongside a number of other core responsibilities.

We also saw interesting differences by tenure (length of service) – those who have been with their organisation for a long time report much higher workloads than those who have only recently started working for the organisation. Forty-four per cent of those with a tenure of more than ten years report workloads that are too high, compared with only 31% of those with less than one or two years' service. Also, those unable to work from home report above-average workloads. Forty-four per cent of those not working from home at all say their workload is too high, compared with 39% of those working from home only some of the time and 35% of those working from home all the time. We also find that key workers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their workload, with nearly half (48%) reporting workloads that are too high, compared with 35% for non-key workers.

Job autonomy and complexity

The level of control over one's job, that is, autonomy, is an intrinsic component of the nature of work. The aspects of control measured in the survey are 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. The presence and level of autonomy forms an important part of job quality. It potentially enables employees to cope with greater work demands, boosts productivity and impacts on the wellbeing of employees.

Figure 19 summarises the findings in relation to job autonomy. Employees have less autonomy when it comes to starting and finishing their working day compared with the other aspects of autonomy measured. This mirrors the flexible working data in the previous chapter, which found 50% of Northern Irish employees did not have flexi-time available to them.

Figure 19: How much influence do you have over aspects of work? (%)
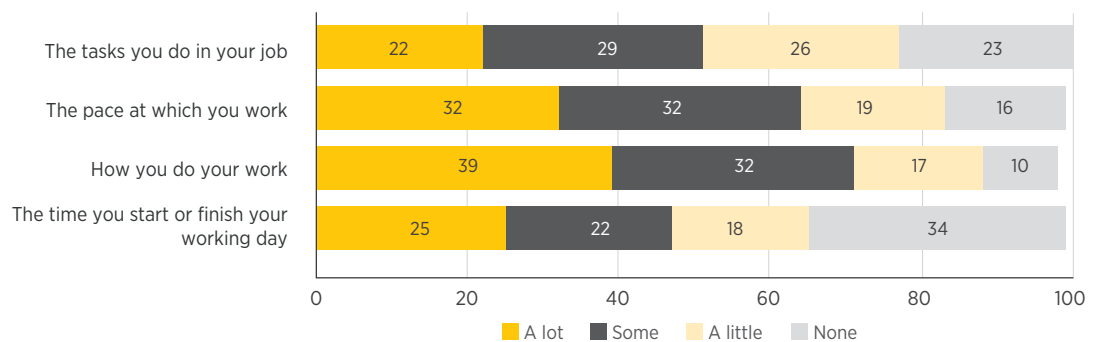
We also found a relationship between occupations, salary bands and elements of job autonomy – especially strong on the question about working hours. For example, 69% of those earning over £40,000 say they have a lot/some autonomy over their working hours, in contrast with just 31% of those earning under £20,000. Regardless of occupation, we find a strong relationship between all four aspects of job autonomy and job satisfaction, with those reporting higher job autonomy more likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

Figure 20: Influence over aspects of work, by salary (%)

Net: a lot/some
- Up to £20,000 per year
- £20,000 to £39,999 per year
- £40,000 and above per year

	Up to £20,000	£20,000 to £39,999	£40,000 and above
The tasks you do in your job	41	48	62
The pace at which you work	65	61	71
How you do your work	66	73	88
The time you start or finish your working day	31	42	69
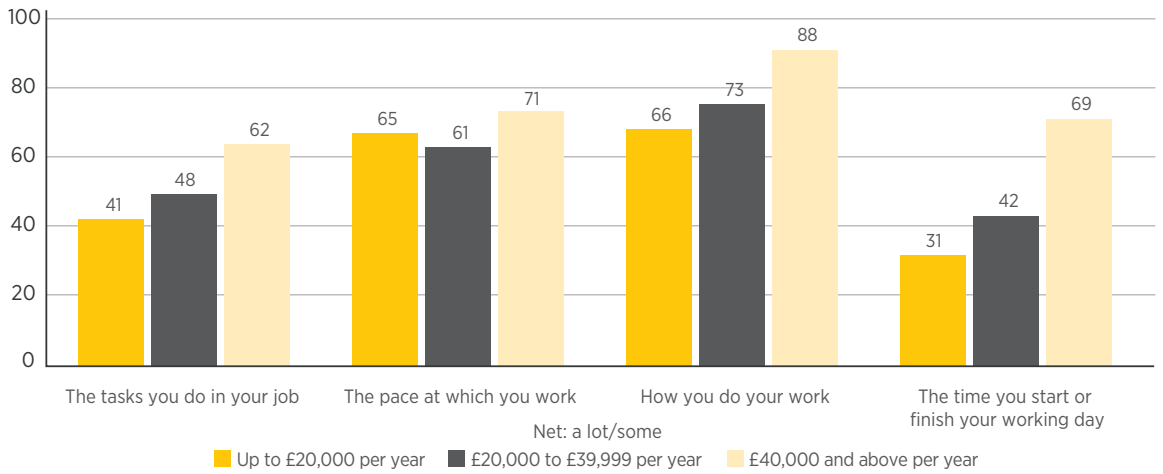
Self-evidently, those with flexible working arrangements and those working from home during the pandemic (both fully and partly) also reported better job autonomy, especially on the question around working hours. Similarly, job autonomy also increases with an employee's tenure, with those who have been with their organisations for longer reporting much higher job autonomy. On the other hand, key workers' job autonomy is poorer across all four aspects measured.

The survey also looked at 'job complexity'. This examines the nature of an employee's job and whether it involves interesting or monotonous tasks as well as problem-solving. Figure 21 summarises the findings. As with job autonomy, the main differences sit with salary band and occupation. For example, while 71% of 'managers, directors and senior officials' said their job involves solving unforeseen problems on their own always or often, only 27% of those in 'elementary occupations' reported the same. This occupational split also means that those working from home (fully or partly) do better than those who can't work from home at all across all five elements of job complexity.

Figure 21: How often does your job involve...? (%)
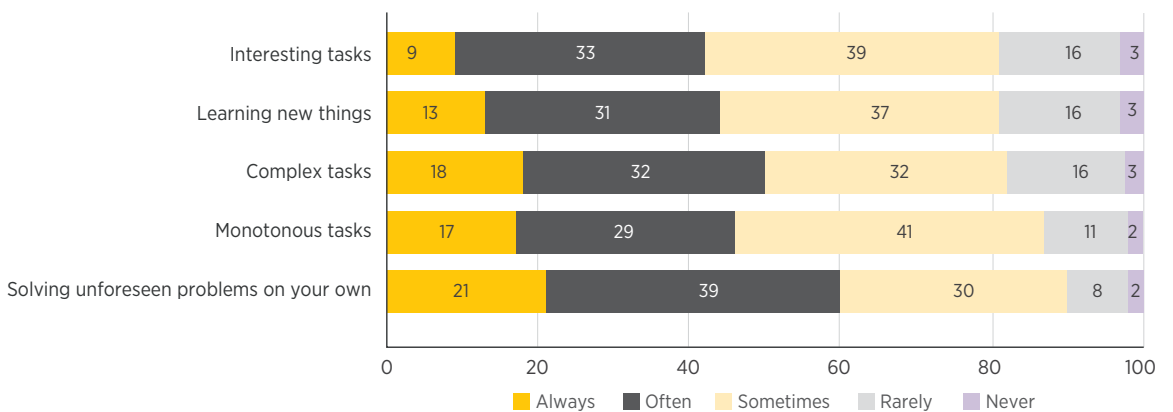
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Interesting tasks	9	33	39	16	3
Learning new things	13	31	37	16	3
Complex tasks	18	32	32	16	3
Monotonous tasks	17	29	41	11	2
Solving unforeseen problems on your own	21	39	30	8	2

Adequate work resources

Having access to the right resources, the right equipment, the right training and suitable premises to do the job effectively is crucial to our performance at work. This is an issue that has been highlighted during the pandemic, with some employees forced to work from home despite having no space to do so or struggling with broadband issues. The survey asked employees to answer five questions in relation to adequate work resources. Most employees report good access to training, equipment, premises, digital tools and broadband – summarised in Figure 22.

The biggest gap was found around training, with a quarter (25%) of employees saying they don't receive training and information to do their jobs well. Those on lower salaries are more likely to report this, with corresponding differences by occupation (with the exception of 'caring, leisure and other services', who report lowest disagreement). Looking just at those working fully from home, 12% reported a lack of a suitable space to do their job effectively.

Figure 22: Adequacy of work resources (%)
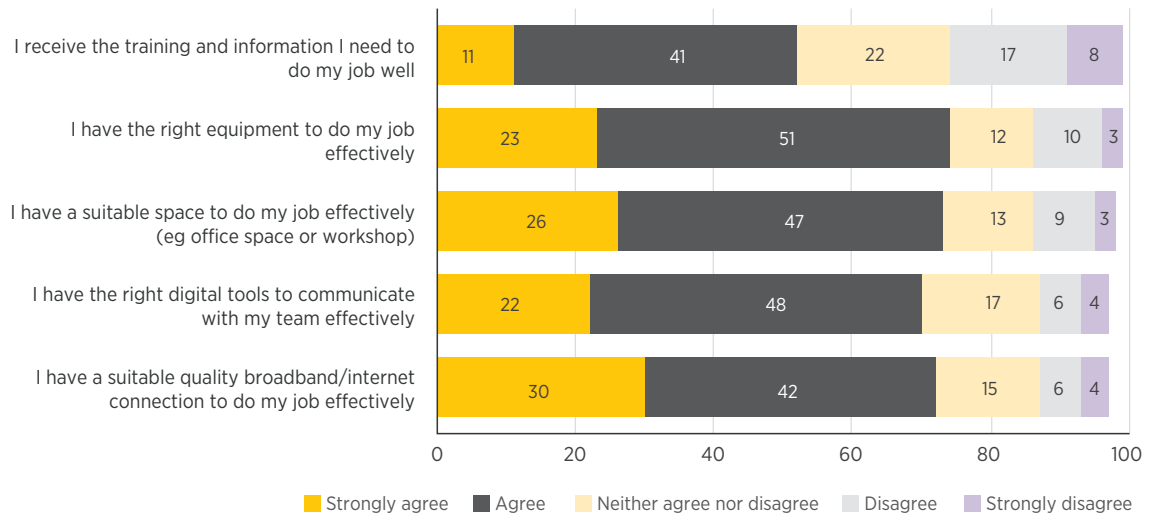
Note: does not add up to 100% due to 'don't know' answers.

Meaningful work

This report also examined whether employees feel they make a useful contribution through their work – be it to the organisation or to society as a whole. It also asked employees to say whether they feel motivated by their organisation's core purpose – also an indicator of fulfilling and meaningful work.

Figure 23 shows a significant majority (69%) of employees felt they are doing useful work for their organisation, although only 42% felt highly motivated by the organisation's core purpose.

Figure 23: Feelings on meaningfulness of work (%)

Job design and nature of work
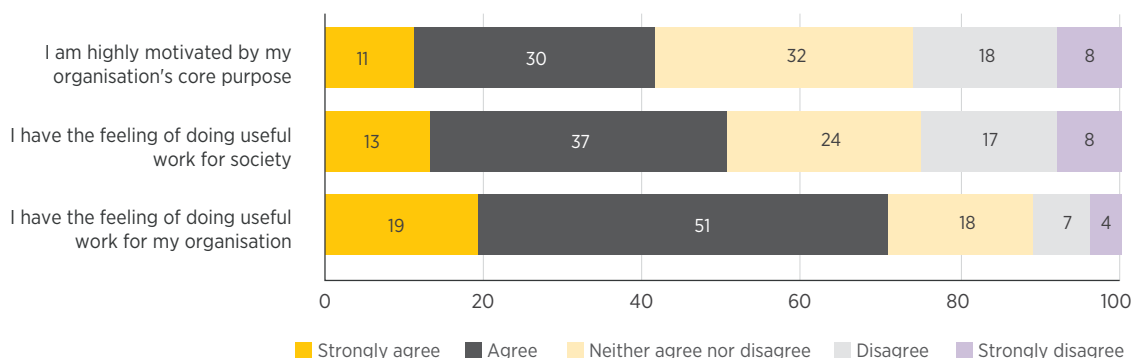
Half (50%) of all employees felt they are doing useful work for society and, unsurprisingly, there were considerable differences by key worker status as well as sector. Sixty-four per cent of key workers agreed with the statement, compared with 40% of non-key workers. Furthermore, only 41% of private sector employees agreed, compared with 73% of public sector employees and 79% of voluntary sector employees. Private sector employees scored more poorly across the other two questions too, especially compared with employees in the voluntary sector.

The findings showed a significant correlation with job satisfaction across all three questions, with those agreeing with the statements significantly more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with their jobs. Seventy-five per cent of those who felt they are doing useful work for their organisation, and 76% of those who felt they are doing useful work for society, are satisfied with their jobs, compared with 13% who were dissatisfied. The difference is even bigger for the core purpose question, with 84% satisfied and 7% dissatisfied with their jobs.
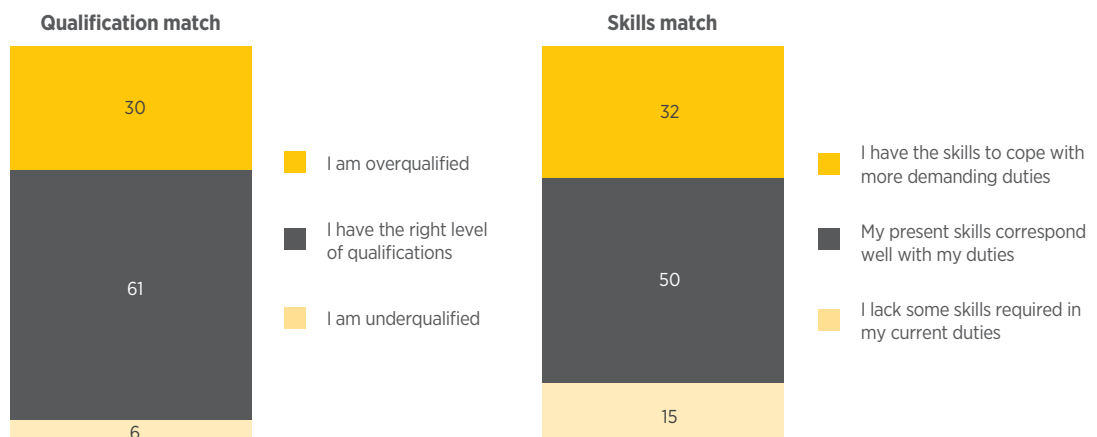
The data also reveals some interesting differences between occupational classes. On the question of doing useful work for society, the two occupational classes that stand out are 'professionals' and 'caring, leisure and other services', both of which record higher levels of agreement than the average. This is most likely since these occupational classes include health and teaching professionals as well as scientific researchers. On the other two questions we saw a clear split by occupational class too, with higher occupational classes more likely to agree with both questions than those in lower occupational classes.

Skills and qualification match

The chance to use one's skills to their full extent in employment is a crucial element of job quality. The issue of overqualification, especially around the number of degree-educated employees in lower-skilled jobs and the impact of this on productivity, has also been of increasing interest to researchers and policy-makers. Overqualification points to inefficiencies in the relationship between the labour market and our skills development system, but it also impacts on individual motivation and wellbeing.

We measured 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. The survey data showed that the majority (61%) of employees felt their qualifications match their job well, with 30% feeling overqualified. A similar proportion (32%) of employees felt they have the skills to cope with more demanding duties, with half (50%) saying their skills match their current duties well.

Figure 24: Qualification and skills matching (%)

Qualification match

30	■ I am overqualified
61	■ I have the right level of qualifications
6	■ I am underqualified

Skills match

32	■ I have the skills to cope with more demanding duties
50	■ My present skills correspond well with my duties
15	■ I lack some skills required in my current duties

Job design and nature of work

As with most other dimensions of job quality, there were significant differences in the answers between occupational classes as well as salary bands. On the latter, there is a gradual drop in perceived overqualification towards the high end of the salary scale. Nearly half (46%) of those earning less than £20,000 per year feel overqualified, compared with only a quarter (25%) of those earning over £40,000 per year.

Breaking the results down by occupational class shows the incidence of overqualification is highest among employees in 'sales and customer services', 'administrative and secretarial' and 'elementary' classes. Figure 25 summarises the differences by SOC 2020.

Figure 25: Overqualification, by occupation class (%)
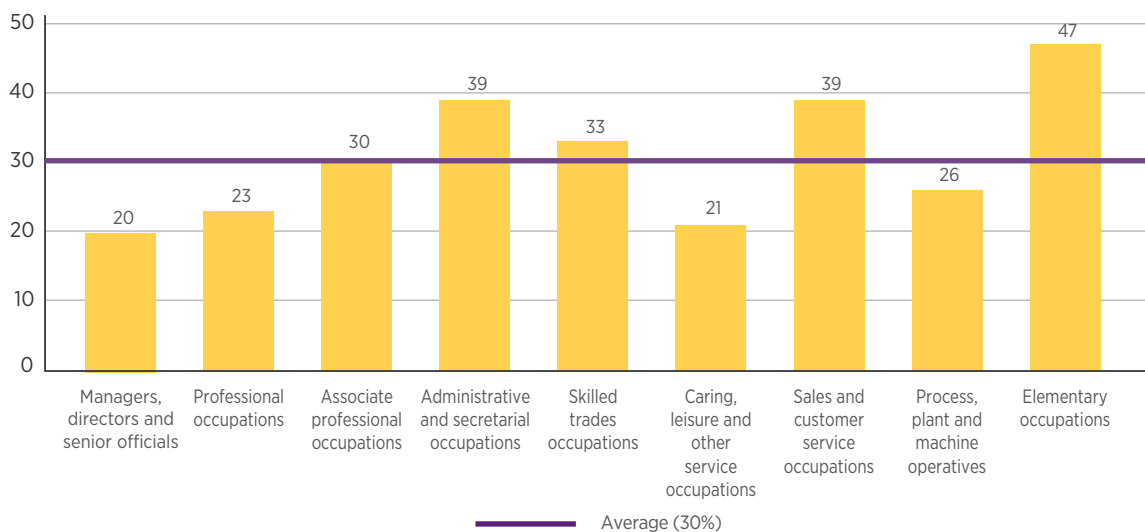
Personal and career development
Upskilling and continuous personal development within the workplace is something all employers should encourage, especially when looking to tackle skills and qualification mismatches described above. This is also linked to opportunities for career progression, which is another element of job quality. Our survey asked employees two questions – whether their job offers good prospects for career advancement and whether it offers good opportunities to develop skills.

Figure 26 summarises the answers received across the two questions. Over a third (36%) of employees believed their job offers good prospects for career advancement. More encouragingly, 51% believed that their job offers good opportunities for skills development.

Figure 26: Personal and career development (%)

Job design and nature of work
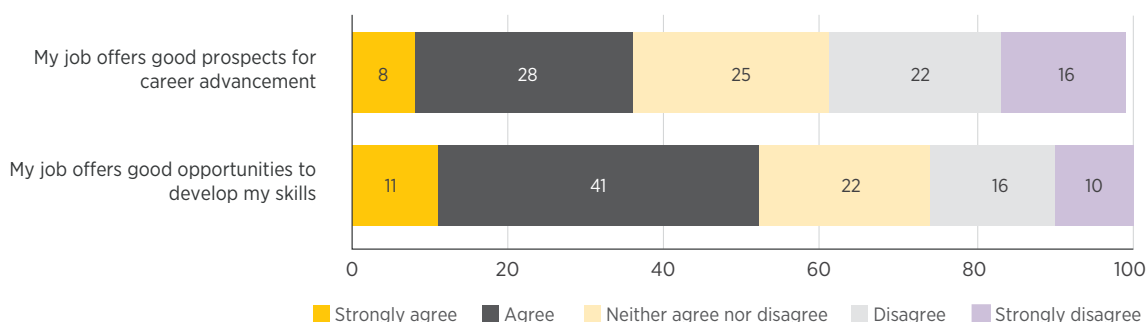
There was a positive relationship between rising salary levels and reported opportunities for career advancement in the survey. Forty-seven per cent of those earning over £40,000 per year reported good career advancement options, compared with 37% of those earning less than £20,000. These differences were borne out when looking at occupational classes, with the highest career advancement opportunities reported by employees in the top two occupational classes ('managers and senior officials' and 'professionals') and, conversely, the worst opportunities recorded by the two bottom occupational classes ('elementary' and 'process, plant and machine operatives').

We found exactly the same pattern in skills development opportunities too. The same two occupational classes reported the best skills 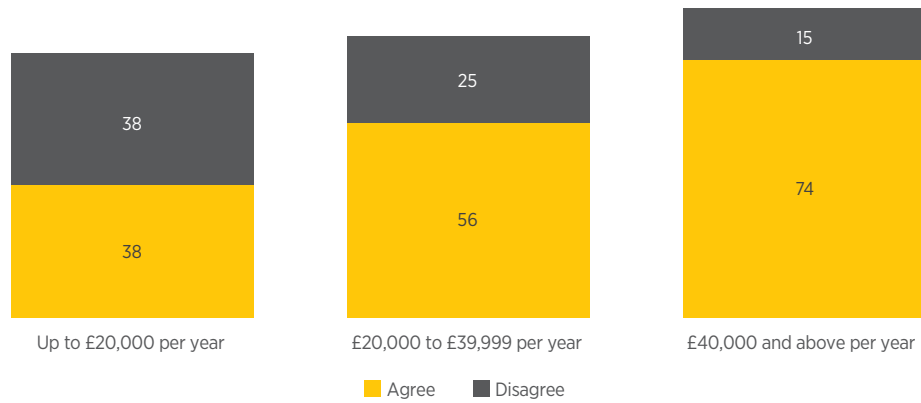development opportunities, with the two bottom classes the worst. This occupational split means that there are significant differences between different salary levels and skills development opportunities, summarised in Figure 27.

Figure 27: Prospects for skills development, by salary (%)

	Up to £20,000 per year	£20,000 to £39,999 per year	£40,000 and above per year
Agree	38	56	74
Disagree	38	25	15

There were significant drops in perceived skills and career development opportunities by age, with older workers less likely to report good opportunities for both. This could simply reflect the stage of the employees' careers, but the answers around skills in particular (Figure 28) could also point to a gap in the provision of training by employers, as well as a poorer public policy skills infrastructure for these employees.

Figure 28: Prospects for skills development, by age (%)

Age	Agree
25–34	60
35–44	54
45–54	47
55+	46

Agree — Average (51%)

Job design and nature of work
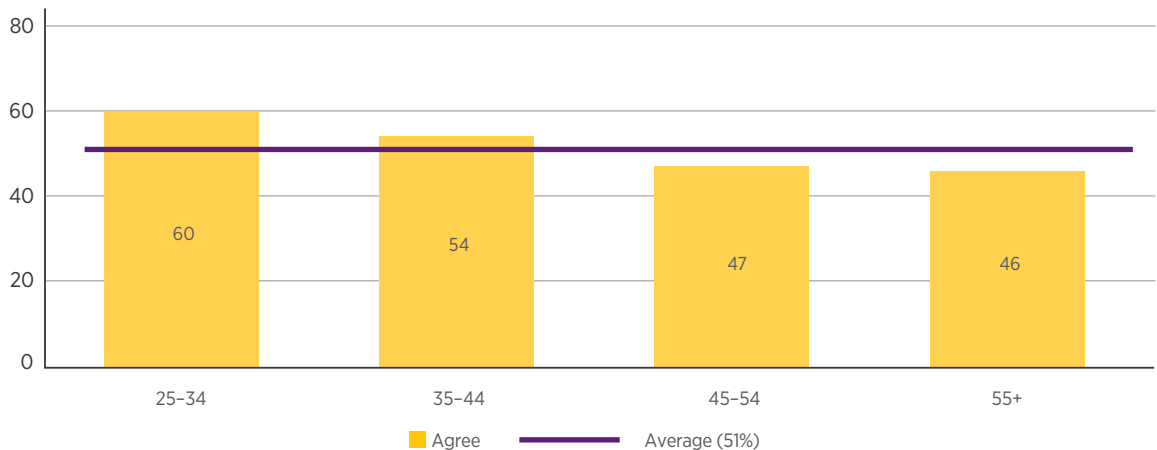
⑨ Relationships at work

Relationships in both our working and personal lives are a key part of our overall quality of life. Previous CIPD reports, academic research as well as the experiences of our members tell us that relationships at work are incredibly important. They impact how we treat each other, how we share knowledge, and how we accomplish group-based tasks. Good relationships at work improve the way organisations function, with bad relationships negatively affecting performance. They also impact individuals' health and wellbeing, their motivation, commitment as well as their performance. This chapter looks at a range of different relationships at work, quality of management, psychological safety as well as experiences of conflict at work and how this was dealt with.

Key findings
- We find better relationships with colleagues for those working from home only some of the time and those not working from home at all compared with those working fully from home.
- However, we also see homeworkers rate their managers more highly than those who don't work from home at all, irrespective of occupation.
- Nearly a fifth (18%) of employees feel their boss would hold it against them if they made a mistake. A similar proportion (19%) believe that people in their team sometimes reject others for being different.
- 26% of all employees experienced at least one type of conflict at work, with 15% saying they experienced two or more types.
- Those unable to work from home and key workers were much more likely to report having experienced conflict at work in the last year.

Quality of relationships
The survey asked employees to rate their relationships with a range of people at work. The vast majority of employees reported very good or good relationships with those the survey asked about – managers and colleagues, as well as managed staff or clients (where applicable). The most positive relationships reported are with colleagues in their own team, with 81% reporting very good or good relationships, followed by staff managed (where applicable) on 78% and line managers or supervisors on 74%.

Figure 29: Quality of relationships at work (%)

Note: does not add up to 100% due to N/A and 'don't know' answers.

The forced increase in homeworking we have seen over the last 20 months has significantly impacted the way we interact and engage with our colleagues, managers or clients. It is therefore positive to see that workplace relationships remain largely positive despite these new challenges and strains. Looking at homeworking in more detail, ther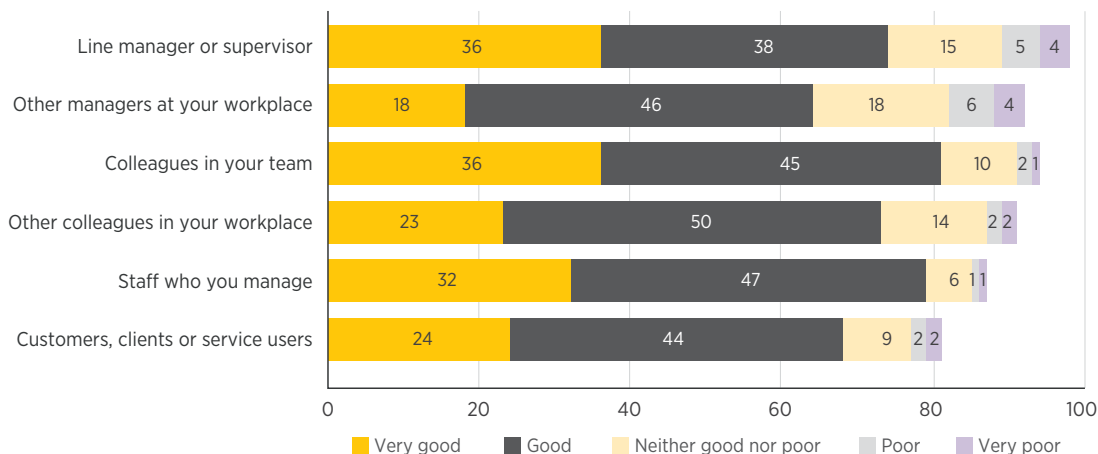e were better relationships with colleagues for those working from home only some of the time and those not working from home at all compared with those working from home all the time. Also, homeworkers rated their managers more highly than those who don't work from home at all, irrespective of occupation.

In line with previous evidence, there is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and good relationships at work. Those who rated their relationships as poor reported much lower job satisfaction – this was true for every relationship we asked about. We also see positive workplace relationships associated with higher task performance (for example, achieving the objectives of the job) and contextual performance (for example, helping colleagues or making innovative suggestions).

Relationship with managers

In addition to the quality of relationships in the workplace, the survey included a series of questions that focus specifically on the relationship with managers. Given the increasing amount of evidence on the importance of good people management to productivity, this is a key element of good work. Figure 30 shows a summary of the findings.

Over 70% of employees believed that their boss respects them as a person, treats them fairly and is supportive if they have a problem. The highest percentage of negative responses were associated with the question about feedback, with just over a fifth (21%) of employees disagreeing with the statement that their boss provides useful feedback on their work.

Figure 30: Relationships with managers (%)
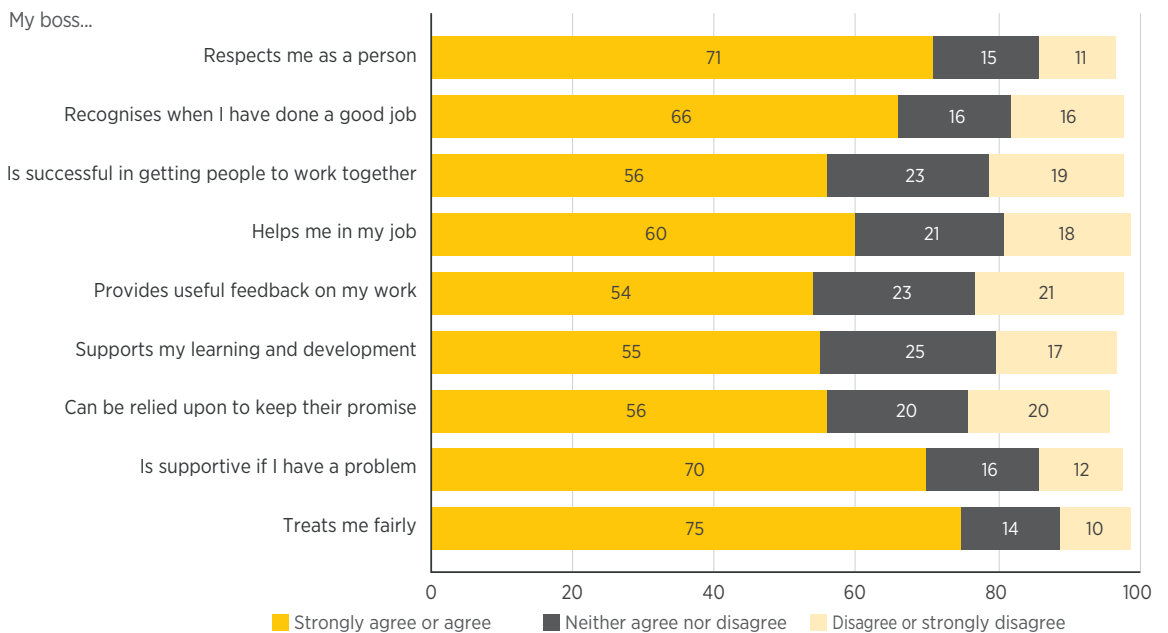
My boss...

	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
Respects me as a person	71	15	11
Recognises when I have done a good job	66	16	16
Is successful in getting people to work together	56	23	19
Helps me in my job	60	21	18
Provides useful feedback on my work	54	23	21
Supports my learning and development	55	25	17
Can be relied upon to keep their promise	56	20	20
Is supportive if I have a problem	70	16	12
Treats me fairly	75	14	10

Note: does not add up to 100% due to N/A and 'don't know' answers.

Looking at the data in more detail, we found some interesting differences. Homeworkers (both those working fully and partly from home) reported more positive relationships with managers compared with those who do not work from home at all, irrespective of occupational differences. The same was true for employees with any flexible working arrangements more broadly. This, coupled with the findings about managerial openness in the next chapter, underlines why good management is crucial to enabling flexible work.

Good management is also crucial to job quality overall. As with the findings around relationships at work, we see a very strong link between the quality of line manager relationships and job satisfaction. Across all nine questions asked, those who agreed with the statements were at least five times more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than dissatisfied.
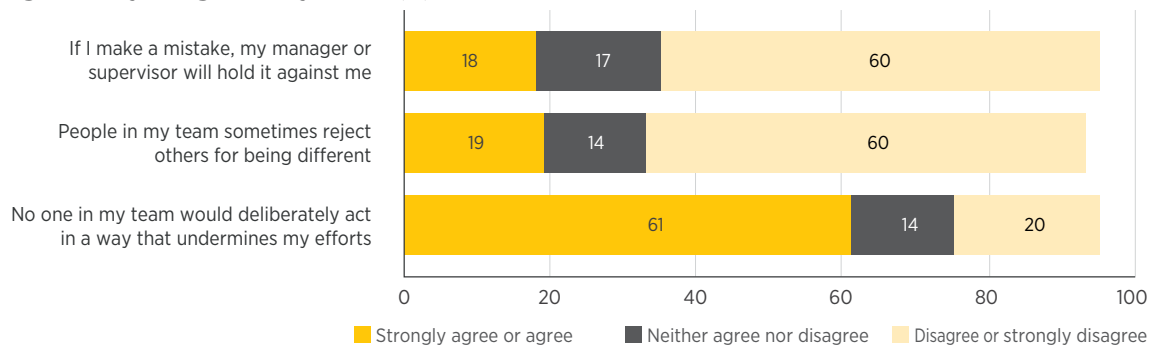
Psychological safety

Working Lives Northern Ireland also looks at 'psychological safety at work'. Through a series of questions, we sought to uncover whether a 'blame culture' exists in an organisation – where people are fearful about making mistakes or expressing their opinions because of negative consequences.

The findings showed that almost a fifth (18%) of employees felt their boss would hold it against them if they made a mistake. A similar proportion (19%) believed that people in their team sometimes reject others for being different. Another fifth (20%) disagreed with the statement that no one in their team would deliberately act in a way that undermines their efforts.

As with other aspects of job quality, occupation and salary have an impact on the answers given, especially to the first two questions. For example, while 37% of those on the lowest salaries agree that people in their team sometimes reject others for being different, this falls to only 7% for those earning £40,000 and above per year. This also means that those who are unable to work from home scored more poorly on psychological safety.

Figure 31: Psychological safety at work (%)

	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
If I make a mistake, my manager or supervisor will hold it against me	18	17	60
People in my team sometimes reject others for being different	19	14	60
No one in my team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts	61	14	20

Note: does not add up to 100% due to N/A and 'don't know' answers.

Experience of conflict

The last element of good work in this chapter we look at is experience of conflict. This can range from being undermined or humiliated in one's job, through verbal, physical or sexual assault, to discrimination because of a protected characteristic. We also look at whether the experienced behaviour was resolved.

Concerningly, 26% of all employees experienced at least one of the behaviours we asked about, with 15% saying they experienced two or more behaviours. The most common behaviour experienced was 'being undermined or humiliated in my job', experienced by 13% of employees, followed by 'shouting or very heated arguments' (11%) and 'verbal abuse or insult' (9%). The full breakdown is show in Figure 32.

Figure 32: Experience of conflict at work (%)

Being undermined or humiliated in my job	13
Shouting or very heated arguments	11
Verbal abuse or insult	9
Discriminatory behaviour because of a protected characteristic (ie my gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or belief, or age)	6
False allegations made against me	5
Other offensive or threatening behaviour	5
Intimidation or harassment (not of a sexual nature)	4
Physical threat	2
Unwanted attention of a sexual nature	1
Physical assault (not of a sexual nature)	1
Sexual assault	0

Even though we don't have comparable figures from before the pandemic, it is reasonable to assume that working from home will have had an impact on some of these experiences, as those who continued to attend their normal place of work had more direct contact with colleagues or customers. This was borne out in our survey, where those unable to work from home and key workers were much more likely to report having experienced conflict at work. Thirty-four per cent of key workers experienced at least one such behaviour, compared with 21% of those not in key worker roles.

When looking at whether the behaviour was resolved, we found that 73% of those who experienced discrimination because of a protected characteristic felt it remains unresolved. Sixty per cent of those who experienced being undermined or humiliated in their job felt it was unresolved, with the figure at 55% for those who experienced verbal abuse or insult.

10 Voice and representation

The next good work dimension we look at is voice and representation. This refers to the opportunities available to employees to engage with their managers and employers in some form and whether they feel they have the opportunity to influence decisions. This is intrinsically important to job quality – having a meaningful voice is part of what makes us human. Employee voice also allows workers to communicate concerns, provide feedback and make a difference. We look at various forms of employee voice, including individual and collective voice. It can mean direct engagement with managers or indirect engagement through a representative (union or non-union).

Key findings

- Over a fifth (21%) of employees say they have no voice channel at work at all.
- One-to-one meetings with managers and team meetings are the most commonly reported forms of voice, available to 57% and 49% of employees respectively.
- The availability of voice channels differs significantly by organisation size and, consequently, between the public and private sectors in Northern Ireland.
- Just over a quarter (27%) of employees rate their managers as good in allowing employees to influence final decisions.
- Employees who work flexibly rate their managers significantly better than those not working flexibly, underlining the importance of good management to enabling flexible work.

Voice channels

We asked employees to select from nine different voice channels to ascertain their availability across workplaces. Figure 33 shows that the most common channels are one-to-one meetings with managers and team meetings, available to 57% and 49% of employees respectively. Just over a fifth (21%) of employees reported the availability of a trade union in their workplace.

Figure 33: Voice channels available to workers (%)

Channel	%
One-to-one meetings with your line manager	57
Team meetings	49
Employee survey	39
All-department or all-organisation meetings	22
Trade union	21
Online forum or chat room for employees (ie an enterprise social network, such as Yammer)	14
Employee focus groups	11
Non-union staff association or consultation committee	5
Other	1
None of the above	21

Over a fifth (21%) of employees say they have no voice channel at work at all. This is linked primarily to organisation size, with 45% of all employees working for organisations with fewer than ten employees saying they had no voice channel at all, compared with 10% of those in 250+ organisations and only 9% in 1,000+ organisations. Considering that we include team meetings as well as one-to-one meetings with managers in this question, it is concerning to see such high proportions of SME employees reporting no voice channels at all.

The differences by organisational size mean that the availability of voice channels differs significantly between the public and private sectors in Northern Ireland. Sixty-six per cent of public sector employees worked in organisations with over 1,000 employees, compared with only 27% of private sector employees. In consequence, 25% of private sector employees reported no voice channels at all, compared with 10% of public sector employees. Most of the channels examined have better availability in the public sector.

Figure 34: Voice channels, by sector (%)

Channel	Private sector	Public sector
Team meetings	42	65
One-to-one meetings with your line manager	57	59
Trade union	11	49
Employee survey	39	44
All-department or all-organisation meetings	20	27
Employee focus groups	11	11
Online forum or chat room for employees (ie an enterprise social network, such as Yammer)	15	10
Non-union staff association or consultation committee	6	5
Other	1	1
None of the above	25	10

Private sector · Public sector

Voice and representation

The biggest differences in availability of the individual types of channel are observed in trade union channels (49% public sector vs 11% private sector) and team meetings (65% public sector vs 42% private sector).

Employee rating of their representatives

For those employees who reported having an employee representative at work – just under 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 employees with works councils in their organisations.

We found that employees rated their representatives relatively well, with 44% saying they keep employees informed of management discussions or decisions, 43% saying they represent employee views to senior management, and 49% saying they seek the views of employees.

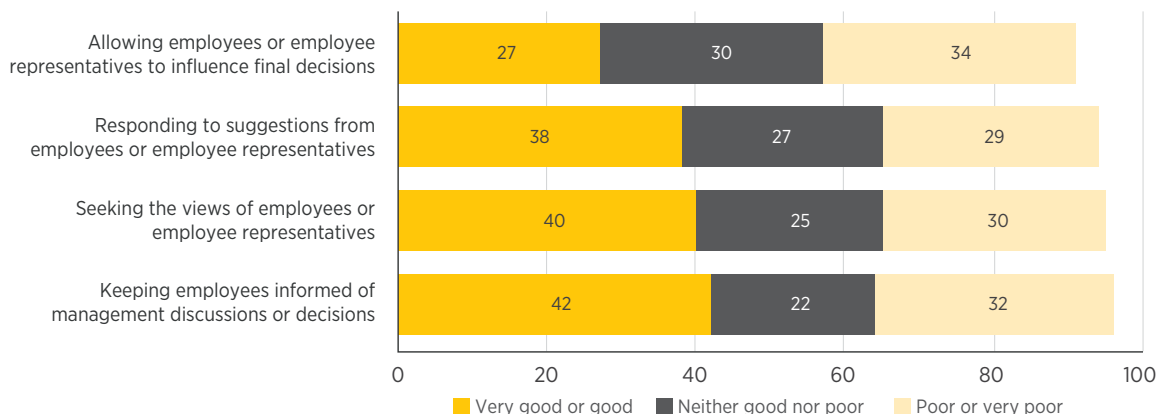**Figure 35: Employee ratings of voice representatives (%)**

	Very good or good	Neither good nor poor	Poor or very poor
Keeping employees informed of management discussions or decisions	44	24	29
Representing employee views to senior management	43	29	24
Seeking the views of employees	49	25	22
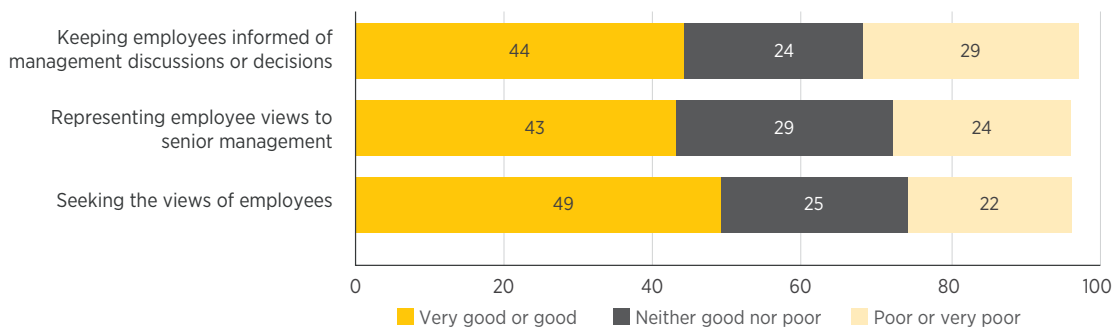
Note: does not add up to 100% due to 'don't know' answers.

Managerial openness

For all employees in our survey, regardless of whether they have a representative or not, we also measured the openness of their manager to employee views, which is a useful indicator of employee voice. 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 36 summarises the findings across all four questions. Managers are rated the poorest in the first of the questions, with just over a quarter (27%) of employees rating their managers as good or very good in allowing influence over final decisions. Over a third (34%) rate them poor or very poor.

Figure 36: Employee ratings of their managers (%)

	Very good or good	Neither good nor poor	Poor or very poor
Allowing employees or employee representatives to influence final decisions	27	30	34
Responding to suggestions from employees or employee representatives	38	27	29
Seeking the views of employees or employee representatives	40	25	30
Keeping employees informed of management discussions or decisions	42	22	32

Note: does not add up to 100% due to 'don't know' answers.

Voice and representation

In recent years we have seen an increased focus on the importance of good management to job quality and raised productivity. The pandemic emphasised this even further as the big changes to working patterns had to be underpinned by effective internal communication. As employers, employees and managers look towards the future of the workplace, effective employee voice has to be integral. Our *Good Work Index* and *Working Lives Scotland* reports both showed improvements in managerial openness scores compared with pre-pandemic data, perhaps suggesting the focus on communication did have an impact.

There is no comparable pre-pandemic data for Northern Ireland, but we can see evidence of the relationship between management quality/openness and ways of working in this survey too. While we found some differences across occupations in managerial openness (especially on the 'keeping informed' question), as well as significant differences by organisational size across some of the questions, there were strong relationships between each question and flexible working.

Figure 37 shows the net difference between very good/good and poor/very poor ratings among those working flexibly and those not working flexibly at all. Coupled with the findings in the previous chapter – where those working from home rated their managers better, regardless of occupation – these findings underline the importance of good management to enabling flexible working.

Figure 37: Managerial openness, by flexible working (%)

Legend:
- Keeping employees informed of management discussions or decisions
- Seeking the views of employees or employee representatives
- Responding to suggestions from employees or employee representatives
- Allowing employees or employee representatives to influence final decisions
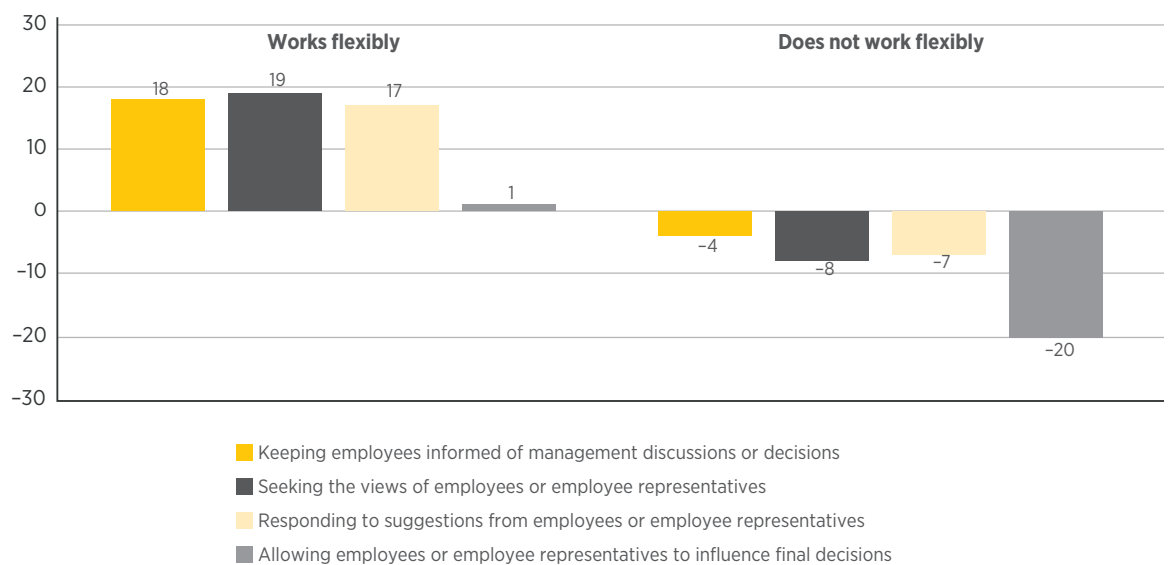
11 Health and wellbeing

The last dimension in our good work framework is health and wellbeing. This is an area that has, understandably, shot up to the top of policy-makers' and practitioners' agendas as a result of the pandemic. However, the importance of good mental and physical health goes beyond individual wellbeing. We know there is a clear relationship between poor health and work engagement and job satisfaction – for example, the CIPD's previous *Good Work Index* reports have shown health and wellbeing as having the strongest relationship with job satisfaction and job enthusiasm out of all job quality dimensions.

Key findings

- 51% of employees experienced a health-related physical condition, while 55% reported experiencing a non-physical one.
- Nearly a third (31%) of employees felt their work impacts negatively on their mental health, with 28% reporting negative impacts on their physical health.
- The most commonly reported health conditions (sleep problems, musculoskeletal issues and anxiety) are more prevalent in female employees.
- A worrying 45% of all employees reported going to work despite not being well enough to do so. This is even higher for those with adult caring responsibilities (61%), for those with disabilities (64%) and for key workers (52%).
- Nearly a third (31%) of employees always or often felt exhausted at work, with 28% saying they feel under excessive pressure.

Mental and physical health

The survey asked employees a range of questions in relation to physical and mental health. The survey asked individuals whether they had experienced health problems, such as backache or other bone, joint or muscle problems. This also encompassed problems relating to breathing, the heart, hearing, the skin, as well as road traffic accidents during commuting, injury due to work accidents and repetitive strain injury. In addition, it asked about the level of exhaustion at work and whether workers thought their work had a positive or negative impact on their physical health.

The survey also asked people to describe their current overall physical and mental health. We found that over half of all employees reported good physical and mental health – 56% said their mental health is good and 59% said their physical health is good. We found significant differences by age around mental health, with workers in the oldest age bracket reporting the best mental health (65% good for 55+). We also find adult caring responsibilities impact on employees' health, with carers reporting lower mental (44% good) and physical (47% good) health, compared with those with no caring responsibilities (60% good and 62% good respectively).

Looking at the breakdown in reported conditions, we saw that 51% of employees have experienced some form of physical health condition, while 55% have experienced a mental health condition over the last 12 months. The most common reported conditions were:

- backache or other bone, joint or muscle problems (40%)
- sleep problems (40%)
- anxiety (34%)
- depression (20%)
- skin problems (14%).

We consider differences by gender in the answers to this question. Anxiety was reported by 41% of women versus 28% of men, sleep problems by 44% of women versus 36% of men, as well as musculoskeletal problems, where the difference is the same: 44% of women versus 36% of men. As above, caring responsibilities have an impact here, with 72% of those with adult caring responsibilities reporting a mental health condition and 67% reporting a physical health condition. This compares with 53% and 51% for those with no caring responsibilities.

Impact of work on health

When it comes to how work impacts on health, the survey found 31% of employees believed their work impacts negatively or very negatively on their mental health, with 28% reporting the same for their physical health. Conversely, similar proportions of employees reported a

positive impact of work on health – 32% said it is good for their mental health and 24% said it is good for their physical health. Figure 38 shows a breakdown of the figures.

There are interesting differences when looking at these figures in more detail. Occupational class has an impact here, although it is stronger on the physical health measure. Those in lower occupational classes (that is, those who aren't mostly office-based) are more likely to say work impacts positively on their physical health, although we also find higher-than-average negative impacts for those in 'elementary' and 'sales and customer service' occupations (with a much lower proportion of 'neither' answers).

The same pattern can be found on the impact of work on mental health, although those in 'caring, leisure and other service' and 'sales and customer service' occupations also report an above-average negative impact (with a much lower proportion of 'neither' answers). These occupational differences also impact the working from home findings, which showed that 37% of those working from home all the time say work impacts negatively on their physical health, resulting in 20% of these workers rating their physical health as poor.

We also found older workers more likely to report a positive impact of work on mental health – 45% reported a positive impact. This is primarily linked to a much higher proportion of older workers being self-employed, with these workers much more likely to be positive about their jobs (62% of self-employed report a positive impact, compared with only 29% of full-time employees).

Figure 38: Work's impact on mental and physical health (%)

Presenteeism

Previous research carried out by the CIPD has found that presenteeism – going to work despite not feeling well enough to do so – is a very common problem, with significant impacts on employee wellbeing as well as company performance. Our survey found a worrying 45% of employees answering positively to the question: 'In the last three months, have you ever worked in your main job despite not feeling well enough to perform your duties?'

Lower occupational classes were slightly more likely to report presenteeism, with the lowest presenteeism reported by employees in 'professional' and 'associate professional' occupations. This is then reflected in employees who were unable to work from home more likely to report presenteeism – 50% of these employees said they have worked despite not feeling well enough to do so. We also see presenteeism drop as we move up salary bands – 53% of those earning under £20,000 reported presenteeism, compared with 37% of those earning over £40,000 per year.

The data also highlights the unequal pressures some employees face. Those with adult caring responsibilities reported much higher levels of presenteeism – 61%, compared with 41% for those without caring responsibilities. We also saw higher levels of presenteeism in employees with disabilities – 64% compared with 42% for those without disabilities. Furthermore, 52% of key workers reported presenteeism, compared with 40% of non-key workers.
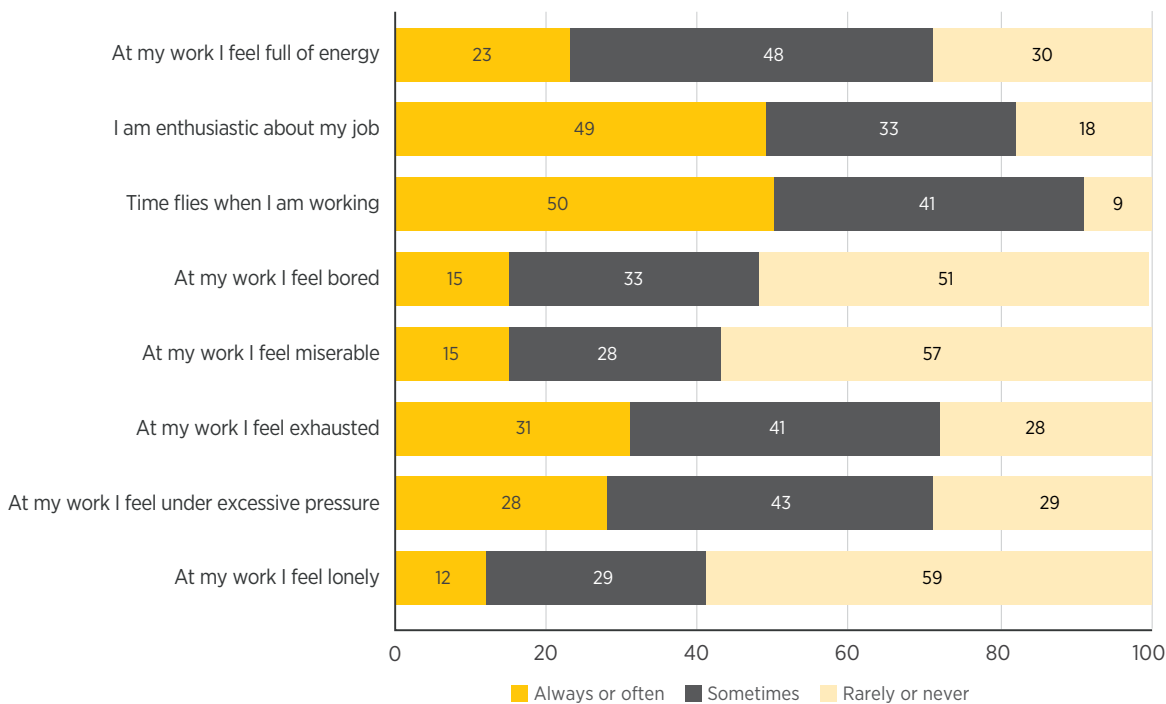
Subjective feelings in work

In addition to reporting on their mental and physical health, the impact of work on these and the specific physical and non-physical 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 39 summarises the answers to the question of how employees feel at their work. It shows, for example, that nearly a third (31%) of employees always or often feel exhausted at work, with 28% saying they feel under excessive pressure. Fifteen per cent of employees said they always or often feel bored or miserable at work.

As with most other job quality dimensions, occupational class has a significant impact across many of these statements. For example, those in 'elementary' occupations were nearly twice as likely to say they felt lonely at work (21% say they feel this way always or often) and miserable (32%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two occupational classes with the highest levels of excessive pressure are 'managers, directors and senior officials' and those in 'caring, leisure and other service' occupations. Linked to this, 32% of key workers reported they always or often feel under excessive pressure, compared with 25% for non-key workers.

Figure 39: How workers feel at work (%)

	Always or often	Sometimes	Rarely or never
At my work I feel full of energy	23	48	30
I am enthusiastic about my job	49	33	18
Time flies when I am working	50	41	9
At my work I feel bored	15	33	51
At my work I feel miserable	15	28	57
At my work I feel exhausted	31	41	28
At my work I feel under excessive pressure	28	43	29
At my work I feel lonely	12	29	59

(12) Conclusions and recommendations

Working Lives Northern Ireland is the first snapshot of job quality in the country. As policy-makers and HR practitioners alike look towards a post-pandemic future of the workplace, we hope some of our findings will be of interest. This section summarises some of the most important conclusions and provides recommendations to our profession, with some extending across to public policy.

Pay and benefits, contracts and job security

The issue of job security is of increased importance during an economic crisis. Our survey does not capture those who lost their jobs during the pandemic, but it does show job security concerns among existing employees too, with differing levels of labour market confidence. Employers can tackle this by placing additional importance on financial wellbeing. Given employee preferences for the future of work, it is likely that requests for contractual changes will increase, just as employers make long-term decisions about ways of working. Furthermore, employers should be aware of the inequalities and trade-offs when it comes to job quality – these can be tackled; all jobs have the potential to be better:

- **Provide support for financial wellbeing:** Many employees, especially if furloughed for some of the last 20 months, may have experienced financial difficulties alongside fears about job security. Financial assistance benefits are by far the least available out of the nine types of benefit our survey asks about. It is important that organisations think about underlined_financial wellbeing as part of their overall wellbeing strategy.
- **Maintain trust and fairness when making decisions about hybrid working:** Many organisations are concerned about the creation of a 'two-tier' workforce, where some can work from home and some can't. Organisations should have an open dialogue with workers about what is and is not possible and maintain trust and fairness through such open communication. You can access our hybrid workforce planning tool to help.
- **Examine potential trade-offs in job quality:** It is important for employers and policy-makers to understand what trade-offs are made on different aspects of job quality, and whether these are necessary. Our findings suggest that lower-paid occupations have fewer opportunities for skills development, as well as reporting poorer job autonomy. On the other hand, managerial roles struggle with workload and stress. These issues can be proactively addressed.

Work–life balance and relationships at work

The largest homeworking experiment this country has ever seen has highlighted some positives and some negatives for both employees and employers. We see homeworkers respond positively to questions around management quality and employee voice, but also report worse relationships with colleagues and more negative impacts of work on physical health. Most importantly, though, we need to avoid homeworking becoming synonymous with flexible working – other flexible working arrangements may suit some employees much better:

- **Review flexible working across the workforce:** It is crucial that the focus on homeworking does not crowd out other flexible working options that may suit employees (and employers) better. Flexibility is not just about location, but also working patterns, with demand for flexi-time particularly high among employees. Read our guidance on flexible working across sectors for more insight.

- **Take a holistic approach to work–life balance:** It is concerning to see nearly a third of all employees find it hard to relax in their personal time due to their jobs. In the wake of remote working, supporting employees to have time away from their work and recharge, even when their work and home are separate, will be important. We discuss boundary-setting in our report *Flexible Working: Lessons from the pandemic*.
- **Think about workplace relationships when planning for hybrid working:** Encouragingly, our findings suggest that remote working might not have the negative impact on workplace relationships that some feared. Organisations should reflect on how they have successfully maintained workplace relationships remotely and take forward these learnings.

Job design and nature of work

We found significant occupational differences in this good work dimension, especially around issues like job autonomy, where higher occupational classes perform much better. We have also seen differences in workloads, which are reported as being higher by those with management responsibilities as well as key workers. We also saw some gaps in job resources, with 12% of those working fully from home saying they don't have a suitable space to do their job effectively. Finally, we identify concerning gaps in skills and career development opportunities, something that both employers and policy-makers need to address:

- **Reflect on job design in your organisation:** As we plan for post-pandemic recovery, it is important that we understand what jobs look like now, and how fairly good job design is distributed across the workforce to ensure fairness and good working experiences for everyone. Engage with employees, look at workforce data and think about how job design can be adapted in the future.
- **Monitor workload:** With managers, key workers and those unable to work from home reporting higher workloads, consider how work is distributed across the workforce, and ensure enough resource is in place to avoid excessive work intensity and workloads, with negative implications for wellbeing.
- **Prioritise better skills development and alignment:** We see evidence of overqualification, skills mismatch and low skills development opportunities across a range of industries and occupations. Organisations need to think about how to make skills development more readily available, especially for those lower occupational classes.

Voice and representation

It was encouraging to see organisations increase their focus on communication with remote workers over the course of the pandemic. That being said, concerning gaps remain, with over a fifth of all employees not having access to any voice channel at all. Our data suggests that this is a particularly pronounced problem among smaller and medium-sized businesses, which could make a real difference by putting more emphasis on voice:

- **Meaningfully engage with employees on organisational change:** As COVID restrictions ease, it is important employers continue to consult with staff – through individual or collective channels like unions – about health and safety, returning to the workplace, and hybrid working, among other issues.
- **Ensure employees have opportunities for voice:** The CIPD has a large body of work to help improve voice channels in organisations of all types. The CIPD has more on employee voice, including case studies on organisational approaches to voice.
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of voice channels:** We know from our data that Northern Irish employees are more satisfied with their ability to give their views, but less satisfied with the extent to which their views influence management decision-making. It might be worth considering whether this gap can be addressed.

Health and wellbeing

We have seen an increased focus on health and wellbeing by employers during the pandemic, something that is likely reflected in the relatively positive indicators in our survey. That being said, we still see over a quarter of all employees saying their job impacts negatively on their mental and/or physical health. We also find that those with adult caring responsibilities and key workers are more likely to go to work despite not feeling well enough to do so:

- **Don't stop prioritising wellbeing as COVID restrictions ease:** Our *2020 People Profession* survey highlighted that employers are putting wellbeing at the top of their people priority list. Given the findings around the negative impact of work on health and wellbeing in this report, this focus needs to be maintained, especially when considering hybrid working in the future.
- **Support line managers to support workers:** Line managers have a key role to play in promoting wellbeing, but our latest *Health and Wellbeing at Work* survey identifies a decline in workplaces offering manager training on this important topic. It is likely that employees will have less regular 'face-to-face' contact with a manager in the future, so helping managers to identify signs of poor wellbeing should be high on employers' agendas.
- **Account for hybrid working in your wellbeing strategy:** It's important to recognise that choice and flexibility in where people work can be beneficial for wellbeing, but there are also challenges like sedentary lifestyle and temptation to work longer hours to contend with.