

Modern Families Index 2020 in focus: SCOTLAND



The *Modern Families Index* is the most comprehensive study of how working parents manage the balance between work and family life in the UK.

Who took part in the 2019 *Index*?

The 2020 *Index* surveyed 507 working parents in Scotland. The Scottish survey comprised more fathers than mothers (66% vs 34% respectively). This is a higher proportion of fathers than might be expected, and may account for some of the differences between the data from Scotland and the data from the rest of the UK. Thirty-five per cent of those surveyed were millennials (slightly fewer than the wider sample), and 74% lived in couple households (again, slightly fewer than the wider sample).

The majority of respondents had one (49%) or two (41%) children. Respondents in Scotland were slightly more likely than respondents elsewhere in the UK to have children aged 11 years or older.

Median income was £36,000 in couple households and £23,500 in single-parent households.

Key findings

- In assessing the financial costs of raising a family, over half (51%) of Scottish parents thought it had become more difficult over the last three years – the second highest percentage, after Wales (56%), of the regions and nations of the UK. The average across the UK was 45%.
- However, parents in Scotland were more likely (30%) than their counterparts in the rest of the UK (24%) to report having the right balance between money and family time, and less likely than parents in the rest of the UK to report feeling they had insufficient money (31% vs 37%).
- Parents in Scotland were marginally more content with their work–life balance than the UK average (53% vs 56%).

The family-friendly and flexible working ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’

Fifty-three per cent of Scottish parents reported they worked flexibly (compared to 55% of parents across the whole of the UK). Nearly a quarter (23%) reported they worked flexibly informally (compared with 18% of working parents in the rest of the UK). Fifty-three per cent of parents agreed flexible working was a genuine option for women in their workplace (compared to 51% of parents across the whole of the UK), reducing slightly to 47% who believed it was a genuine option for men (compared to 46% of parents across the whole of the UK).

The most common reasons for working flexibly were childcare (47%) and wellbeing management (39%). Almost a third (30%) said their employer had required them to work flexibly, while more than a quarter (27%) worked flexibly to pursue hobbies and outside interests. People working in the scientific and IT sectors were the most likely to report working flexibly.

Parents in Scotland who worked flexibly most commonly used flexible time arrangements (53%). Over a third had flexibility around their work location (35%) – although this figure is relatively low when compared to parents in the rest of the UK (43%).

Of those who did not work flexibly, 45% said this was because their job wasn’t compatible with flexibility, while 29% said flexibility wasn’t available where they worked. Of the latter group, 87% said their manager had told them flexibility wasn’t possible (see Figure 1, below). The least flexible sectors were transport, storage/distribution, and education. Some flexibility can be found in most roles and, like the rest of the UK, there may need to be a particular focus on unlocking flexible working in frontline sectors in Scotland.

Figure 1. Why do you not work flexibly? (n=237)



Working parents in Scotland identified similar benefits for employers in providing flexible working to parents in the rest of the UK, including people feeling happier at work (60%), remaining with their employer (60%) and being motivated (58%).

In terms of what employers could improve, 35% identified policy provision and 29% the increasing use of existing policies and a more accepting workplace culture.

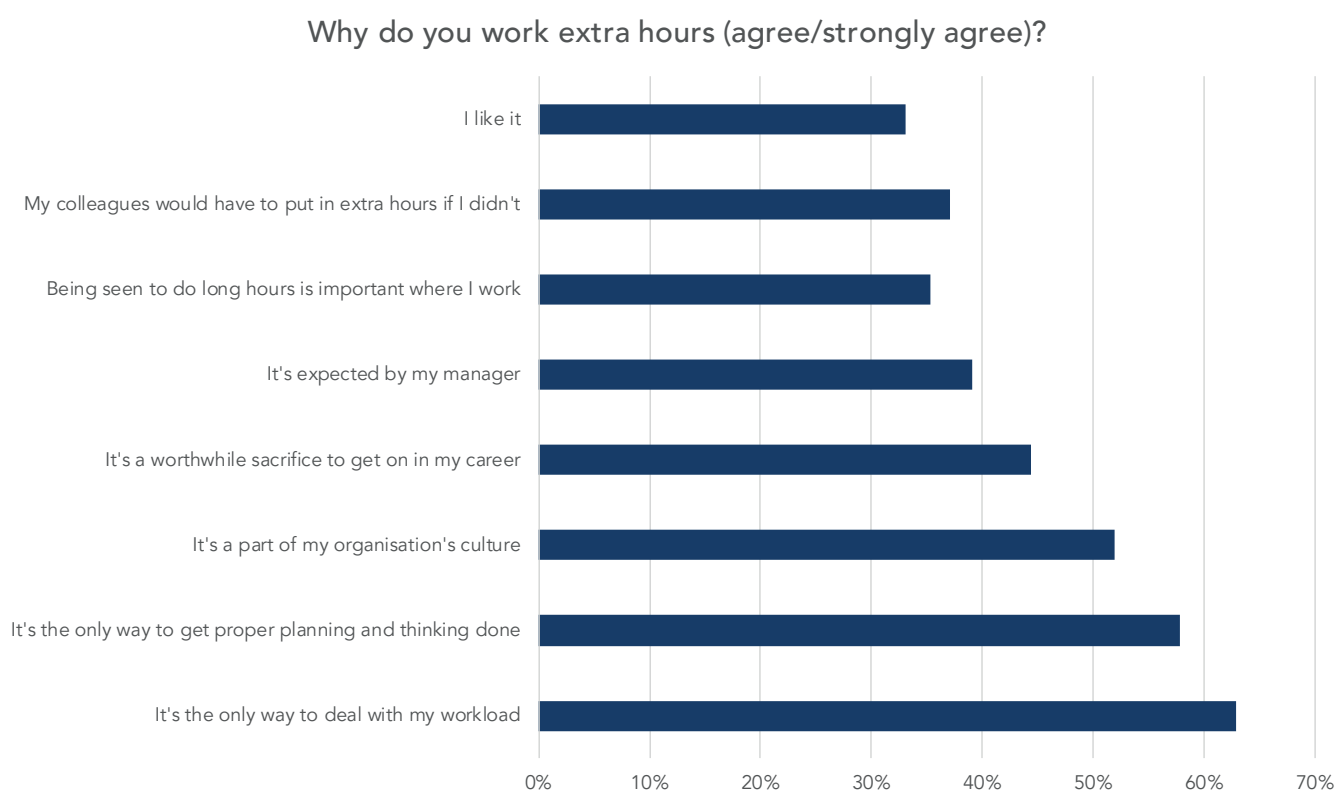


Technology and switching off

Like parents across the UK, working parents in Scotland are putting in extra hours. Taking, for example, Scottish parents contracted to work a 40-hour week (17%), over a third (34%) worked extra hours – an average of seven hours per week (the equivalent of an extra working day). Around a third (37%) left work on time every day.

The reasons parents identified for putting in extra hours were their workload (63%), insufficient time to get the job done in their contracted hours (58%) and their workplace culture (52%) (see Figure 2, below).

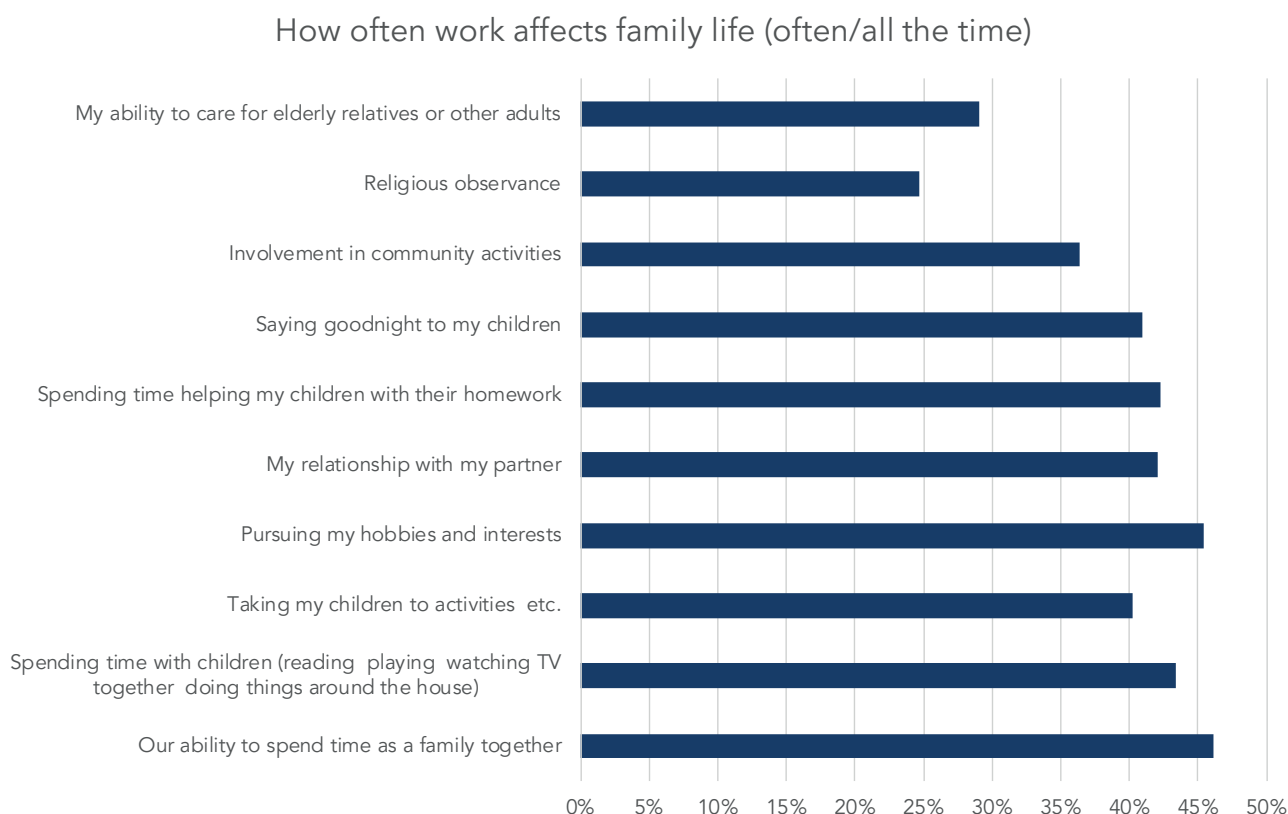
Figure 2. Why do you work extra hours? (n=317)



As a result, disruption is found across a range of activities for parents in Scotland, similar to their counterparts in the rest of the UK (see Figure 3, on next page).



Figure 3. How often work affects family life (n=506)



Childcare and future plans

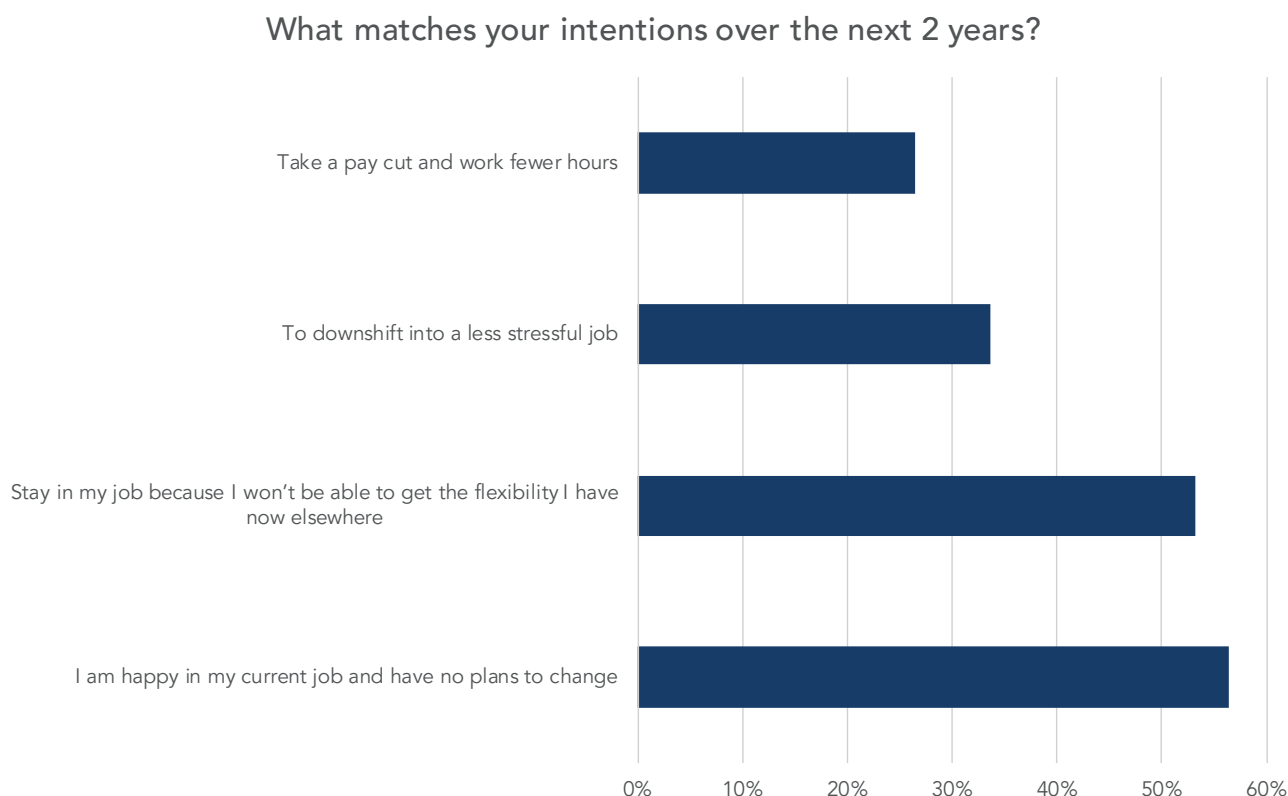
In line with working parents across the rest of the UK, just under a third of working parents in Scotland said they shared childcare equally with their partner – and were the most positive across the whole of the *Index* about the ease of setting up and maintaining this arrangement (86% said it had been easy, compared to 77% across the UK sample).

Forty per cent of Scottish parents used childcare, but they were less likely than the UK average to use formal care and more likely to rely on informal care. Parents in Scotland placed the same high value as working parents across the UK on their childcare arrangements,

with 73% considering childcare before accepting a promotion.

Working parents in Scotland were less likely than their counterparts in the rest of the UK to have already downshifted to a less stressful job for a better work–life balance. However, when asked to indicate the option they felt best matched their plans for the next two years (see Figure 4, below), just over a third said they intended to downshift into a less stressful job – a figure in line with their counterparts in the rest of the UK.

Figure 4. Intentions over the next two years (n=507)




Conclusion and recommendations

There were many similarities between the experiences of working parents in Scotland and those within the larger sample. It is positive that more working parents in Scotland feel they have the right balance between money and time spent with family. Twenty-three per cent said they have put off applying for a new job, versus 19% in rest of UK. Assuming a new job means a higher salary and a workplace where the work-life balance culture is 'unknown', this could indicate a greater willingness among working parents in Scotland to sacrifice money for time.

However, many working parents in Scotland do not believe their employer genuinely cares about their work-life balance, and would like them to do more to stop work intruding into family time. Making flexibility more widely available is a good starting point. In line with the rest of the UK, the availability of flexible working is being undermined by its patchy availability.

But flexibility cannot, on its own, fix long working hours, which – in combination with flexibility being off limits for many Scottish parents – can make achieving work-life balance a lottery. As we have seen, working parents in Scotland are willing to downshift for a better work-life balance, indicating they may not continue to 'put up with' a lack of support from their employer.



Given that working parents in Scotland are slightly more likely to say they are looking for a job with an employer who supports working parents better than their current one, compared with working parents across the UK (15% vs 13%), the recommendations below are a good starting point for Scottish employers that want to be ahead of the curve on flexible and family-friendly working:

1. Scottish employers should publish their flexible working and parental leave and pay policies (supported by 60% of Scottish parents) and advertise their vacancies on a flexible basis (supported by 63%), helping more parents join the flexible and family-friendly working 'haves'. This should be underpinned by a UK Government requirement that all UK employers do similar.
2. Almost three-quarters of working parents reported they would carefully consider their childcare options before accepting a new job or promotion. Scottish employers should consider solutions to better support working parents with childcare, and publish details of the childcare support they offer – alongside their flexible working and parental leave and pay policies (see above) – as part of a wider family-friendly-working offer.
3. Having access to flexible working is not enough to impact positively on a parent's wellbeing. Scottish employers taking an organisation-wide, strategic approach to job design – proper consideration of the tasks each role requires, whether these can be done in the hours allotted, and which types of flexible working would work – will help ensure jobs are more 'human-sized', allowing parents to better balance work and home life.
4. Scottish employers are encouraged to use the *Happy To Talk Flexible Working* strapline and logo, which take employers from flexible job design through to flexible recruiting for vacancies. Its use helps engender an organisation-wide approach to job design, as well as ensuring a wider pool of talent applying for

About Family Friendly Working Scotland

Family Friendly Working Scotland (FFWS) is part of Working Families, the UK's work-life balance organisation. Our mission is to create and support working-culture change in Scotland that builds economic success and improves the lives of families. We work with employers, government, families and others to promote a flexible and family-friendly working culture. This is a way of working that delivers business success, enabling working families to have a good balance between work and family life. Spanning boundaries between private, public and third sectors, we offer practical support and share best practice with employers. We also raise awareness of the issues and benefits of flexible, family-friendly working. Acting as a nucleus, FFWS promotes innovative and sustainable ways of working that are good for families and the Scottish economy.

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Bright Horizons partners with more than 1,100 leading employers globally to address the work-life and dependant care challenges that can otherwise negatively impact productivity and engagement. Solutions are tailor-made to support clients' evolving business needs and include workplace nurseries and nursery place arrangements; back-up care for adults and children of all ages; maternity/paternity coaching and work-life consulting. We are proud of the longevity of our client relationships – reflecting decades of consistently high levels of satisfaction with our services.

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