



Department for
Business & Trade

Agency Worker Survey (2021) – Report of Findings

Experiences and views of agency workers in
the UK



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Glossary

Agency	An agency is a company that finds an individual work by hiring them out to a hirer (i.e. 'client' or 'employer'). They are sometimes referred to as employment businesses or 'temp agencies'.
Agency worker	Agency workers are contracted to an agency (employment business) but work temporarily for a hirer.
Assignment	When an agency worker is on assignment, they are temporarily working for the hirer (often referred to as the 'employer' or 'client') but still contracted to their agency. Work undertaken for different hirers (or 'clients' or 'employer') are separate assignments. For example, for a school supply teacher each single period of cover at an individual school should be considered a separate assignment. When on assignment, the individual is still contracted to the agency and is either paid by the agency directly or through an umbrella company.
Hirer	The hirer is the end user i.e., the organisation or individual the agency worker performs the work for, following their direction/instruction; this is not the agency. They may also be referred to as, the 'client' or 'employer'.
Key information document	These were introduced in April 2020 and set out key information relating to agency worker registrations with their agency, such as how they will be paid, how deductions are applied and entitlement to employee benefits such as holidays.
Rolled up holiday pay	Rolled-up holiday pay is the practice of paying holiday pay by increasing their hourly wage to reflect the amount of holiday the worker is entitled to and then not paying any holiday pay while the worker is on actual holiday.
Umbrella company	An umbrella company is a separate company to the agency and works as an intermediary between the agency and the worker. Their main function is to organise payment for the contractor.
Unpaid leave (time off for dependents/ emergency leave/ compassionate leave/ special leave)	By law agency workers can take unpaid leave at short notice during working hours when a dependent falls ill or is injured or because of unexpected disruption or incident during their care.

Abbreviations

ACAS	The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
BEIS	The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
DBT	The Department for Business and Trade
EAS	The Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate

Disclaimer

This research was commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in 2020. Survey responses were obtained via online panels, and fieldwork conducted from 14th September - 28th September 2020, during localised restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) was formed via Machinery of Government changes announced on 7 February 2023, bringing together what was the Department for International Trade with business-focused functions from BEIS. However, given when the work was conducted, this report refers to BEIS throughout in the past tense.

Executive Summary

Key findings

- Three-quarters of agency workers were satisfied with working through agencies over the 18 months before they were surveyed. They were most satisfied by the flexibility, the hours they worked, and the work itself. Less than half of agency workers were satisfied with their job security.
- Around half of agency workers had an ongoing relationship with multiple agencies, the vast majority held formal written contracts with at least of one these agencies.
- Over half of agency workers had made a request to move to a permanent contract with a hirer in the 18 months before they were surveyed, the main reason for seeking this change was to obtain greater job security, more regular or consistent working patterns, and wanting to continue to do a job they were enjoying. Of those who requested a permanent contract, the majority were able to move to a permanent contract.
- More than half of agency workers viewed agency work as their long-term career.
- Most agency workers felt they had a good understanding of their employment rights. The vast majority were aware of the right to be paid for hours worked, as well as right to take time off for dependents, emergency, compassionate or special leave.
- Despite high awareness of rights, only half of agency workers were spontaneously able to name an organisation they would go to if they needed to information about employment rights. This was most commonly government websites, online sources and Citizens Advice.
- The majority of agency workers were provided with a written statement detailing key information relating to their current or most recent main assignment, as well as identification checking taking place when they agreed their contract and being informed of health and safety risks.
- A third of agency workers experienced problems relating to fair treatment, either with an employment agency, an umbrella company and/or a hirer. Problems had arisen for a wide range of reasons without any single-issue predominating, pay and working hours or patterns were the most commonly mentioned.
- When dealing with a problem at work, agency workers were most likely to have contacted their employment agency for help.

Introduction

This report discusses the findings of an online study among 547 agency workers. Responses were obtained via online panels, and fieldwork conducted from 14th September - 28th September 2020, during localised restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. An additional 922

responses were obtained via two employment agencies distributing the online survey to their workers. Results from this element of the study have only been used occasionally in this report due to the danger that results become skewed to the experiences of workers within two specific agencies. The aims of the research were to strengthen the evidence base around the experience of agency workers and assess any detriment faced by agency workers, to support the development of future policy and serve as a baseline against which the impact of planned policy changes can be assessed.

Employment history

The agency workers participating in the research were relatively new to agency work, with over two in five (44%) accepting their first contract or agreement with an employment agency in the 12 months prior to the survey (rising to 62% among those aged under 25).

Before entering agency work, most had been employed on some other basis (67%). 19% had been in education and 13% neither in education nor work. Their decision to switch to agency work was driven by a range of factors; primarily the need for more flexible working hours, the perception that agency work can provide better pay, an improved work-life balance and a lack of available jobs. When asked to consider what their main motivation was, greater flexibility in regard to hours and the lack of local jobs were key.

Since accepting their first contract or agreement with an employment agency, most (68%) had been continually contracted to an agency. Among the 31% who had had periods doing other things, the most common other activity had been permanent employment (77%), but the majority had also had spells doing other forms of temporary or casual employment (59%), engaged in learning (58%) or periods when they had not been working or learning (53%).

Employment activities

Almost half of agency workers (48%) had an ongoing relationship with a single employment agency. Older workers, those for whom agency work was their main source of employment and potentially their long-term career were more likely to be linked to a single agency. In comparison, 11% had an ongoing relationship with more than five. Almost all agency workers employed by multiple agencies held a formal, written contract with at least one of these agencies (95%).

Agency workers split relatively evenly between those that had agreed to work 35 hours or less per week excluding overtime with their main hirer (34%), those that had agreed to work 36 or more hours a week (29%) and those that did not have agreed hours with the hirer (36%). Among respondents giving exact figures for the agreed and actual hours worked, the mean agreed number of hours per week with their main hirer was 31.4 and the actual hours worked (including any overtime) was 32.6.

Pay, charges and deductions

Most workers (83%) said that it had been made clear who was responsible for paying them on their current or most recent assignment. 14% said that it had not been made clear (rising to 22% among those paid by an umbrella company).

Most agency workers (81%) said they received payslips for their current or most recent assignment, but 15% said this was not the case. Where payslips were received few found them difficult to access (5%) or understand (6%); 7% found the information regarding deductions on their payslip difficult to understand.

Two-thirds (65%) of agency workers had been charged for services or equipment over the 18 months prior to the survey, which typically related to DBS checks (30% of all agency workers), training (30%) or uniforms (25%). Most workers experiencing deductions being made had been notified in advance for at least some of these, though 15% had not.

Less than half (45%) of agency workers said they received rolled up holiday pay¹. Of the rest, 29% were expected to take holiday leave but were unsure whether they would be compensated for any leave they did not use, and one in five (19%) said they did not get holiday pay.

Awareness of their employment rights as agency workers

Most agency workers felt they had a good understanding of their employment rights: 46% felt fully and 43% somewhat aware of their rights as an agency worker, compared with 10% that did not feel aware.

Agency workers were asked about their awareness of four different employment rights. Awareness was highest for the right to be paid for hours worked (92%) followed by the right to take time off for dependents, emergency, compassionate or special leave (86%). Awareness was lower for the right to be provided with a key information document (84%) and to be paid the same rate as an equivalent direct employee after 12 weeks on assignment (82%).

Although awareness of employment rights may be high, knowing where to find out about these rights was more limited. Only half of agency workers were spontaneously able to name an organisation they would go to if they needed to find information about their employment rights. This was most commonly government websites (13% of all workers), online sources (13%) and Citizens Advice (12%). When those who were unable to think of any sources spontaneously were provided with a list of possible sources, their agency/agencies (30%), trade unions (20%) and local government (20%) were the most likely ones to be mentioned.

While the majority (62%) of agency workers knew of the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) inspectorate, only three in ten (28%) were aware of any details of what they do. Of those that had heard of EAS, one in five (20%) felt they knew how to get in touch with the organisation.

Problems at work

In the two years prior to the survey, three in ten agency workers experienced problems relating to fair treatment (either with an employment agency (22%), an umbrella company (18%) and/or a hirer (19%). Problems had arisen for a wide range of reasons without any single-issue predominating. Pay (24%) and working hours or patterns (21%) were the most commonly mentioned, but issues around training, the job role or workload, bullying / harassment, performance, promotion, redundancy, and leave were also relatively common (each mentioned by 15%-19%). In order to address these issues, agency workers were most likely to have contacted their employment agency for help (38%), with around a fifth contacting each of the following: local government, their hirer, a trade union, and the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate.

In most cases the length of time between a problem over fair treatment first occurring and being resolved was relatively short; either a week or less (33%) or over a week but less than a month (20%). Most agency workers (72%) were satisfied with the outcome of the dispute. The most common outcome was to remain with the same hirer but change assignments (51% who experienced a resolution). However, some agency workers in this situation had to leave their hirer (34%), the agency involved (21%) or agency work altogether (13%).

Requests to move to a permanent contract

Over half (55%) of agency workers had made a request to move to a permanent contract with a hirer in the 18 months before they were surveyed. The main reason for seeking this change was

¹ Rolled-up holiday was introduced as part of reforms to holiday pay and entitlement from 1 January 2024 for irregular hours and part-year workers only. Rolled-up holiday pay is a system where a worker receives an additional amount or enhancement with every payslip to cover their holiday pay, as opposed to receiving holiday pay when they take annual leave.

to obtain greater job security, more regular or consistent working patterns, and wanting to continue to do a job they were enjoying (each mentioned by 30% of those that had made a request). Other common reasons were wanting better to pay (27%), more agreeable working hours (24%), and the good relationship they had with the hirer (23%).

The majority (62%) of agency workers were able to move to a permanent contract, either on a permanent (32%) or fixed term contract (30%). Three in ten (30%) said their request was declined but they were offered more work, while 7% said the request was turned down.

Terms and conditions of hire

The majority of agency workers (65%) recalled being provided with a written statement detailing key information relating to their current or most recent main assignment, but a third (32%) did not. Most agency workers (75%) also reported identification checks taking place when they agreed their contract, but 17% said that these checks did not take place even though they were aware that they should have been and 6% said the check did not take place but were unaware of this process.

Again, while the majority of agency workers (64%) were informed about the health and safety risks of their current (main) assignment, 30% said this did not happen. In instances where health and safety information was provided, it was typically part of a formal induction at the beginning of a contract and delivered in person.

Satisfaction

Three-quarters of agency workers (74%) were satisfied with working through agencies over the 18 months prior to the survey, compared with around one in ten (9%) dissatisfied. Overall, three in ten (29%) were very satisfied, though this was higher among under 25s (40%). Reasons for dissatisfaction centred around poor communication or support, not enough work being available, not liking to work a zero hours contract, and poor rates of pay.

Agency workers were most satisfied by the flexibility, the hours you work, and the work itself; for each two thirds (67%) were satisfied compared against one in ten (10%) dissatisfied. At the other end of the spectrum, less than half (45%) of agency workers were satisfied with their job security in agency work over the 18 months prior to the survey (21% were dissatisfied). Dissatisfaction was also relatively high for: their benefits package (19% dissatisfied), pay received (17%) and the opportunities to develop their skills (14%).

Over three-fifths of agency workers (62%) viewed agency work as their long-term career: just over a third (35%) did not, and 3% were undecided.

1. Introduction

Background

The Taylor 2017 Review of Modern Working Practice suggested that agency workers were less aware of their rights and thus made a series of recommendations to improve the rights of agency workers. Following the recommendations from the review, the Government commissioned the independent Low Pay Commission (LPC) to provide advice on the prevalence of one-sided flexibility. The LPC's research and engagement with stakeholders found that one-sided flexibility is indeed a problem in some parts of the modern economy, where some employers misuse flexible working arrangements to create unpredictability, insecurity of income and a reluctance among some workers to assert basic employment rights. The previous Government then secured the Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) Act 2023 which would bring in a 'right to request' that could be turned down by the employer. The Government does not want to confuse employers and workers with two different models, so we are repealing that Act through the Employment Rights Bill.

Instead, the Government is ending exploitative zero hours contracts by giving workers on zero hours contracts and workers with a 'low' number of guaranteed hours, who regularly work more than these hours, the ability to move to guaranteed hours contracts which reflect the hours they regularly work over a 12-week reference period. If more hours become regular over time, subsequent reference review periods will provide workers with the opportunity to reflect this in their contracts. Alongside this, the government will ensure workers get reasonable notice of any change in shifts or working time, with proportionate compensation for any shifts cancelled or curtailed at short notice. This will give them a greater ability to plan their lives, without banning flexible arrangements that some workers benefit from. The Government consulted last year on the application of the measures to agency workers, to ensure they are effectively and appropriately applied to this group and will respond to that consultation in due course.

Agency workers can be considered a vulnerable and hard to reach group, and there is a lack of good evidence on the number of agency workers in the UK, with estimates at the time of this survey work ranging from 800,000 (the Labour Force Survey) to 1.2m (The Recruitment and Employment Confederation, December 2016). This lack of evidence has persisted, though more recent estimates range from 900,000 (the Labour Force Survey) to 1m (The Recruitment and Employment Confederation, 2024). There is a significant evidence gap around the situation of agency workers - much of the data available is anecdotal or based on a small number of qualitative interviews, and/or outdated research.

Consequently, BEIS (now DBT) commissioned IFF Research to undertake the Agency Worker Survey (AWS) in 2020, in pursuit of an up-to-date account of agency worker experiences in the workplace.

This research covered topics such as the awareness of agency workers about their rights, their understanding of the role of the different organisations they deal with, and the role of the organisations that currently exist that can assist them if they have a problem. It also examined their experiences of fair treatment at work.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the research were to:

- Strengthen the evidence base around the experience and awareness of agency workers in the UK
- Assess the risks, scope and scale of any detriment faced by agency workers
- Support the development of policy to strengthen the rights of agency workers, and to assist with actions and communication to encourage compliance with the law and being fair to agency workers

- Serve as a baseline against which the impact of planned policy changes can be assessed.

Methodology²

The core survey used online self-completion data collection, completed by a screened panel sample. Additional responses were also obtained by two employment agencies distributing the online questionnaire to their agency workers.

Sample

Eligibility

To be eligible for the research, respondents had to:

- Have either a written or verbal agreement in place with an employment agency that set out their obligation to support the respondent in finding work;
- Have either a formal, written contract/agreement with an agency, an informal agreement, or another type of contract/agreement with an agency (respondents were screened out if they replied 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' to the type of contract or agreement in place);
- Be on assignment at the time of the survey or in the past (described to them as temporarily working for a hirer for example a 'client' or 'employer') – respondents were screened out if they said they a contract/agreement in place with at least one agency but have not started any work through them yet; and;
- Not be paid by the hirer (described as the client, employer or the end user i.e., the organisation or individual the respondent performs the work for).

Sampling

Agency workers are a relatively small subsection of the labour market, making them difficult to access. The sample of agency workers was free, found using online panels and screened for eligibility.

In order to boost the sample size, in October 2020, IFF Research contacted the 20 largest employment agencies/businesses in the UK and asked them to disseminate the survey amongst their current (agency) workforce. Despite initial interest from a handful of agencies, most were unable to assist, owing to competing priorities and a lack of resource, magnified by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, one large employment agency did distribute the online survey link. The Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (EAS) conducted a second exercise to engage temporary work agencies, which led to one further agency taking part.

In total, the survey received 1,469 responses. The majority of these (922) came from a single temporary work agency, 547 from the online panel and a further 22 from the agency recruited via EAS. Because the overall sample was so heavily skewed to those working for a single agency it, this report focuses on the 547 responses from the online panel. In a number of places throughout the report we discuss findings from the 922 respondents recruited via one large agency and one recruited by the EAS: in these cases, findings are presented in text boxes.

The profile of agency workers responding to the survey is presented in the appendix.

Survey design

Questionnaire

IFF and BEIS worked closely in the design of the questionnaire.

² Further details of the methodology can be found in appendix C

The questionnaire covered a range of topics, including their attitudes towards agency work, experience of pay, charges and deductions, understanding of terms and conditions of hire and understanding of rights. It also explored agency workers experience of any unfair treatment at work, as well as overall satisfaction and wellbeing as an agency worker. The survey also collected data on agency workers employment history, their employment activities and demographic information.

Before the launch of the mainstage survey, IFF conducted cognitive testing followed by a small-scale pilot. A total of ten cognitive interviews³ were conducted, and 20 pilot survey completes, with the findings from the cognitive phase feeding into the design of the pilot questionnaire.

Fieldwork

Mainstage fieldwork with the panel provider took place between 14th September - 28th September 2020, during localised restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire looked to reflect this: agency workers were asked to provide an indication of their pre COVID-19 agency work status, even if these had changed as a result of the pandemic.

IFF Research began contacting temporary work agencies to share the survey in June 2020. The survey was shared with workers at the single temporary work agency via an email link on 20th October 2020. The survey remained open until 22nd December 2020 whilst EAS conducted their engagement exercise.

Weighting

The core survey data (from the panel) were weighted to the profile of those classified on the Annual Population Survey⁴ as in a 'temporary job through employment agency'. The weights were applied on the following characteristics: ethnicity, sex, and age. No weighting has been applied to the responses received directly from two temporary work agencies. A weighting matrix showing the final weighting categories is shown in Appendix B.

³ Details of which can be found in appendix C

⁴ [Annual population survey \(APS\) QMI - Office for National Statistics](#)

Analysis

The survey analysis describes the experiences of the total population of agency workers in the UK. It also looks to identify different patterns by key subgroups. Differences between subgroups that are reported are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless specifically indicated otherwise.

Fieldwork took place during the localised COVID-19 restrictions in September 2020. Where relevant, measures were put in place to encourage agency workers to consider their situation in 'normal circumstances'. Nonetheless, the timing of the survey should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

As discussed earlier, unless otherwise stated the findings in this report are based on the 547 panel responses (weighted using data from the Annual Population Survey (APS)).

Text in shaded boxes throughout the report refers to data taken from respondent sources from the two temporary work agencies.

Reporting conventions

Throughout the report unweighted base figures are shown on tables and charts to give an indication of the statistical reliability of the figures.

Standard Occupation Coding (SOC) has been used to classify agency workers job roles according to their duties and responsibilities reported by workers in the survey.

Standard Industry Classification (SIC) has been used to classify the sectors in which agency workers are employed in, according to the company sectors reported by workers in the survey.

2. Employment History

In this chapter we explore the employment history of agency workers, both within and outside of employment agency work. It examines the reasons why people chose agency work and their prior employment status, alongside periods of work elsewhere.

Chapter summary

Agency workers participating in the research were relatively new to agency work, with over two in five (44%) accepting their first contract or agreement with an employment agency in the 12 months prior to the survey (rising to 62% among those aged under 25 and 49% among women). In comparison around one in seven (15%) had signed their first contract with an agency more than five years ago.

Before entering agency work, most (67%) were employed on some other basis rather than being in education (19%) or neither in education nor work (13%). Their decision to switch to agency work was driven by a range of factors; primarily the need for more flexible working hours, the perception that agency work can provide better pay, an improved work-life balance and a lack of available jobs. When asked to consider what their main motivation was, greater flexibility in regard to hours and the lack of local jobs were key.

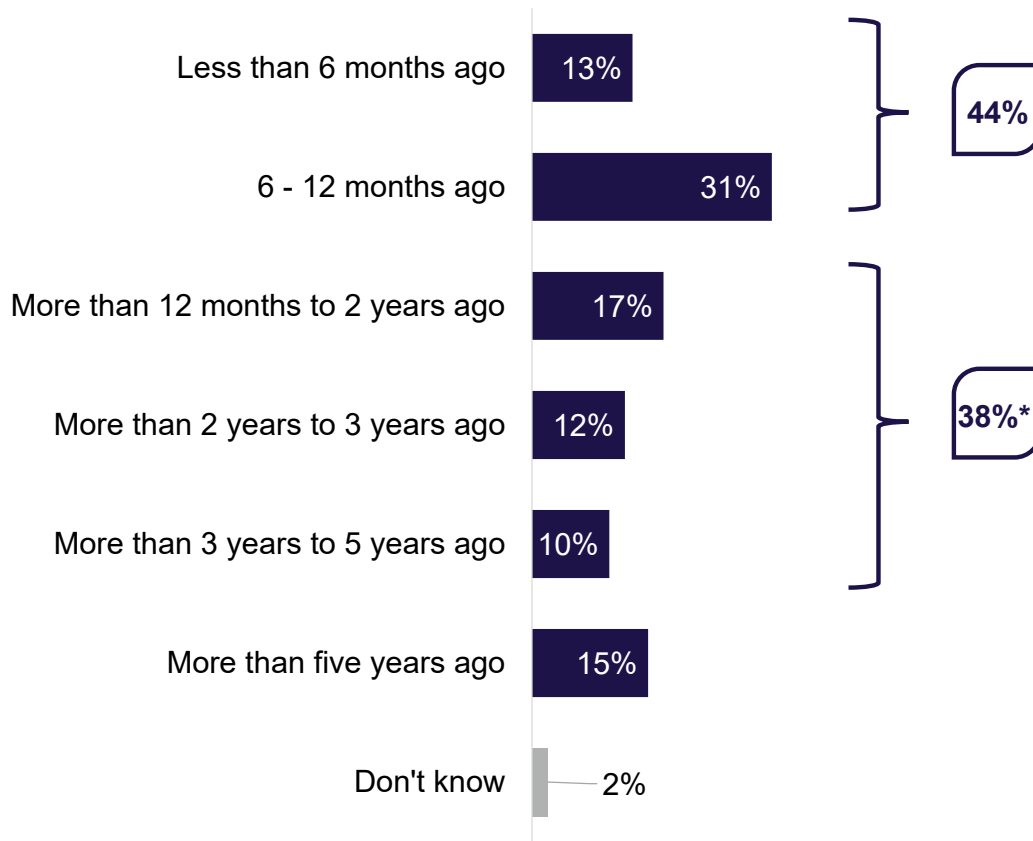
Since accepting their first contract or agreement with an employment agency, most (68%) agency workers had been continually contracted to an agency. Among the 31% who had had periods doing other things, the most common other activity had been permanent employment (77%), but the majority had also had spells doing other forms of temporary or casual employment (59%), engaged in learning (58%) or periods when they had not been working or learning (53%).

Experience of agency work

Length of time in agency work

Research participants were relatively new to agency work; 44% had accepted their first contract or agreement with an employment agency in the 12 months prior to the survey. Two in five agency workers (38%) had been with an employment agency for between one and five years, while 15% had signed their first contract with an agency over five years ago.

Figure 1. Time since first contracted to an agency



Base: All agency workers (547)

*This summary of 38% is based on calculating unrounded figures

Those who had first become an agency worker in the 12 months prior to the survey, i.e., during or just before the pandemic, were more likely to be:

- Women – half (49%) signed their first agreement with an employment agency at some point in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with 39% of men.
- Under 25 years of age – three in five (62%) signed up to an agency during the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with a third (34%) of agency workers aged 45 or older.⁵

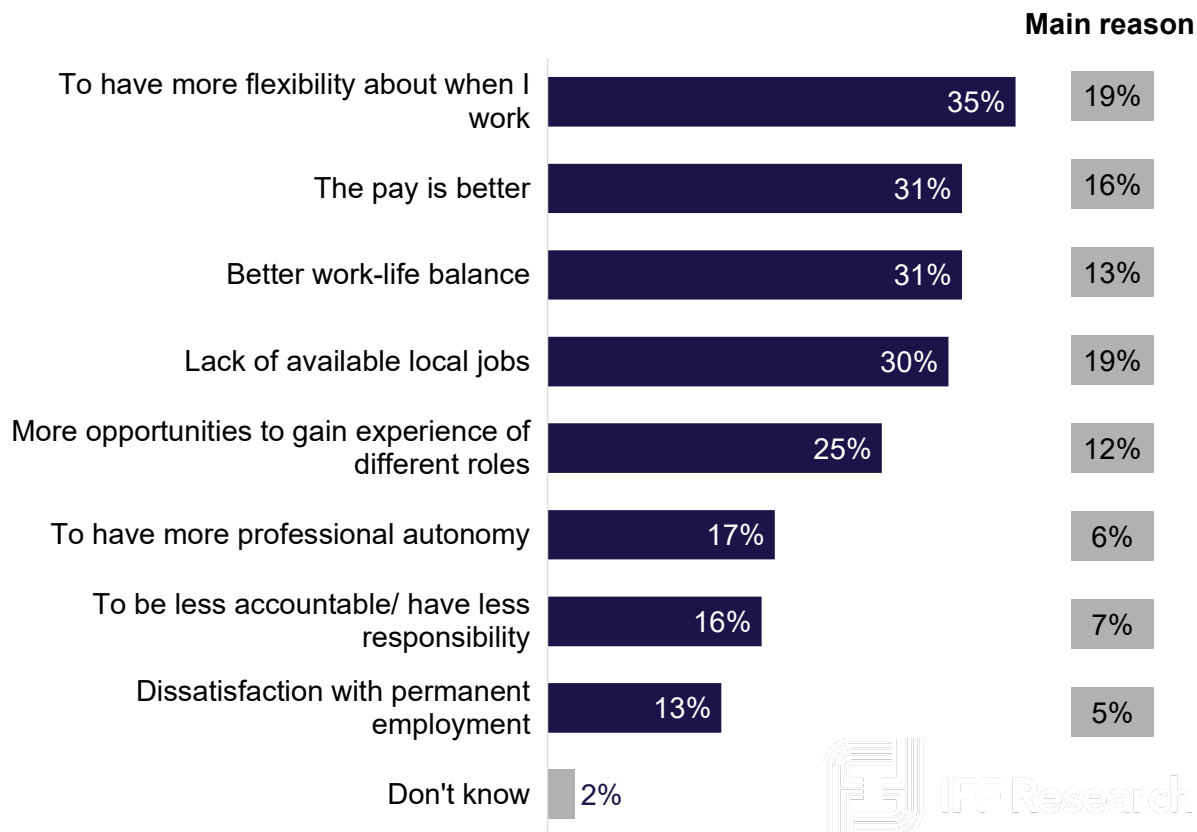
Reasons for entering agency work

The decision to become an agency worker was driven by a variety of reasons, with the most common being the need for more flexible working hours (35%), better pay (31%), to achieve a better work-life balance (31%, this was more of an issue for those near the end of their career, at 44% among those aged 55-64) and the lack of available jobs close to home (30%). In addition, a quarter of agency workers highlighted the opportunities that are available to gain experience of different roles (25%), with this more of an issue for those aged 45-54 (33%). Around a sixth of agency workers said part of the reason for working in this way was to have more professional autonomy (17%), though almost the same proportion did so to have less accountability or responsibility (16%, rising to 26% among those aged under 25).

⁵ Note small base size of those under 25 years of age (n=60).

When asked to consider their main reason for choosing agency work, the ability to have more flexibility in regard to hours and the lack of local jobs were most likely to be mentioned (19% in both cases), followed by better pay (16%).

Figure 2. Reasons for entering agency work



IFP Research
 Base: All agency workers (547)
 Codes above 3% reported.

The main reason for becoming an agency worker varied by age, contract basis and perceptions of this type of work:

- By age – agency workers under the age of 25 were more likely to select this type of work because it means less responsibility or accountability (mentioned by 18% in this group compared with 7% of all respondents).⁶
- Career plans – there were notable differences in the motivation behind working for an employment agency between those who regarded it as a long-term career and those who do not. For those who saw a future in agency work, better pay and flexibility of working hours were more likely to be key (mentioned by 21% and 19% of this group respectively). For those who did not, the lack of local jobs was the main reason for becoming an agency worker (mentioned by 33% of this group).

⁶ Note small base size of those under 25 years of age (n=60).

- Contract type⁷ – those with an informal contract with an agency were far more likely to highlight better pay as their main reason for doing this type of work than any other reason (mentioned by 30% who had an informal contract compared with 15% who had a formal contract).⁸
- Satisfaction with agency work – those who were satisfied with working through agencies, cite flexibility in when they work as the reason behind their choice (mentioned by 21%). Those who were dissatisfied with agency work were more likely than average to say that their main reason is the lack of other job opportunities locally (mentioned by 36%).⁹

Experience of non-agency work

Employment status before agency work

Before entering agency work, most agency workers (67%) had been working on a non-agency basis. Around a fifth (19%) had been in education and a further one in eight (13%) had been neither working nor in education.

Predictably younger groups were more likely to have been in education prior to becoming an agency worker (44% of under 25s, compared with 19% overall),¹⁰ as were those who did not see this type of work as a long-term career (25%, compared with 16% of those who regard agency work as a long-term career).

Employment outside of agency work

Since accepting their first contract or agreement with an employment agency, most (68%) agency workers had been continually contracted to an agency, rather than having had periods doing other things (31%).

Among agency workers who had not been continually contracted to an employment agency since first working in this way, most had had more than one period of doing other things (the mean average was three periods doing other things). During those periods away from agency work, the majority were in permanent employment (77%). However, three in five had spells doing other forms of temporary or casual employment (59%) or engaged in learning (58%), and just over half (53%) had experienced periods when they had not been working or learning.

The amount of time spent away from agency work varied in terms of the nature of the activity. For example, those who were in permanent employment during these periods were more likely to have spent a year or more away from agency work (21%), than those who had had spells doing other temporary or casual work (8%), periods of learning (6%) or time spent neither in work nor learning (12%).

⁷ Contracts and agreements used interchangeably. What counts as an 'agreement'? *This is a written or verbal agreement that sets out the agency's obligation to find you work and your obligation to fulfil it. The written document may be formal (e.g. an official contract) or more informal (e.g. an email exchange) and is separate to anything agreed directly with the hirer.*

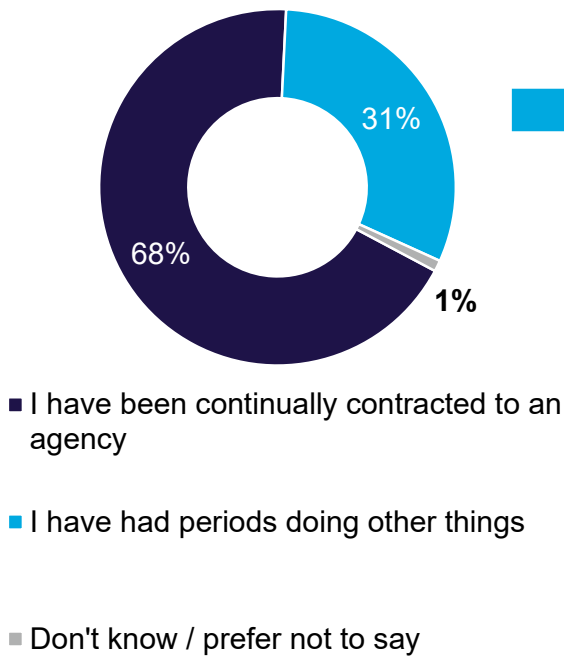
⁸ Note small base size of those with an informal contract (n=54).

⁹ Note very small base size of those who were dissatisfied with agency work (n=41).

¹⁰ Note small base size of those under 25 years of age (n=60).

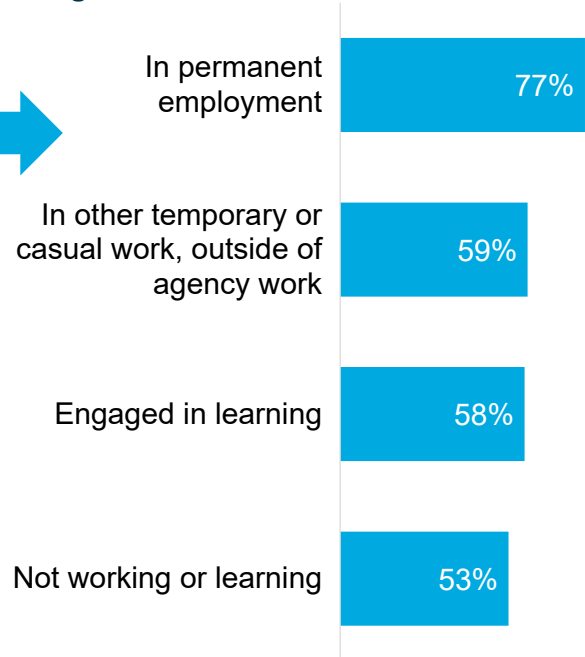
Figure 3. Whether agency workers are doing ‘other things’ outside of agency work

Continually contracted?



Base: All agency workers whose main source of employment is through agency work (486)

Time spent during ‘periods of doing other things’



Base: All agency worker whose main source of employment is through agency work AND have had periods of doing other things (141).

Charts shows top four mentions only.

The main findings presented in this report are based on responses from 547 agency workers recruited via a panel. An additional 922 responses were received from those working for two agencies, and in places in the report findings from these agency-recruited agency workers are shown for comparison. In terms of their employment history the agency-recruited agency workers were:

-Newer to agency work (59% had their first contract with an agency in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with 44% among the panel-recruited agency workers)

-More likely to have been employed (72% vs. 67% among panel-recruited agency workers) or unemployed (19% vs. 13%) and less likely to have been in education (6% vs. 19%).

-More likely to have been motivated to take agency work because of a lack of jobs available locally (39% vs. 30% among the panel-recruited agency workers), and far less motivated by issues such as better pay (19% vs. 31%), obtaining a better work-life balance (20% vs 31%) or having flexibility about when they worked (22% vs 35%).

3. Employment Activities

This chapter considers the relationship between employment agencies and agency workers, exploring the number of agencies individuals were working for, their hours of work, the basis of their arrangement and whether agencies had been able to provide work in the 18 months prior to the survey. It also provides a snapshot of working arrangements in February 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter summary

Almost half of agency workers (48%) had an ongoing relationship with a single employment agency. Older workers, those for whom agency work was their main source of employment and potentially their long-term career were more likely to be linked to a single agency.

Half (50%) had an ongoing relationship with multiple employment agencies, with 11% saying this was with more than five. Of those employed by multiple agencies, around half held a formal, written contract with at least one.

There were two main approaches to signing up with an agency: in person (mentioned by 51%) or online (49%). In comparison just one in seven (15%) had signed up over the phone, and 3% by post. However, the approach taken differs by age (older workers were more likely to sign up in person, younger workers online).

Agency workers split relatively evenly between those that had agreed to work 35 hours or less per week excluding overtime with their main hirer (34%), those that had agreed to work 36 or more hours a week (29%) and those that did not have agreed hours with the hirer (36%). In terms of actual hours worked (including overtime), agency workers typically worked 35 hours or fewer each week on their (main) current assignment (63%).

In February 2020 (just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK) a quarter (24%) were actively working on just one assignment, half (48%) were working on two or more; 11% had not been working for an agency and a further 15% had a contract with an employment agency but were not on any assignments at that time. Approximately half the agency workers would have liked more assignments than they were working on at the time (52%), and almost half (48%) would have liked to have been working more hours. Almost half (47%) intended to continue agency work, a third (32%) anticipated a move into permanent work with a hirer, and one in eight (12%) planned to work on a self-employed / freelance basis. Overall, 4% had planned to be studying, rising to 12% of those aged under 25.

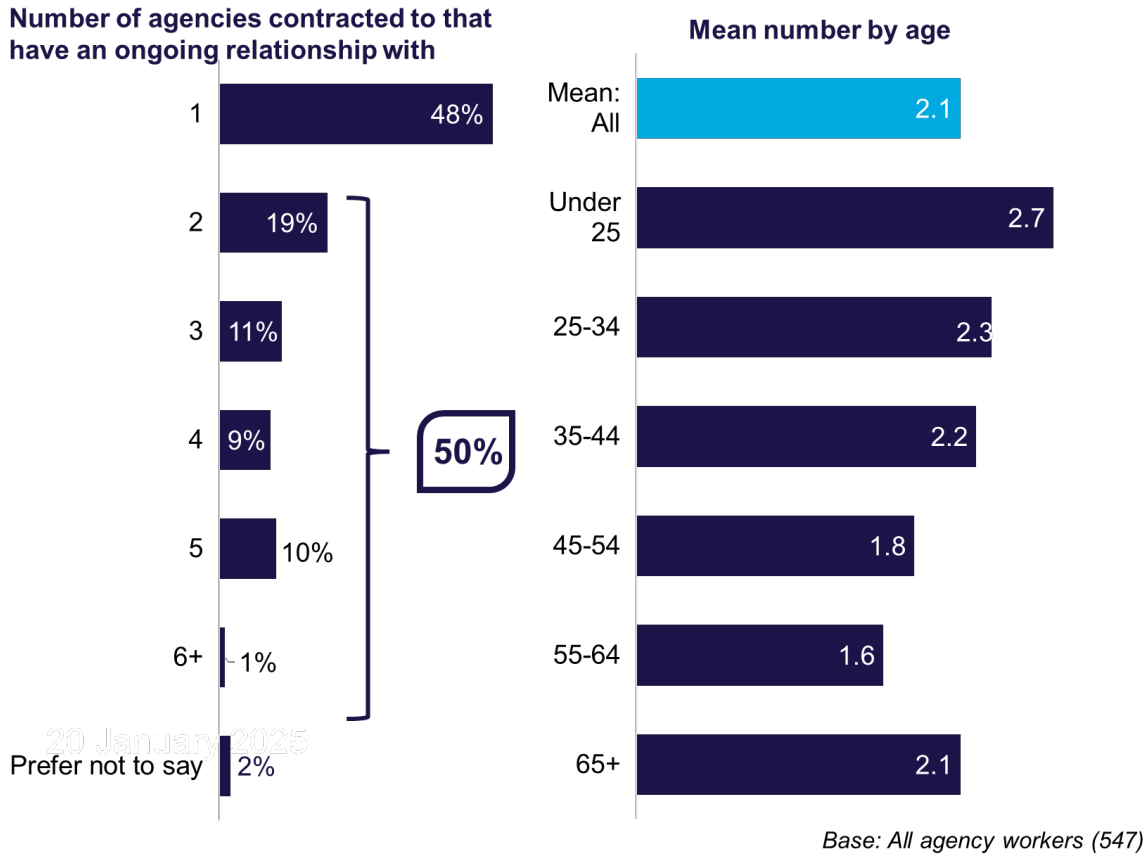
Agencies

Agency workers were asked a series of questions about employment agencies that they currently held a contract with, even if the specifics had changed since the Covid-19 pandemic e.g., they had been furloughed or were working under reduced hours or were not hired to an employer at the time of taking part in this research. They were asked to only consider agencies they have an 'ongoing relationship' with, which was defined as receiving work in the present or past and did not include agencies who they may be signed up to but who had never provided them with any work.

Number of agencies that have an ongoing relationship with

Almost half of agency workers (48%) had an ongoing relationship with a single employment agency. Half (50%) had an ongoing relationship with more than one agency, typically two (19%), though 11% had an ongoing relationship with more than five, as shown in Figure 4.¹¹

Figure 4. Number of agencies contracted to that workers have an ongoing relationship with, and by age



As shown in the chart, there is a clear link between age and developing relationships with agencies. Younger agency workers were more likely to be in contact with multiple agencies: a quarter (25%) of agency workers under the age of 25, and two in five (39%) aged 25-34 had a relationship with only one agency, compared to a clear majority (71%) of those aged 55 plus.

There were also variations by perceptions of the nature of agency work, with those who regarded this type of work as their main source of employment more likely to have an ongoing relationship with two or more agencies than those who have other sources of work (53% and 29% respectively).¹² Similarly, agency workers who saw this form of working as a long-term career were more likely to have an ongoing relationship with two or more agencies (55%) than those who did not (40%).

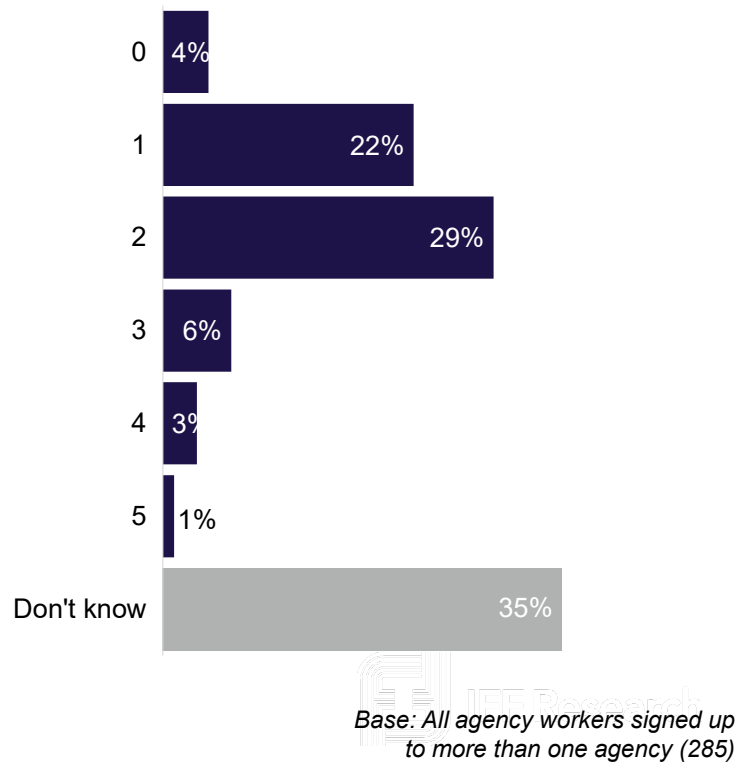
Follow-up questions were asked of those who had an ongoing relationship with more than one employment agency to establish how many agencies had provided work and the types of contract held with each agency.

¹¹ It is worth noting that among the sample of agency workers recruited via temporary work agencies rather than from the online panel (the online panel group are those used for the main reporting, those recruited via two agencies are reported only occasionally), a much higher proportion had an ongoing relationship with a single agency (80%).

¹² Note small base size of those who say that agency work is not their main source of employment (n=61).

In the 18 months prior to the survey, those who had an ongoing relationship with more than one agency were more likely to say they had been provided work from more than one agency (41%) than say none or one of these agencies had provided them any work (26%), though a third (33%) were unsure how many agencies had provided them with work in the 18 months prior to the survey.

Figure 5. Number of agencies have an ongoing relationship that who have provided them work in the 18 months prior to the survey



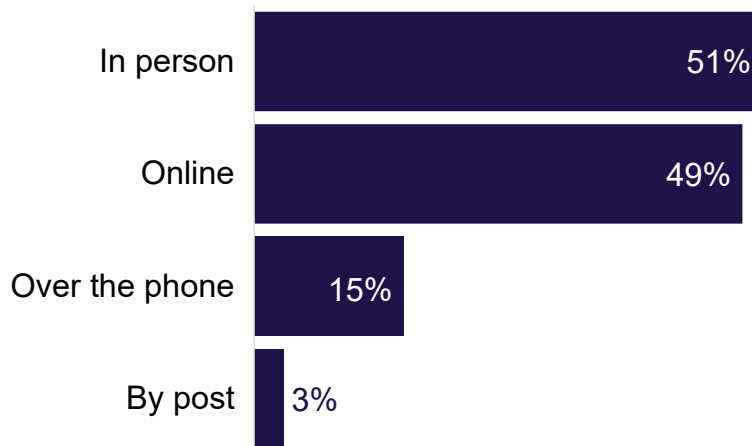
Reasons for not having a formal written contract

Around one in twelve agency workers (8%) did not have a formal, written contract/agreement with any agency. Many did not know why this was the case, or preferred not to say (38%); some said it was their personal choice in that they preferred a zero hours contract or the flexibility to turn down work (17%) or did not want to feel tied to an agency (8%). However, one in eight (12%) said they never had or were never offered a contract. It is important to note that these findings are indicative only and should be treated with caution given the small base size for those without a formal contract (44 respondents).

Signing up to agencies

There were two main approaches to signing up with agency; either in person (mentioned by 51% of agency workers) or online (mentioned by 49%). In comparison just one in seven (15%) agency workers signed up over the phone, and 3% had signed up by post. Respondents were able to select multiple responses (and some respondents were signed up to multiple agencies), hence the percentages sum to over 100% in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Method of signing up to an agency



*Base: All agency workers (547)
Don't know 1%.*

Older workers were more likely to have signed up with an agency in person (60% of 45-54 year olds compared to 38% of 25-34 year olds, among whom most had signed up online (62%)).

Methods used for signing up with an agency also differed based on the number of agencies workers had an ongoing relationship with (this relates to the finding on age given that younger workers were more likely to be signed up with multiple agencies). Those signed up with multiple agencies were more likely to have done so online (e.g., 67% who those had signed up with 3-4 agencies had used online methods for at least some of these, compared with 36% who were only registered with one agency). Agency workers who had an ongoing relationship with just one agency were more likely to have signed up in person (56%, compared with 36% who had signed up online).

Assignments

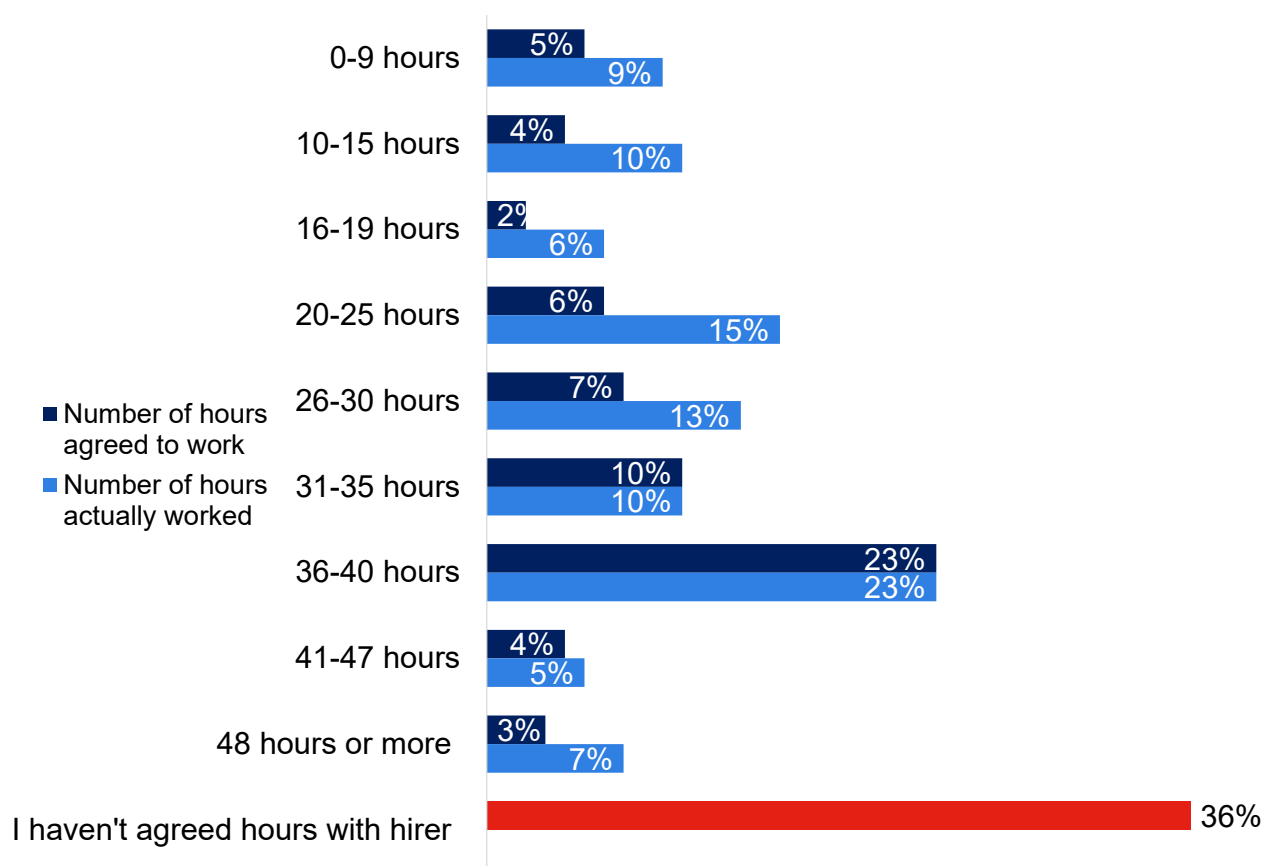
Agreed and actual hours of work

Agency workers split relatively evenly between those who had agreed to work 35 hours or less per week excluding overtime with their main hirer (34%), those that had agreed to work 36 or more hours a week (29%) and those that indicated that they did not have agreed hours with the hirer (36%).

Men were more likely to have agreed to work 36 or more hours a week (36% vs. 23% of women) while women were more likely not to have an agreed number of hours with the hirer (43% vs. 29% among men). Those aged under 25 were particularly likely to have agreed to work 35 hours a week or less (47%; 19% had agreed longer working hours).

In terms of actual hours worked (including overtime), agency workers typically worked 35 hours or less each week on their (main) current assignment (63%). Just over a third (36%) worked more than 35 hours a week; this was higher for men (47%) than women (31%).

Figure 7. Agreed and actual hours of work



Base: All agency workers (546/545 – anomalies in data removed).

Among respondents giving exact figures for the agreed and actual hours worked (as opposed to answers in bands, as presented in the previous chart, if they did not do the exact hours) the mean agreed number of hours per week with their main hirer was 31.4 and the actual hours worked 32.6. The former excludes overtime the latter includes any overtime.

The agency-recruited agency workers had a very different work pattern to those recruited via the panel. They were far less likely to say they did not have agreed hours with the hirer (13% vs. 36%) and far more likely to have contracted hours of 36 or more hours a week (67% vs. 29%) and to actually work 36 hours or more a week (74% vs. 36%).

Snapshot of agency workers – February 2020

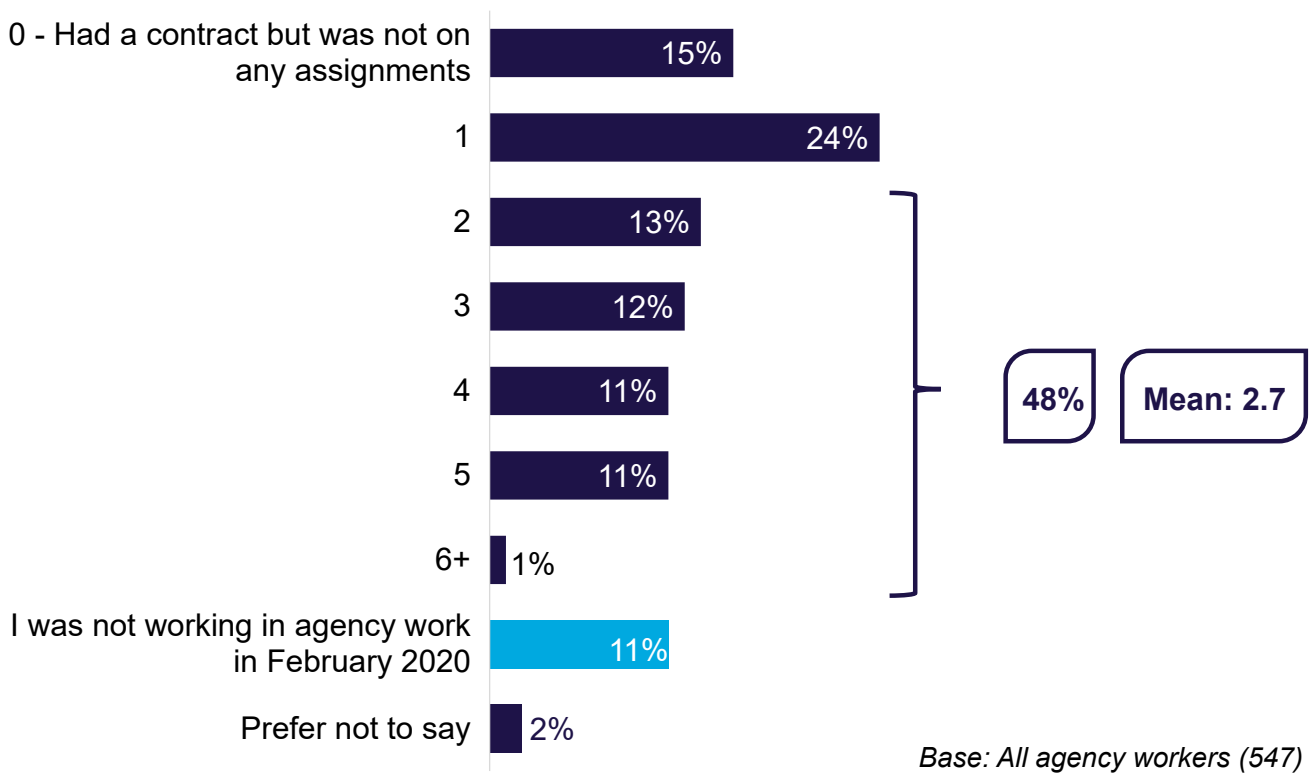
One element of the survey was designed to provide a snapshot of agency work before the COVID-19 pandemic. Agency workers were asked to consider their working arrangements in February 2020 and the plans they had for the rest of the year, at that time.

Number of assignments

A quarter of agency workers (24%) were actively working on just one assignment in February 2020. Just under half (48%) were working on two or more assignments at that time, as shown in the chart below.

Reflecting the fact that a significant proportion of agency workers were relatively new to this kind of work, 11% indicated they were not working for an agency immediately prior to the pandemic, and a further 15% had a contract with an employment agency but were not on any assignments at that time.

Figure 8. Number of assignments in February 2020



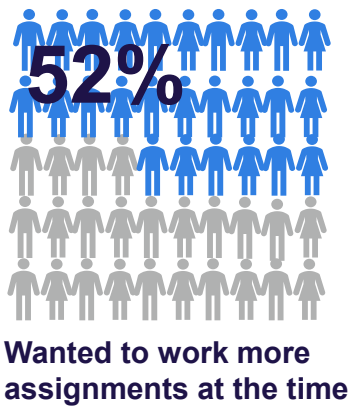
People who were not employed in agency work prior to the pandemic, were more likely to be those who do not currently regard agency work as long-term career (19%, compared with 6% of those who do).

Attitudes towards assignments and working hours

Agency workers were asked to think about their working arrangements in February 2020 and consider whether they wanted to work on more assignments at that time. On balance, a slight majority of agency workers (52%) would have liked more assignments than they were working on at that time.

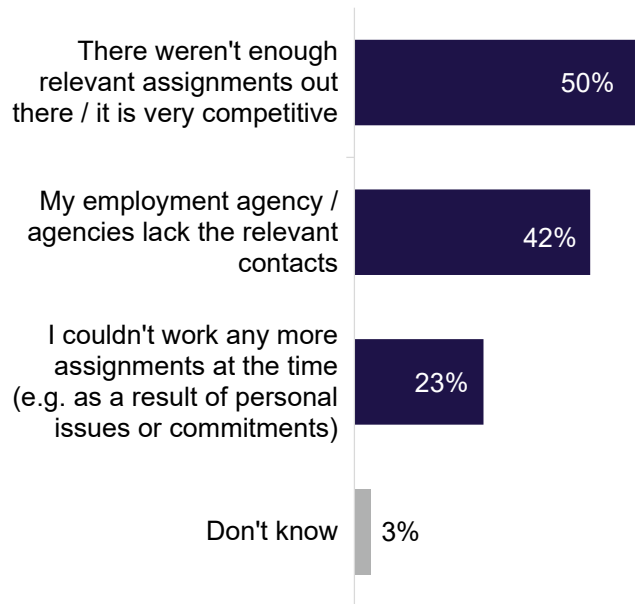
The main reason given for not working on more assignments was the lack of relevant work or high competition for assignments, mentioned by half (50%) of those who wanted more assignments at that time. Two in five (42%) felt their employment agency / agencies did not have sufficient relevant contacts. A quarter (23%) said that, even though they wanted to work on more assignments in February 2020, their personal commitments prevented them from doing so.

Figure 9. Attitudes towards assignments and working hours in February 2020



Base: All agency workers working for an agency in February 2020 (493)

Reasons for not working on more assignments at the time

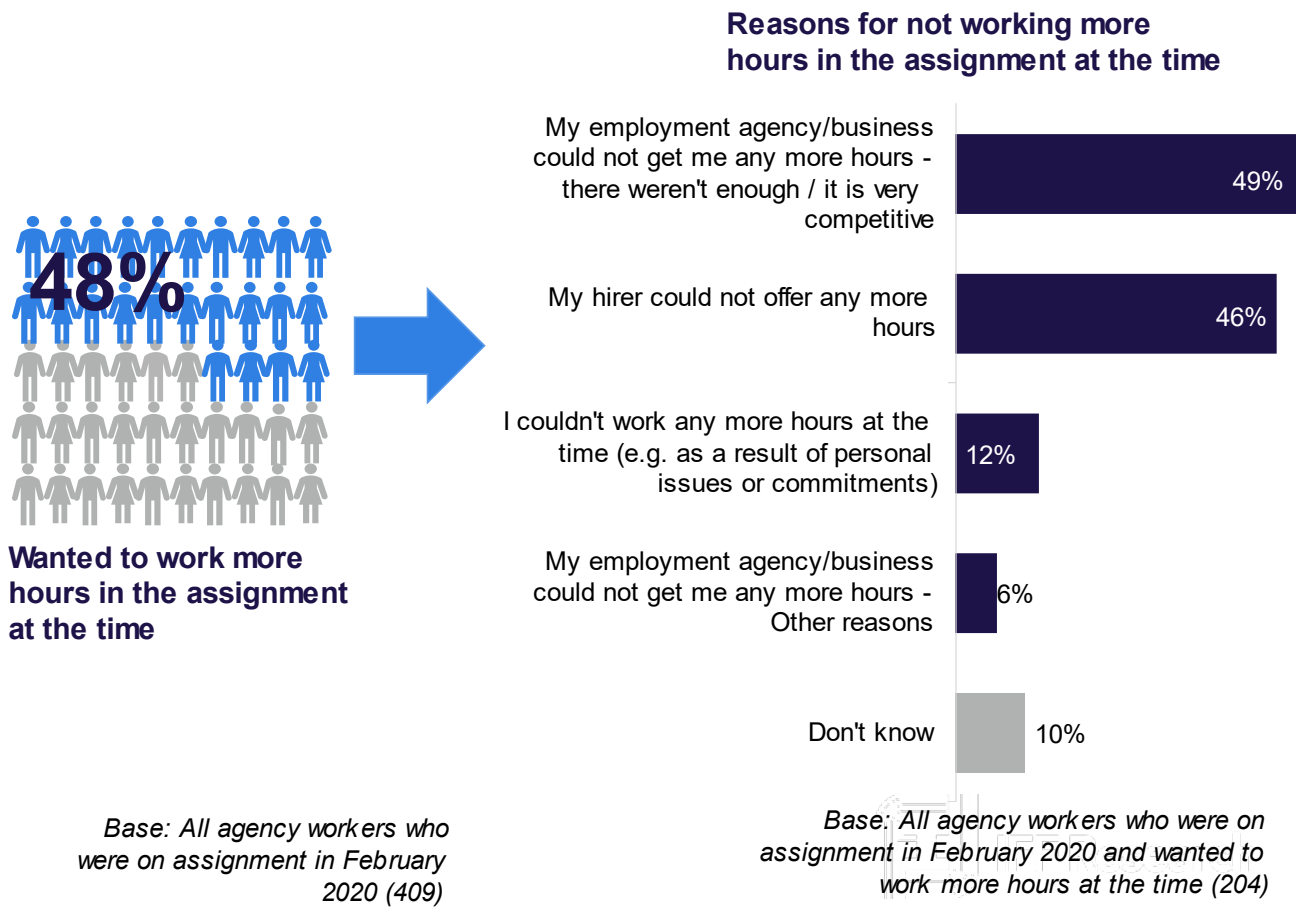


Base: All who were working for an agency in February 2020 and wanted to work more assignments at the time (274)

Similarly, there was a roughly even split between those that wanted to work more hours in their main assignment in February 2020 (48%), and those that did not (46%) – 6% were unsure or could not remember.

A lack of work or competition for available work was the main reason why the demand from agency workers for more hours before the pandemic was not being met (mentioned by 49%). However, another key factor was that the hirer could not offer any more hours (mentioned by 46%). Around one in eight agency workers (12%) who would have welcomed more hours cited personal issues or commitments as a reason for not working more hours.

Figure 10. Reasons for not working more hours in February 2020



Looking at the sub-group variations for both questions, demand to take on more assignments pre-pandemic was notably higher among those agency workers who saw agency employment as a long-term career (59%), compared with those who did not (38%). It was also higher among agency workers who were contracted to (and had ongoing relationships) with more than one employment agency (65% of those contracted to two or more agencies wanted to work on more assignments in February 2020, compared with 36% of those contracted to a single agency).

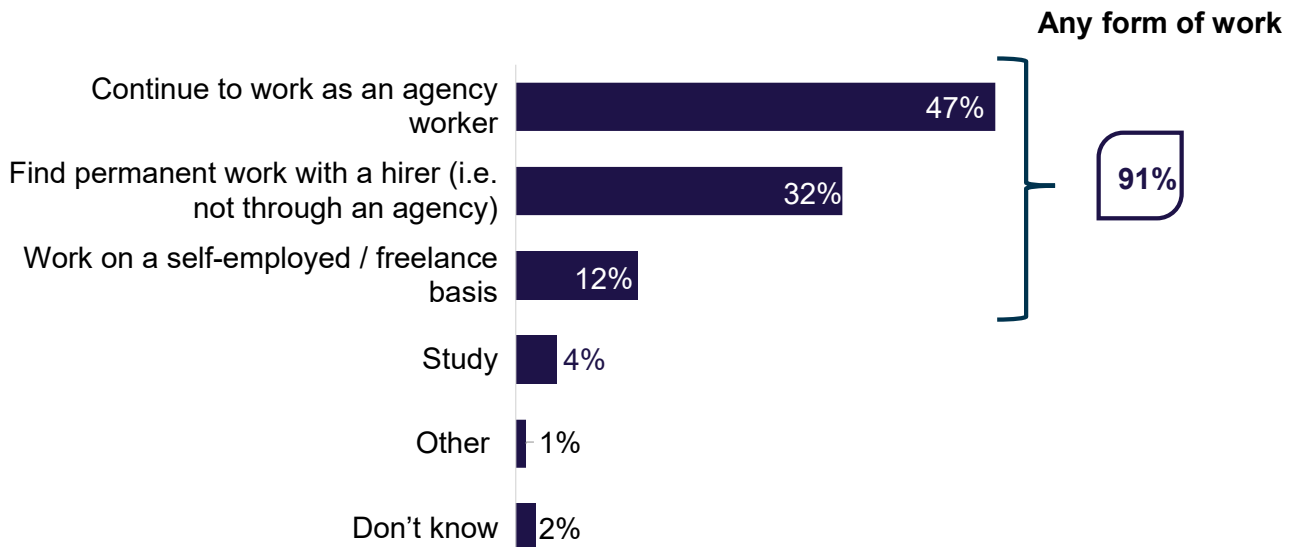
Demand to take on more hours at the time was also higher among agency workers contracted to multiple agencies in February 2020: 60% of those working with 2 or more agencies wanted to work more hours in their main assignment at that time, compared with 33% of agency workers contracted to one agency.¹³

Employment plans for 2020 at the start of the year

The final question in the snapshot section asked agency workers to think back to what their plans were for the year 2020 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority (91%) had been planning to continue in employment, most often remaining in agency work (47%) followed by a move into permanent (non-agency) work (32%) or to work on a self-employed / freelance basis (12%). Overall, 4% had planned to be studying, rising to 12% of those aged under 25.

Figure 11. Employment Plans for 2020 at the start of the year

¹³ Note small base size of agency workers who were contracted to 3 or 4 agencies, for this question (n=92).



Base: All working in agency work in February 2020 (492). Prefer not to say 1%

Intentions, as they were in February 2020, varied by sub-group:

- Long-term career plans: Just under three in five respondents who regarded agency work as a long-term career (56%) were keen to continue working in this way. Those who saw agency work as a short-term career were more likely to be considering permanent work in 2020 (38%).
- Number of assignments working on pre-Covid: Agency workers who were working on just one assignment were more likely to have planned to continue with agency work in 2020, than those who were working on multiple assignments (58% and 43%, respectively).
- Age: older agency workers were more likely to have been planning to continue with agency work in 2020, as shown in the table below. Just a third (33%) of under 25 year olds considered continuing with agency work, while a similar proportion (35%) were considering moving into permanent work.¹⁴ In comparison, the majority of 45-54 year olds (57%) were planning to continue with agency work.

¹⁴ Note small base size of those under 25 years of age (n=56).

Table 1. Employment plans for 2020, prior to the pandemic, by age¹⁵

	Total	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64
<i>Base</i>	493	56	136	152	88	51
Continue to work as an agency worker	47%	33%	37%	54%	57%	56%
Find permanent work with a hirer	32%	35%	42%	28%	23%	32%
Work on a self-employed/ freelance basis	12%	13%	14%	11%	13%	5%
Study	4%	12%	3%	2%	1%	2%

¹⁵ Note small base size of those under 25 years of age (n=56) and those age 55-64 years (n=51). The table also excludes responses from agency workers age 65+ due to very small base size (n=9).

4. Pay, charges and deductions

This chapter focuses on salary arrangements, examining who is responsible for agency worker pay and the clarity of those arrangements, including payslips and possible deductions. It also examines expectation and entitlement to holiday pay across all groups.

Chapter summary

Employment agencies (64%), rather than a hirer (19%) or umbrella company (15%) were typically responsible for paying agency workers. While most workers (83%) felt that who was responsible for paying them had been made clear to them on their current or most recent assignment, 14% felt that it had not been made clear (rising to 22% among those paid by an umbrella company).

While the majority (81%) of agency workers received payslips for their current or most recent assignment, 15% said this was not the case. Where payslips were received few found them difficult to access (5%) or understand (6%); 7% found the information regarding deductions on their payslip difficult to understand.

Two-thirds (65%) of agency workers had been charged for services or equipment over the 18 months prior to the survey, which typically related to DBS checks (30% of all agency workers), training (30%) or uniforms (25%). Most workers experiencing deductions being made had been notified in advance for at least some of these services, though 15% said they did not receive prior warning for any of the deductions. Being given advanced notification of charges was more common for DBS checks (81%) and work finding (78%) than for training (69%) or uniforms (66%).

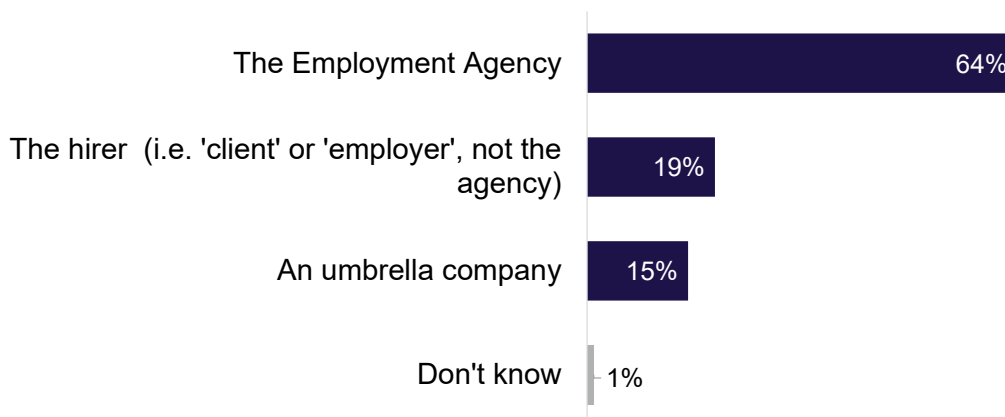
Less than half (45%) of agency workers said they received rolled up holiday pay. Of the rest, 29% were expected to take holiday leave but were unsure whether they would be compensated for any leave they did not use, and one in five (19%) said they did not get holiday pay.

Salary arrangements

Responsibility for agency worker pay

Employment agencies were more likely to be responsible for payment arrangements than a hirer or an umbrella company. Just under two-thirds of agency workers (64%) were paid by their employment agency for the current/most recent assignment, while less than one in five were paid by their hirer (19%) or by an umbrella company (15%).

Figure 12. Agency worker payment source on most recent assignment



Base: All agency workers (547)

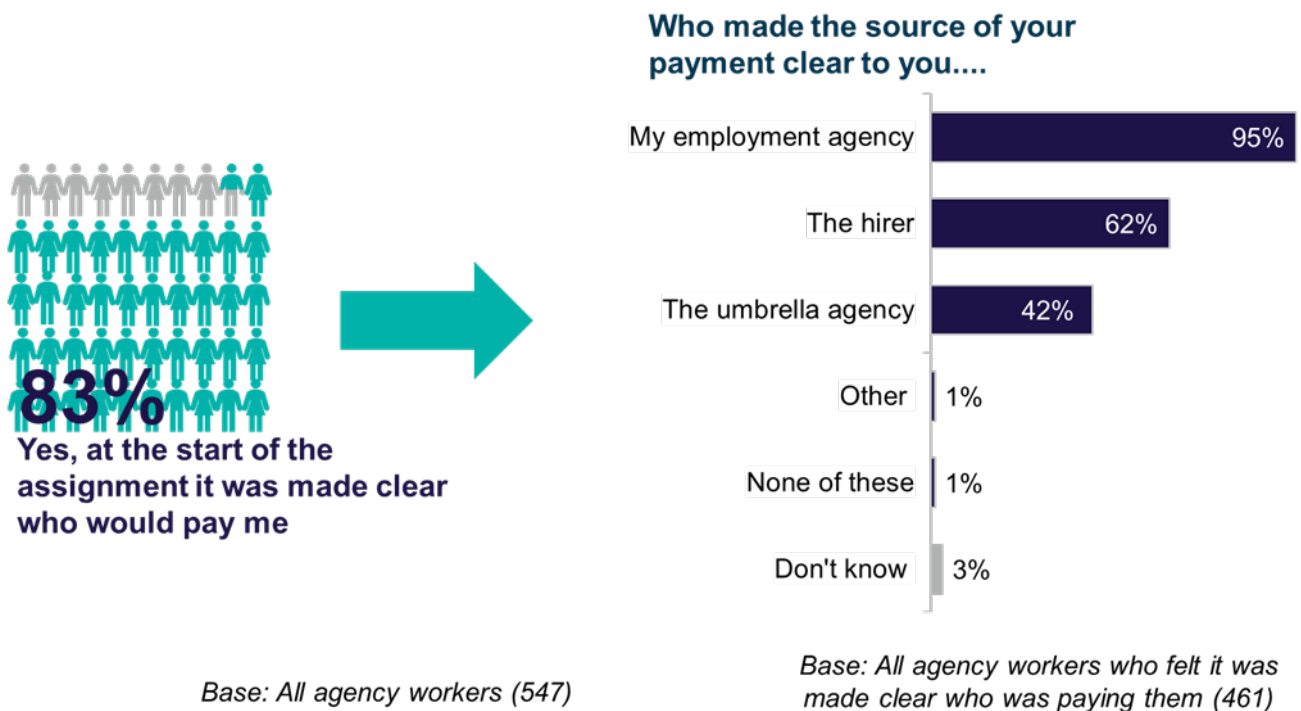
The responsibility for agency worker pay was relatively consistent across sub-groups, with the exception of those who had on-going relationships / contracts with multiple agencies who were more likely than average to be paid by an umbrella company (21% among those contracted to two or more agencies, compared with 9% of those contracted to just one agency).

Clarity of pay arrangements

Agency workers were asked to think back to when they started their current or most recent (main) assignment and consider whether it was made clear who they would receive their pay from. While most (83%) said that this was made clear, 14% felt that it had not been clear.

Clarification of payment arrangements was typically something that employment agencies do. Almost all agency workers (95%) who were clear about who was paying them said they found this out from their employment agency, though quite high proportions also said that their hirer (62%) or an umbrella company (42%) had also made the source of their pay clear. As shown in the chart below, information about salary arrangements was being provided by multiple sources.

Figure 13. Awareness of pay arrangements



As with current payment arrangements, awareness of who was responsible for pay and the source of that information varied between those who were contracted to one agency and those who had an ongoing relationship with multiple agencies. Less than one in ten (7%) of those contracted to a single agency felt that pay arrangements had not been made clear, compared with a third (34%) of those contracted to five or more agencies.¹⁶

There also appears to be a connection between awareness of responsibility for pay and awareness of overall employment rights: a third (33%) of agency workers who were not aware of their rights were

¹⁶ Note small base size of those contracted to five or more agencies (n=56).

unclear about who they would receive their pay from, compared with only one in 20 (5%) of those who were aware of their rights.¹⁷

Those who were currently being paid by an umbrella company were more likely to say that it was not made clear to them who would be paying their salary on their current/most recent assignment than agency workers who were being paid by an agency (22%, compared with 9%).

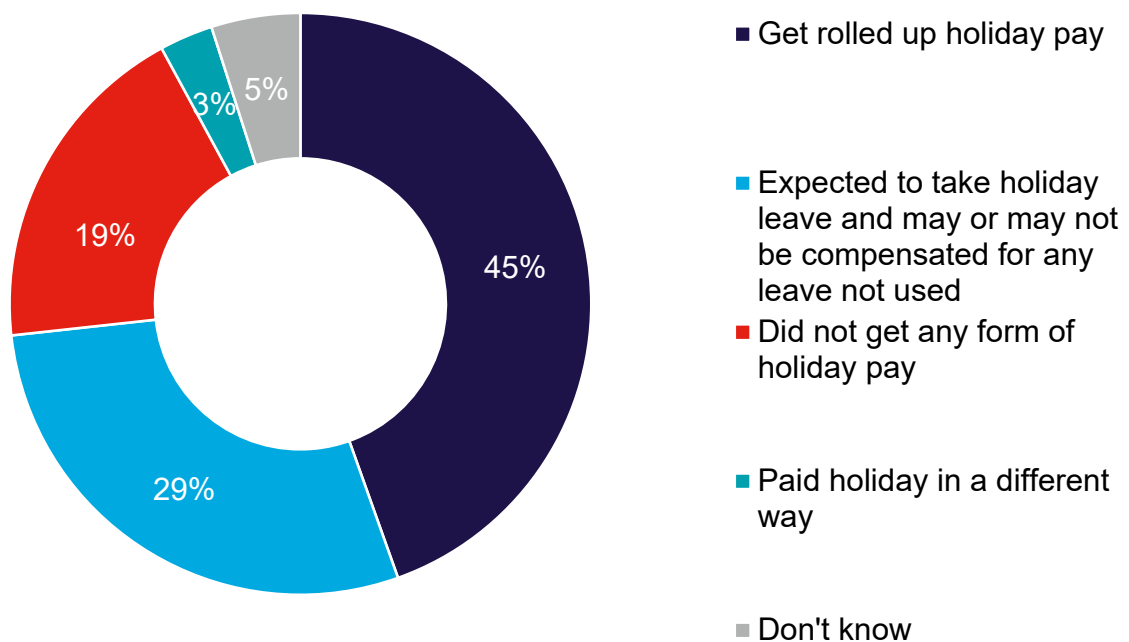
Holiday pay

Expectation of receiving holiday pay

Just under half (45%) of agency workers received rolled up holiday pay in their current (main) assignment (or in their most recent assignment if they were not currently assigned). A further three in ten (29%) indicated that they were expected to take holiday leave but may or may not have been compensated for any leave they did not use.

However, as illustrated in the chart below, one in five (19%) agency workers indicated that they did not get any holiday pay.

Figure 14. Holiday pay



Base: All agency workers (547)

**Note the figures calculate to more than 100% due to rounding*

Agency workers indicating that they did not receive holiday pay were more likely to be:

¹⁷ Note small base size of those who were not aware of their rights (n=53).

- Working in elementary roles (30%).¹⁸ Elementary roles cover such work as general labourer's construction work, cleaners, shelf fillers, catering assistants, waiters, bar staff and chambermaids.
- Those with an ongoing relationship with just one agency (27%).
- Those with an informal contract – the findings suggest that a higher proportion of agency workers with an informal contract expected to get no form of holiday pay, compared with those who have a formal contract (35% and 17%, respectively).¹⁹
- Those who said that agency work was not their main source of employment – 37% did not receive holiday pay, compared with only 16% of people for whom agency work was their main employment.²⁰
- Agency workers who were not aware of their employment rights – over a third (36%) did not expect to receive holiday pay, compared with 14% of those who were fully aware of their rights.²¹
- Agency workers who were not aware of the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) - around a third (32%) did not get holiday pay, compared with 13% of agency workers who were aware of EAS.

Payslips

Receipt of payslips

Most agency workers did receive payslips: 81% had been given one for their current, or most recent, assignment but around one in seven (15%) had not.

Agency workers who held an informal contract with an employment agency were less likely to receive a payslip (68%) than agency workers with a formal contract (83%).²² Those who were not aware of their employment rights were more likely to say they did not get a payslip (40%).²³

Access to, and understanding of, payslips

Overall, payslips appear to be easy to access and easy to understand. As shown in the Figure 15, most agency workers who received payslips felt that they were easy to access (84%; with half (50%) indicating it was very easy. Just one in twenty (5%) described access to their payslip as difficult.

The vast majority (82%) also found it easy to understand the payslip they received (46% described this as very easy). Overall, around one in 20 (6%) found their payslip difficult to understand.

When asked about the information regarding deductions on their payslip, most agency workers (76%) said the information was easy to understand; 15% described this as neither easy nor difficult and 7% that found it difficult.

Access to payslips and understanding of payslip content differed between those who were paid by their employment agency and those who are paid by an umbrella company. Only 3% who were paid by an agency had difficulties accessing their payslip, compared with one in 11 (9%) of those paid by an umbrella company. Similarly, one in eight (12%) agency workers paid through an umbrella company had difficulties understanding their payslips, compared with 3% of those paid by an employment

¹⁸ Note small base size of those working in elementary roles (n=51)

¹⁹ Note small base size of those with an informal contract (n=54).

²⁰ Note small base size of those who said that agency work is not their main source of employment (n=61).

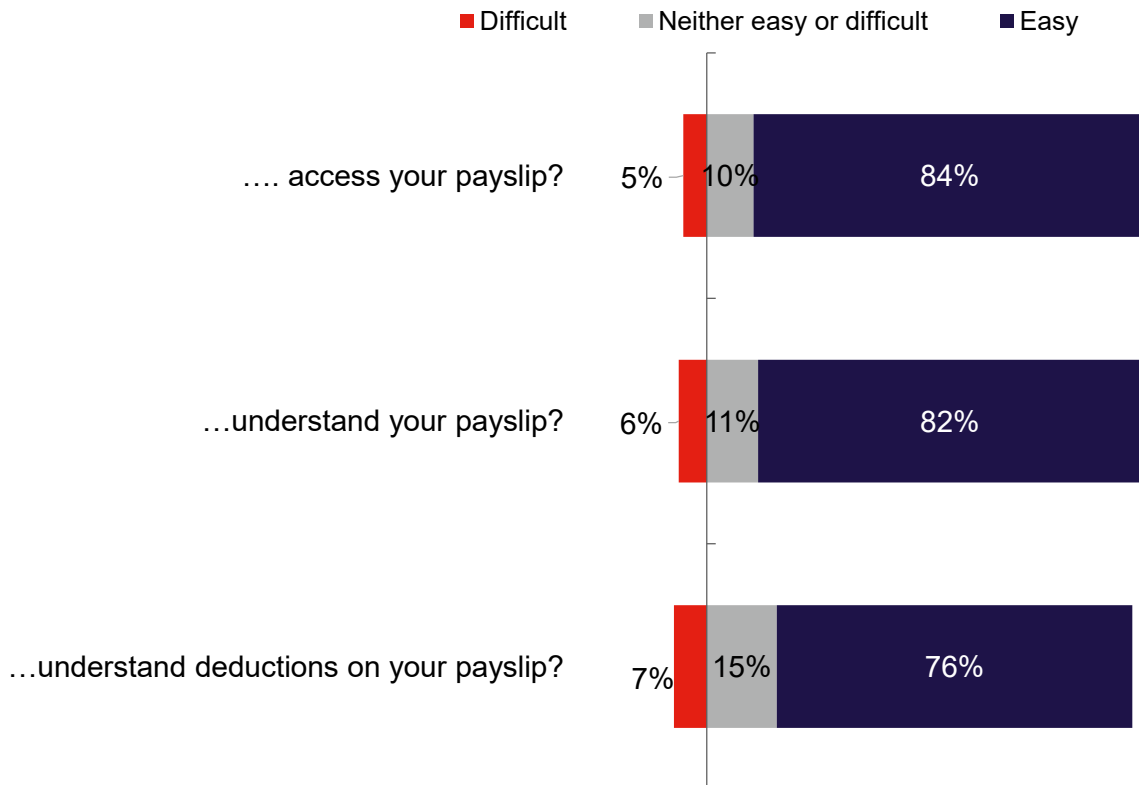
²¹ Note small base size of those who are not aware of their rights (n=53).

²² Note small base size of those with an informal contract (n=54).

²³ Note small base size of those who are not aware of their rights (n=53).

agency. Attitudes towards the clarity of deductions on payslips was largely consistent across all types of agency worker.

Figure 15. Access to and understanding payslips



Base: All agency workers who received payslips (455)

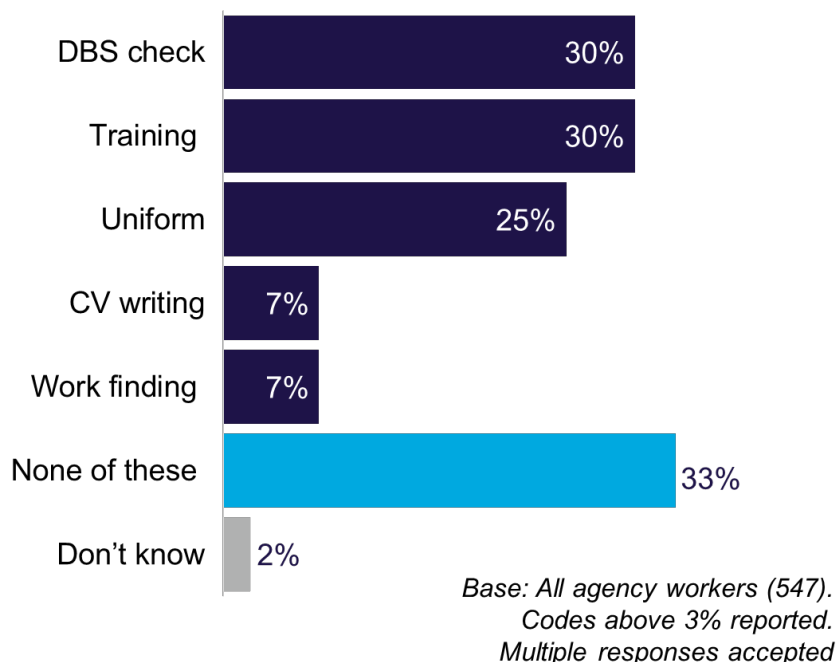
*Note the figures calculate to less than 100% due to rounding / 'don't know' 1% in each instance

Charges and deductions

Charges made for services and equipment

Two-thirds of agency workers (65%) had been charged for services or equipment over the 18 months prior to the survey. These deductions from their salary typically related to DBS checks (30% of all agency workers, rising to 51% of those in caring, leisure or other service roles), training (30%) or uniforms (25%).

Figure 16. Charges agency workers were notified of in the 18 months prior to the survey



Most agency workers were notified of charges for at least some of these services in advance of using them, though 15% said they did not receive prior warning for any of the services listed.

Being given advanced notification of charges was largely in line with this, with agency workers most commonly told about DBS checks (37%), training (32%) and uniform (25%).

Deductions varied across agency workers based on a wide range of factors:

- Two-thirds of agency workers with a formal contract (67%) reported salary deductions over the 18 months prior to the survey, higher than the proportion (43%) found among those holding an informal contract. Training charges were the key difference; 32% of those with a formal contract were charged for training, compared with 12% of those with an informal contract.
- Seven in ten (68%) of those where agency work was their main source of employment reported salary deductions, compared with 45% of those who did not. Highlighting the overlap between agency workers with a formal contract and those who regard this way of working as their main source of employment, training was the key difference in terms of deductions made from salary.
- Over three-quarters (77%) of those who regarded agency work as a long-term career experienced deductions in the 18 months prior to the survey. This group were more likely to have been charged for DBS checks (35%), training (39%) and uniforms (31%) than agency workers who did not intend to work in this sector in the long-term.
- The difference in charges for services, such as DBS checks and uniform, were most notable between those who were contracted to a single agency and those who worked for multiple agencies, as shown in the table below. Just under half (48%) of those working for a single agency experienced one or more deductions in the 18 months prior to the survey, compared with 75% of those working for two agencies and 86% of those working for three or more agencies.

Table 2. Charges made by an employment agency, umbrella company or other to agency workers over the 18 months prior to the survey, by number of agencies contracted to²⁴

	Total	1 agency	2 agencies	3+ agencies
<i>Base</i>	547	262	105	168
Any charges made	65%	48%	75%	86%
DBS check	30%	23%	41%	34%
Training	30%	21%	29%	45%
Uniform	25%	18%	29%	34%
CV writing	7%	3%	5%	13%
Work finding	7%	4%	3%	13%
None of these	33%	49%	21%	14%

For some of the findings in this chapter results among the agency-recruited agency workers differed from those discussed to date among the panel-recruited respondents. In particular, the agency-recruited respondents were:

Less likely to report receiving rolled up holiday pay in their current / last assignment (28% vs. 45%) and not being sure what their holiday leave or pay arrangements were (14% vs. 5%).

More likely to report receiving payslips for their current, or most recent, assignment (93% vs. 81% among the panel-recruited agency workers)

Were far less likely to have had any deductions from their pay in the 18 months prior to the survey for things like training, uniforms or DBS checks (14% vs. 65%).

²⁴ Agency workers were asked to exclude any payments made directly to a supplier e.g. for a DBS check or training.

5. Terms and conditions of hire

This chapter reviews the terms and conditions under which agency workers are hired, including awareness of the requirement to receive a written statement, identification checks and information relating to health and safety risks.

Chapter summary

The majority of agency workers (65%) recalled being provided with a written statement detailing key information relating to their current or most recent, main assignment, however, a third (32%) did not.

Most agency workers (75%) also reported identification checks taking place when they agreed their contract, but 17% said that these checks did not take place even though they were aware that they should have been and 6% said the check did not take place but they were unaware of this process.

While the majority of agency workers (64%) were informed about the health and safety risks of their current (main) assignment, 30% were not. In instances where health and safety information was provided, it was typically part of a formal induction at the beginning of a contract, and delivered in person.

Documentation received from their agency

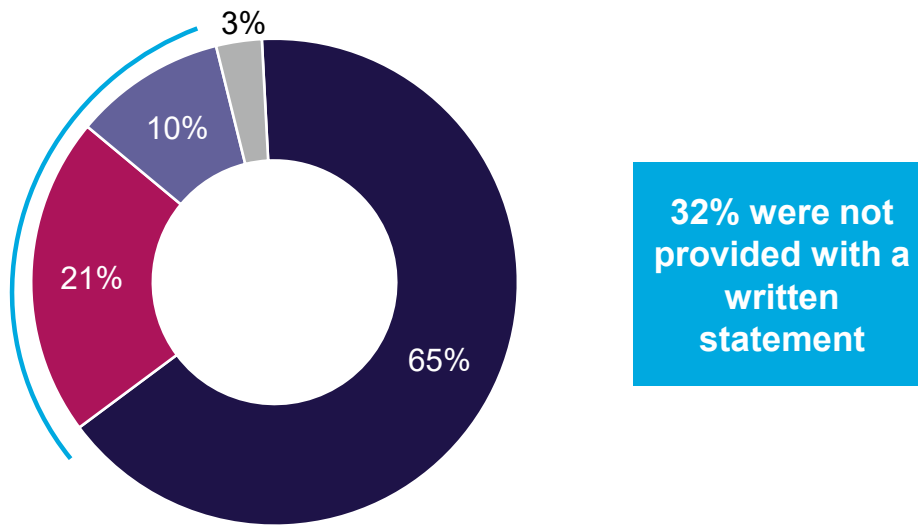
Receipt of written statement

On being offered an assignment an agency should provide a written statement detailing information such as the start date, length of assignment, type of work, expenses, location, hours and training or qualifications required. Agency workers were asked whether they had received a written statement when they started their current or most recent main assignment.

Overall, two-thirds (65%) of agency workers recalled being provided with a written statement, a third (32%) did not. Of those who did not receive a written statement, twice as many (21% of all agency workers) were aware that they should have received a written statement as were not aware (10%).

Figure 17. Receipt of written statement

■ Yes ■ No, but aware it should have happened ■ No, not aware it should have happened ■ Don't know



Base: All agency workers (547)

*Note the figures calculate to less than 100% due to rounding

Those working with a single agency were more likely than average to recall receiving a written statement (69%).

Overall awareness of employment rights was closely related to receipt of a written statement; most agency workers (83%) who felt fully aware of their rights were provided with a written statement when they started their current or most recent assignment. In comparison, just over half (53%) of those who were 'somewhat' aware of their rights and 40% of agency workers who were not aware of their rights received a statement.²⁵

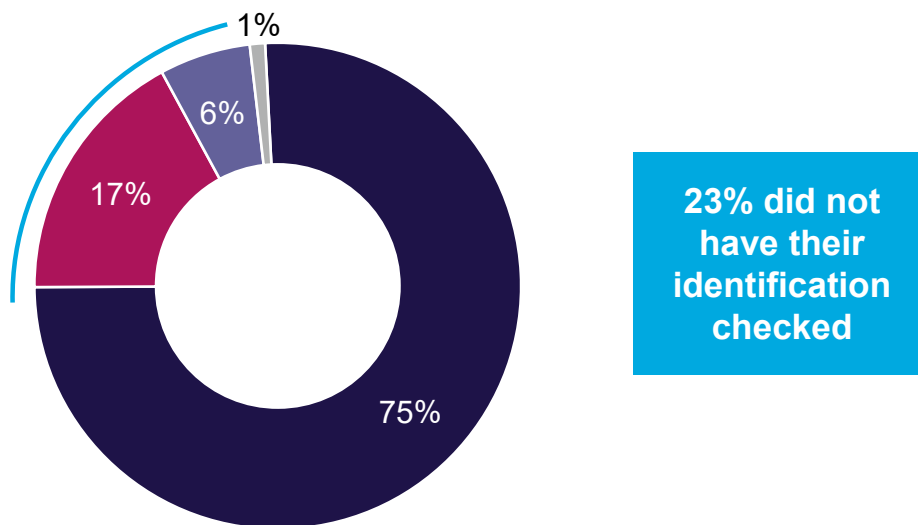
Identification check

Employment agencies should carry out identification checks, using a passport, driving licence or birth certificate, when agency workers agree their contract. While three-quarters (75%) indicated that their current or main agency did so, 17% said that identification checks did not take place, even though they were aware that they should and 6% said the check did not take place and that they were unaware of this process of verification.

²⁵ Note small base size of agency workers who are not aware of their rights (n=53).

Figure 18. Proportion of agency workers who had ID verification checks

■ Yes ■ No, but aware it should have happened ■ No, not aware it should have happened ■ Don't know



Base: All agency workers (547)

**Note the figures calculate to less than 100% due to rounding*

Looking at the variation by sub-groups, similar factors are at play in regard to receipt of written statements and identification checks, with those contracted to just one agency more likely to indicate that an identification verification was carried out (86%) than those who are contracted to more than one agency (62% of those contracted to three to four -agencies).

Similarly, agency workers who perceived themselves as fully aware of their rights were more likely to have their identification check carried out at the point of agreeing a contract, than those who were not aware of their rights (87% and 41%, respectively).²⁶

With a note of caution given the small base size, just 57% of younger workers, under the age of 25, reported that their employment agency checked their identification; 41% said that the checks were not carried out (32% said they had not been carried out and had been aware that they should have been).²⁷

Receipt of contract from an umbrella organisation

All agency workers who were paid by an umbrella company were asked if they had received a contract explaining the terms and conditions of the hire. Just under a quarter (23%) of these agency workers had not received a contract (3% were unsure).

Health and safety information

Receipt of health and safety information

Most agency workers (64%) were informed about the health and safety risks of their current (main) assignment. However, three in ten (30%) were not and 6% were unsure whether they had received health and safety information or not.

²⁶ Note small base size of agency workers who are not aware of their rights (n=53).

²⁷ Note small base size of agency workers under 25 years of age (n=60).

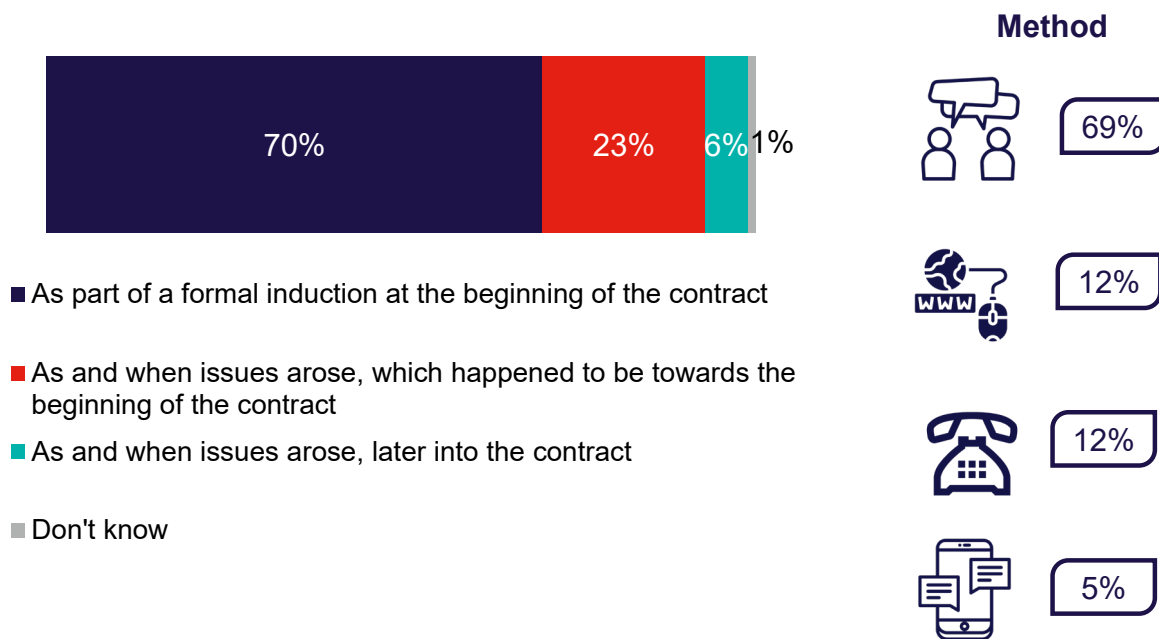
These findings varied little by age or nature of their relationship with the employment agency. However, agency workers with little or no awareness of their employment rights were far less likely to recall information about health and safety risks (77% of those that felt fully aware of their rights as agency workers felt informed about the health and safety risks of their current (main) assignment compared with 59% of those somewhat aware of their rights and 36% among those not aware).²⁸

When and how health and safety information is received

As shown in Figure 19, health and safety information was most commonly provided as part of a formal induction at the beginning of a contract. Seven in ten (70%) agency workers were informed of health and safety risks at this stage, compared with a quarter (23%) who obtained information as and when issues arose, towards the beginning of the contract. Just 6% were given health and safety information as and when issues arose later into the contract.

Agency workers typically received health and safety information in person (69%), but around one in eight were informed about the risks of their last assignment by email (12%) or by phone (12%).

Figure 19. Time and method of health and safety information



Base: All agency workers who were informed of health and safety risks (342)

Once again there was variation based on the number of agencies which workers have an ongoing relationship with. Four in five (81%) agency workers holding a contract with just a single agency received their health and safety training as part of a formal induction at the beginning of a contract, compared with 57% of those contracted to two or more agencies.

The most common method for providing health and safety information was in person, for all sub-groups of agency worker, but those working with multiple agencies were more likely to be informed by methods

²⁸ Note small base size of agency workers who are not aware of their rights (n=53).

such as a phone call (17%, compared with 6% of people contracted to just one agency) or text (9%, compared with 2% of people contracted to one agency).

6. Awareness of rights as an agency worker

A key aim of the study was to explore agency workers' awareness of their rights and sources of support. In this chapter we examine general and specific awareness of employment rights, including understanding of the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) inspectorate. We also highlight sources of information which agency workers said they were likely to use to find out more about their rights and who they regard as being responsible for enforcing those rights.

Chapter summary

Awareness of employment rights, in general, was high: nine in ten felt either fully (46%) or somewhat (43%) aware of their rights as an agency worker, one in ten (10%) did not. Over four in five workers were aware of each of four rights that were presented to them: this was highest for the right to be paid for hours worked (92%) followed by the right to take time off for dependents, emergency, compassionate or special leave (86%). Relative to these, awareness was lower for the right to be provided with a key information document (84%) and to be paid the same as an equivalent direct employee after 12 weeks on assignment (82%).

Although awareness of employment rights may be high, knowing where to find out about entitlements was more limited. Only half of agency workers were spontaneously able to name an organisation they would go to if they needed to find information about their employment rights. The most commonly mentioned sources of information were government websites (13% of all workers), online sources (13%) and Citizens Advice (12%). When those who were unable to think of any sources spontaneously were provided with a list of possible sources, their agency/agencies (30%), trade unions (20%) and local government (20%) were the most likely ones to be mentioned. Similarly, spontaneous knowledge of who is responsible for enforcing agency workers' rights was low, with over half unsure (48%) or not giving a response (11%).

While the majority (62%) of agency workers knew of the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) inspectorate, only three in ten (28%) were aware of any details of what they do. Of those that had heard of EAS, one in five (20%) felt they knew how to get in touch with the organisation.

Awareness of employment rights

General awareness

Almost half (46%) of agency workers felt fully aware of their rights as agency workers and almost the same proportion (43%) were somewhat aware. Just one in ten (10%) did not feel aware of their rights.

Certain groups reported higher than average levels of awareness of their employment rights as agency workers:

- Those for whom agency work was their main source of employment (50% felt fully aware of their rights, compared with 17% of those who had other sources of work), and related to this, those who regarded agency work as their long-term career (52% fully aware).
- Agency workers who had personally experienced problems relating to fair treatment (54% fully aware compared with 42% among those that had not).

Awareness of specific employment rights

Respondents were asked about four specific rights and, for each, asked if they were fully aware, aware of the right and at least some of the details, aware of the right but not sure of the details, or whether they were not aware of the right. The four rights were:

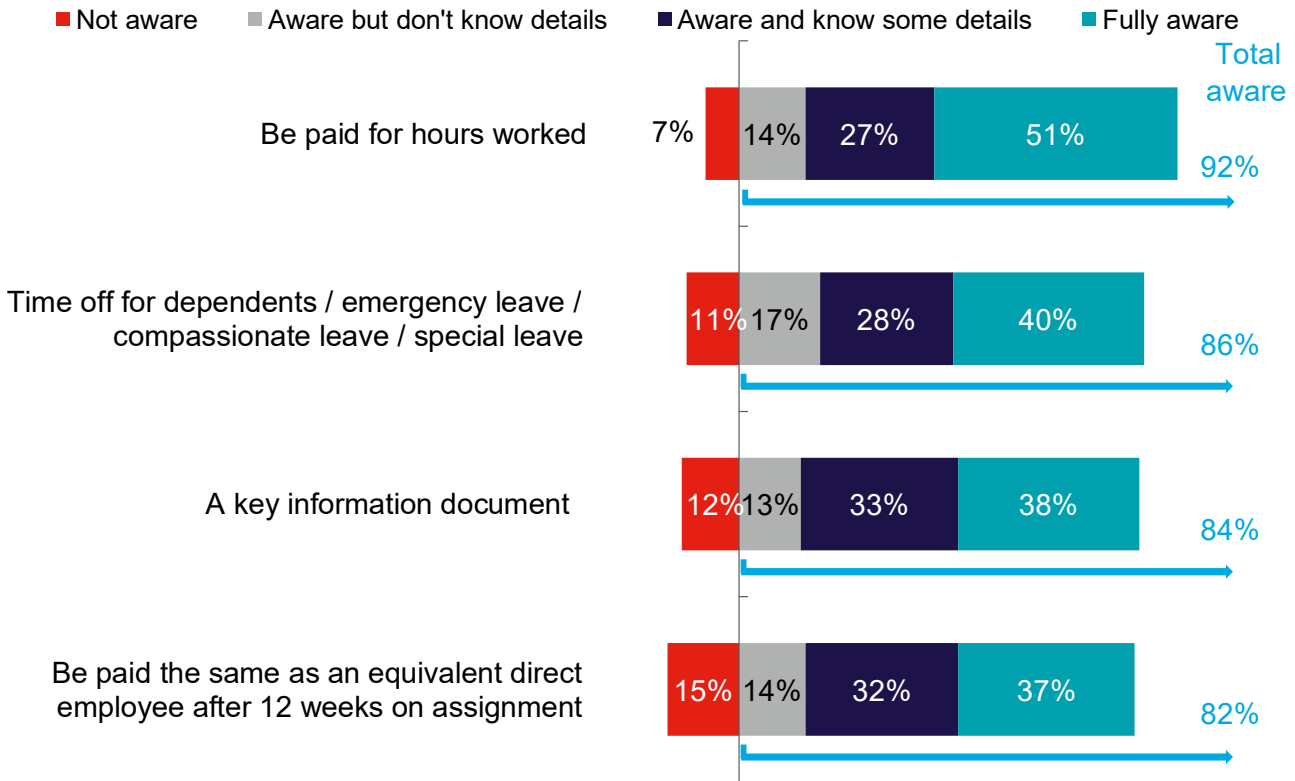
- The right for time off for dependents, emergency, compassionate or special leave. This was described in the questionnaire to respondents as: 'By law agency workers can take unpaid leave at short notice during working hours when a dependent falls ill or is injured or because of unexpected disruption or incident during their care.'
- The right to be paid for hours worked. This was described to respondents as 'agency worker is entitled to be paid for the hours they have worked, regardless of whether the agency has been paid by the hirer or whether the hirer had authorised the worker's timesheets.'
- The right to be paid the same as an equivalent direct employee after 12 weeks on assignment. In the questionnaire it was explained to respondents that this includes key elements of pay, but also other entitlements such as annual leave.
- The right to a key information document. In the questionnaire this was described as follows: 'These were introduced in April 2020 and set out key information relating to your registrations with the agency, such as: how you will be paid, how deductions are applied and entitlement to employee benefits e.g., holidays.'

As shown in Figure 20, over four in five workers were aware of each right. This was highest for the right to be paid for hours worked (92%) followed by the right to take time off for dependents, emergency, compassionate or special leave (86%). Of the four rights discussed, agency workers were least aware of the right to be paid the same as an equivalent direct employee after 12 weeks on assignment (82% aware compared with 15% not aware of this).

Although at least four in five agency workers were aware of each right, selecting either 'fully aware' or 'somewhat aware', for only one (being paid for hours worked) were a majority fully aware of the right (51%).

Figure 20. Level of awareness of four specific rights

Awareness of right to...



Base: All agency workers (547).
 *Don't know 4% or less in each instance

Sub-group variations largely follow those for overall awareness.

Time off for dependents, emergency, compassionate or special leave

Agency workers who were fully aware of this right were more likely to be those for whom agency work was their main source of employment (42%, compared with 25% among those where it was not) and those who regarded it as their long-term career (47%, compared with 32% of those who did not). Similarly, awareness was higher among those who had had problems with their employment rights being upheld (47%). In addition, male agency workers were more likely to be fully aware of their rights to time off / leave (46%) than female workers (35%).

Be paid for hours worked

Awareness of the right to be paid for hours worked was relatively consistent across agency workers, but again a higher proportion of those who said that agency work was their main source of employment were more likely to be fully aware (53%, compared with 39% of those who said that it was not their main source).

Be paid the same as an equivalent direct employee after 12 weeks on assignment

Awareness of this right was highest among those for whom agency work was their main source employment (39% were fully aware of this right, compared to 18% among those for whom it was not).

A key information document

Two in five (41%) of those for whom agency work was their main source of employment were fully aware of this right, compared with 17% who have another main source of employment. Similarly,

agency workers who regarded agency work as their long-term career were more likely to be fully aware of this right (44% vs. 28% of those who do not).

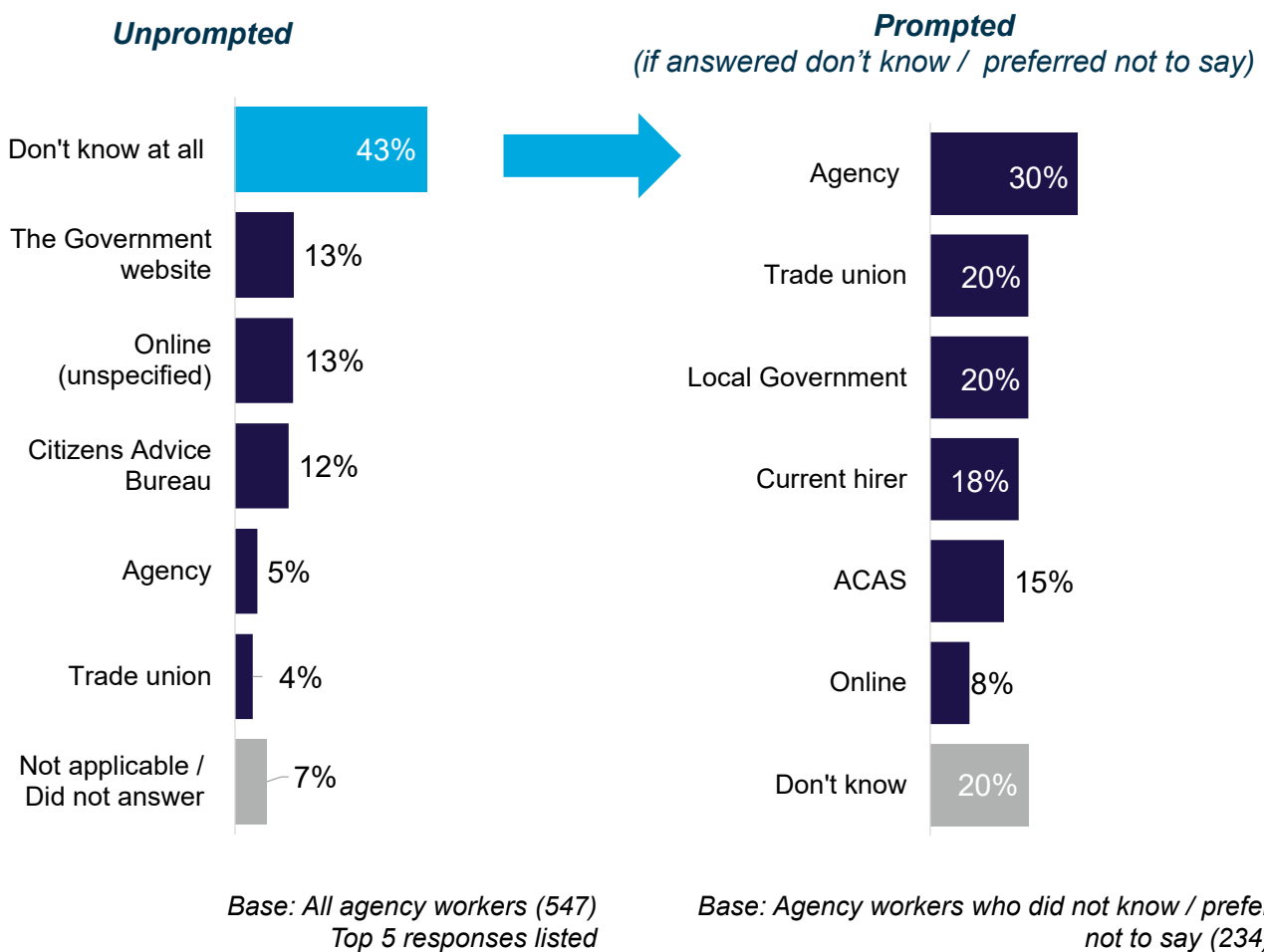
Information about employment rights and responsibilities

Finding information on employment rights

Agency workers were asked as a spontaneous question (i.e. with no list of options to select from) where they would go if they needed to find information about their employment rights. The most commonly mentioned sources of information were government websites (13%), online sources (13%) and Citizens Advice (12%). Other sources mentioned included their agency (5%), unions (4%) and ACAS (3%). Overall, only half were able to spontaneously name any sources of information on employment rights – just over two in five (43%) said that they did not know where they would look and a further 7% answered not applicable, implying they did not see this need arising.

Agency workers who did not know spontaneously where to go for information were asked a follow-up prompted question about the sources they would use for information on employment rights. The most common sources that these agency workers said they would use were their agency/agencies (30%), trade unions (20%) and local government (20%), along with their current hirer (18%) and ACAS (15%). One in five (20%) agency workers remained unsure: this was higher among those aged 35-44 (31%) and those contracted to and with an ongoing relationship with a single agency (27%).

Figure 21. Sources of information on employment rights



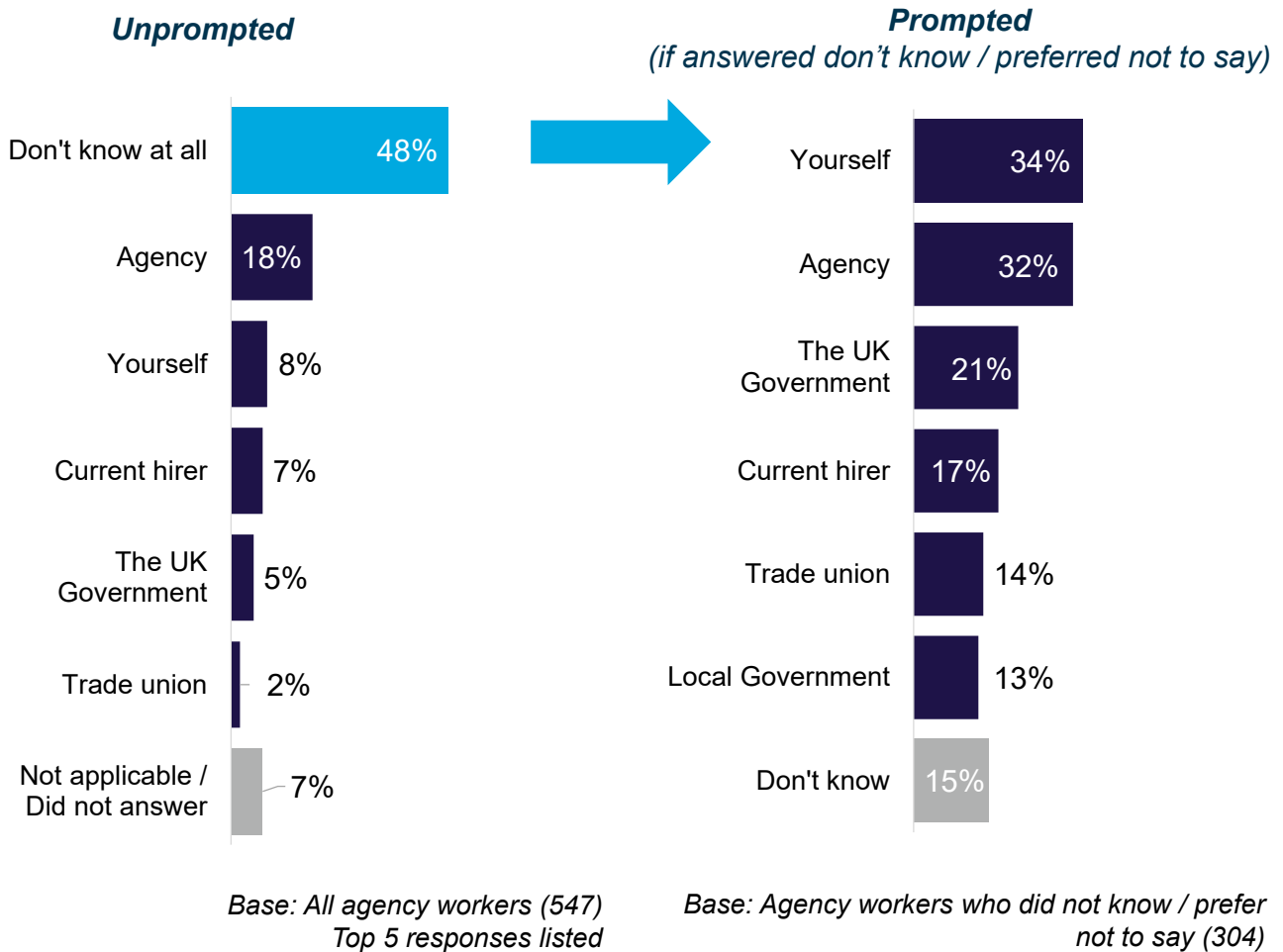
Responsibility for enforcing employment rights

Agency workers were asked to consider who would be responsible for enforcing their employment rights. Spontaneous responses, as shown in Figure 22, included their own agency/agencies (18%) and

themselves (8%). However, almost half of all agency workers (48%) did not know who had this responsibility or did not provide an answer (11%).

When prompted, those who answered ‘Don’t know’ or ‘Prefer not to say’ were most likely to say that it was up to the individual to enforce their own employment rights (34%), or the responsibility lay with their agency (32%).

Figure 22. Who has responsibility for enforcing their rights as agency workers



Awareness of the Employment Agency Standards inspectorate

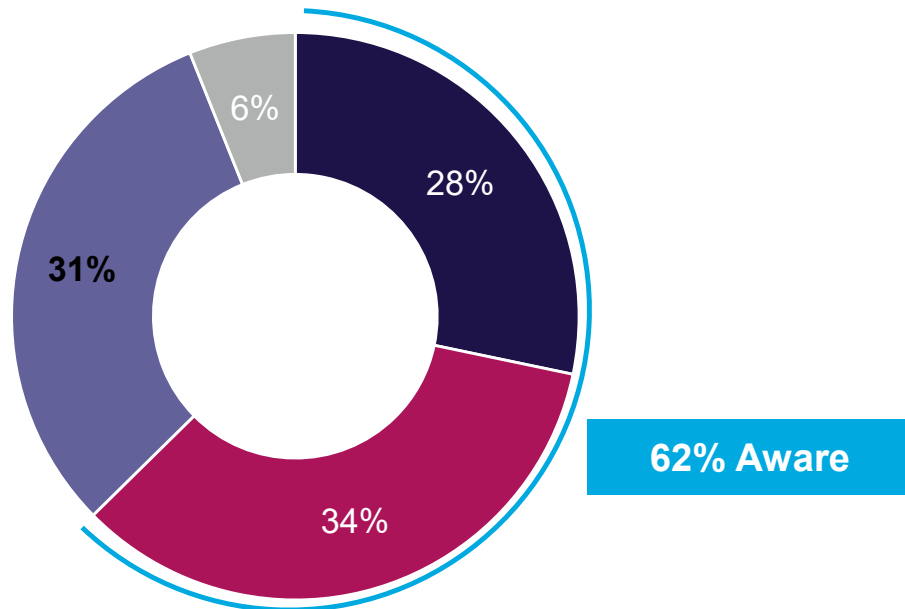
General awareness

When prompted, three in five agency workers (62%) were aware of the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) inspectorate, which regulates the recruitment sector ensuring the legislation and relevant regulations protect agency workers in the sector whilst also creating a level playing field for businesses operating in the recruitment sector. Around three in ten (28%) were aware of EAS and at least some details of what they do, and a third (34%), while aware of EAS, were not sure of the details of their activities.

Three in ten (31%) agency workers had never heard of EAS, and a further 6% were unsure, as shown in Figure 23 below.

Figure 21. Awareness of the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (EAS)

- Aware of EAS and at least some detail of what they do
- Aware of EAS but not sure on the details of what they do
- Not aware
- Don't know



Base: All agency workers (547)

**Note the figures calculate to less than 100% due to rounding*

Awareness was lower among:

- Older workers aged 55+ (37%; in comparison 80% of under 25s and 77% of 25-34s had heard of EAS)
- Those with an informal contract (47% vs. 64% among those with a formal contract)
- Those for whom agency work was not their main source of employment (37%)
- Those with an ongoing relationship with a single agency (48% vs. 77% who had relationships with multiple agencies).

Contacting EAS

Most agency workers that had heard of EAS did not know how to get into contact with the organisation (68%), with a further 12% unsure. A fifth (20%) of those that had heard of EAS did feel they knew how to get in contact with EAS, with the most common method online (8% of those that had heard of EAS), followed by through the website (4%), email (3%) and phone (2%).

For some of the findings in this chapter results among the agency-recruited agency workers differed from those discussed to date among the panel-recruited respondents. In particular, the agency-recruited respondents were:

- Less likely to report feeling aware of their rights as agency workers (74% vs. 89% among panel-recruited respondents); 30% felt 'fully aware', lower than the proportion found among panel-recruited respondents (46%).
- They were less aware of the four specific rights discussed in the chapter, in each case by at least 20 percentage points. For example, 48% were aware to some extent of the right to be paid the same as an equivalent direct employee after 12 weeks on assignment, compared to 82% among respondents recruited from the panel.
- They were far less likely to have heard of the EAS (22% vs. 62% among panel-recruited respondents).

7. Problems at work and their resolution

This chapter explores any problems with fair treatment at work that agency workers may have had with an employment agency, an umbrella company or a hirer and how they were resolved. The problems were described to respondents as including such issues as problems with employment rights, bullying or harassment.

Chapter summary

In the two years prior to the survey, three in ten agency workers (30%) experienced problems relating to fair treatment with an employment agency (22%), an umbrella company (18%) and/or a hirer (19%). The majority of those with a problem reported having just one problem during that period.

Problems had arisen for a wide range of reasons without any single-issue predominating. Pay (24%) and working hours or patterns (21%) were the most commonly mentioned, but issues around training, the job role or workload, bullying / harassment, performance, promotion, redundancy, and leave were also relatively common (each mentioned by 15%-19%). In order to address these issues, agency workers were most likely to have contacted their employment agency for help (38%), with around a fifth contacting each of the following: local government, their hirer, a trade union, and the EAS. The decision of who to approach was based on a wide variety of reasons including previous, personal experience of resolving a dispute through the organisation (25%), the organisation being the only or best one the worker knew of to approach (24%), the advice of friends and family (22%) or colleagues (22%), and the advice of agencies (20%) or hirers (19%). The majority of agency workers (64%) were confident that the organisation they contacted would be able to resolve it, but over a third (35%) had not been confident.

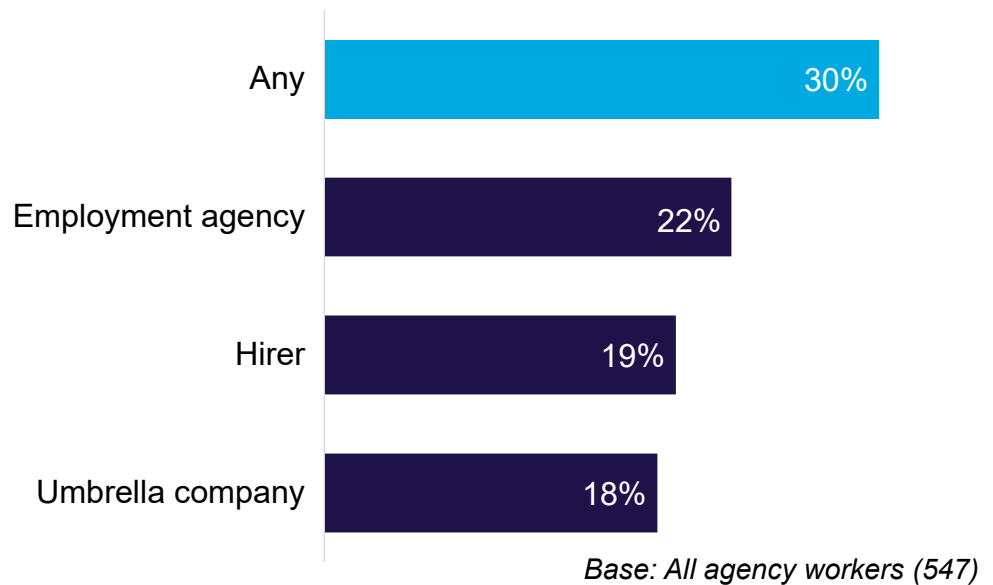
In most cases the length of time between a problem over fair treatment first occurring and being resolved was relatively short; either a week or less (33%) or over a week but less than a month (20%). Most agency workers (72%) were satisfied with the outcome of the dispute. The most common outcome was to remain with the same hirer but change assignments (51% who experienced a resolution). However, some agency workers in this situation had to leave their hirer (34%), the agency involved (21%) or agency work altogether (13%).

Experience of disputes in agency work

Experience of dispute relating to fair treatment

Three in ten agency workers (30%) had experienced a problem relating to fair treatment either with an employment agency (22%), an umbrella company (18%) or a hirer (19%) in the two years prior to the survey. One in five agency workers (19%) had a problem with more than one organisation type in that time period.

Figure 22. Experiences of problems with fair treatment in the 2 years prior to the survey, by organisation type



There were notable variations in the types of agency workers who had experienced problems related to fair treatment, regardless of whether those disputes were with an employment agency, umbrella company or a hirer. While noting the overlap between some of these sub-groups, the following groups were more likely to have encountered problems:

- **Those holding a formal contract** (32% compared with 15% of those with employed on an informal contract)²⁹
- **Those who regarded agency work as their main source of employment** (34% compared with 7% of those for whom agency work was not their main source of employment)³⁰
- **Those who considered agency work to be a long-term career** (38% compared with 17% among those who did not see themselves as agency workers in the long-term).
- **Those who were contracted to multiple agencies** (53% of agency workers who were contracted to three to four agencies had experienced a problem, compared with 16% of those who only worked with one agency).
- **Younger agency workers** (47% of those under 25 and 39% of 25-34 year olds, compared with a quarter of those aged 35-44 (25%) and 45-54 (23%))³¹

Agency workers that were aware of their employment rights (36%) and those who were aware of EAS (40%) were also more likely to have experienced problems related to fair treatment in the two years prior to the survey. It is not possible to know if it was the heightened awareness of their rights which led these workers being more likely to know they had experienced problems with fair treatment, or the experience of unfair treatment which then led them to become more aware of their rights.

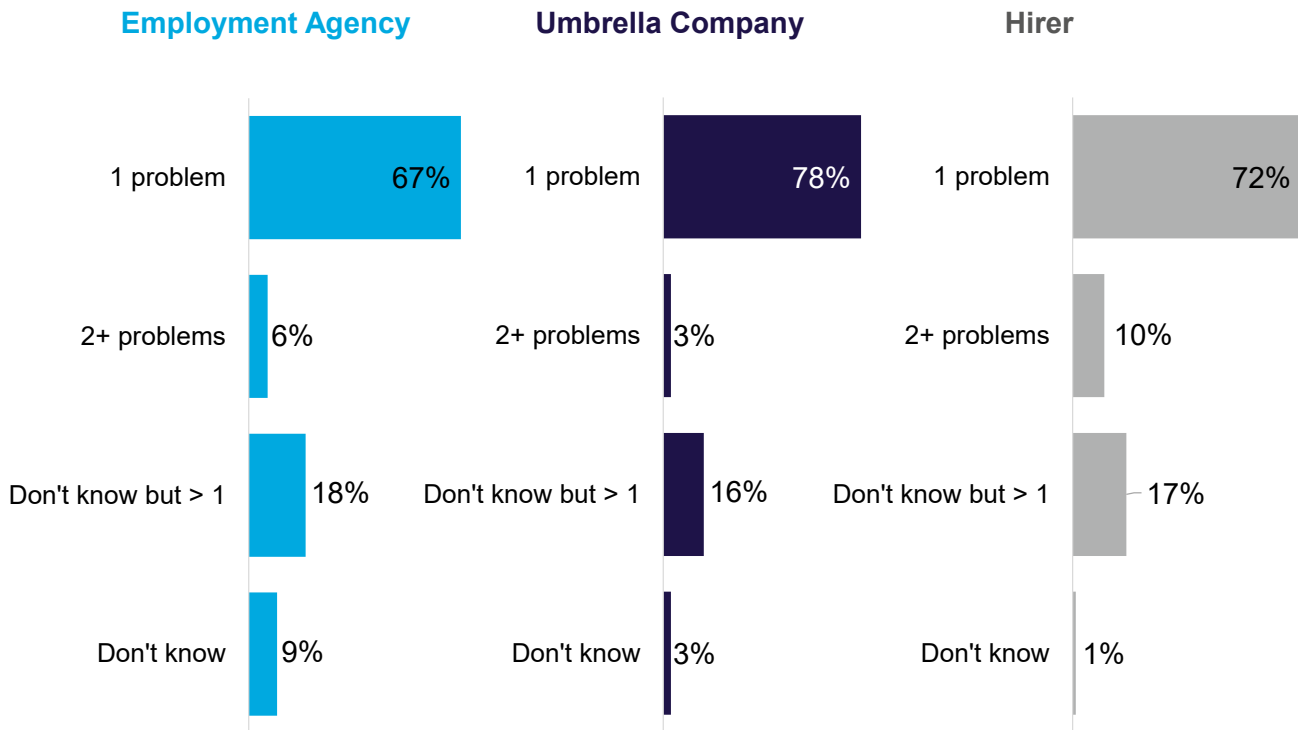
²⁹ Note small base size of agency workers with an informal contract (n=54).

³⁰ Note small base size of agency workers who do not see this way of working as their main source of employment (n=61).

³¹ Note small base size of agency workers under 25 years (n=60).

As shown in Figure 25, most agency workers that had experienced a problem with fair treatment in the two years prior to the survey with an employment agency, an umbrella company or a hirer had experienced just one problem with each organisation type (67%, 78% and 72% respectively).

Figure 23. Number of problems with fair treatment experienced, by organisation type



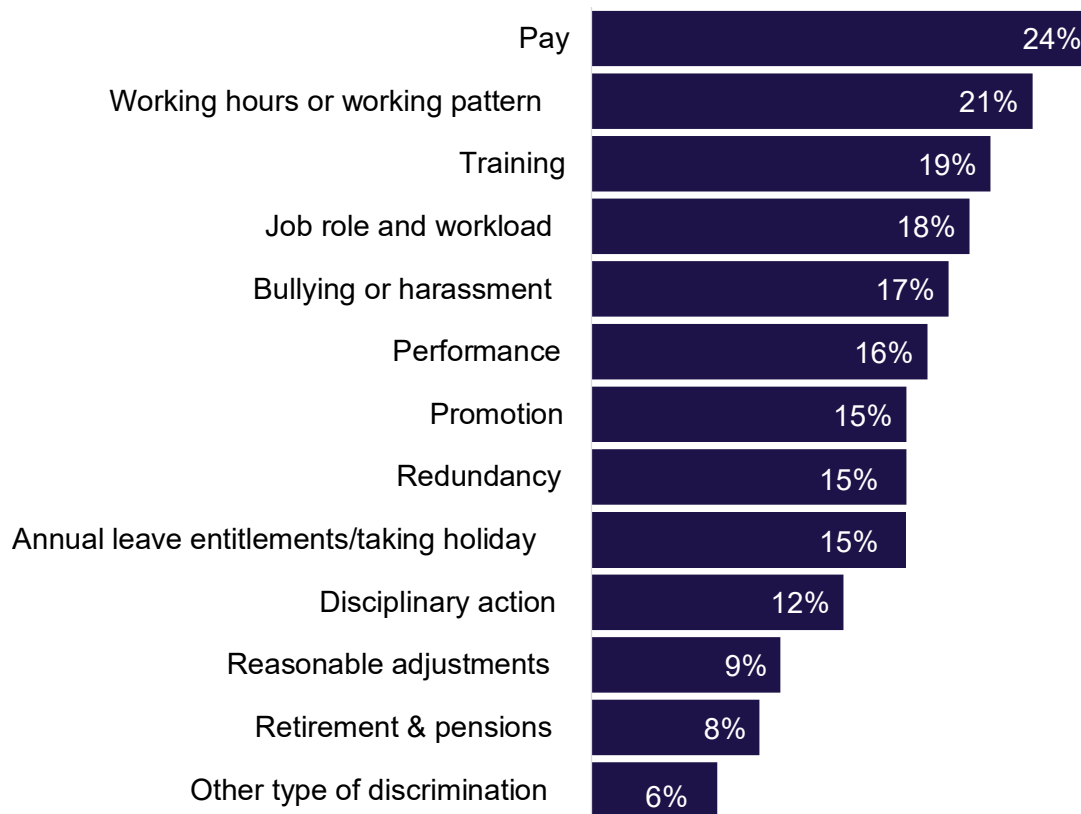
*Base: All agency workers who had experienced a dispute in the last two years with ...
Employment Agency (117); Umbrella Company (98), Hirer (108)*

Nature of problems related to fair treatment at work

Agency workers that had experienced problems related to fair treatment at work in the previous two years were asked what the nature of the problem had been – if they had experienced more than one problem, respondents were asked to answer about the one they considered the most serious.

As shown in Figure 26 a variety of problems had been encountered, without any one problem predominating, with a sixth to a quarter mentioning each of: pay (24%), working hours or working patterns (21%), issues around training (19%), the job role or workload (18%), bullying/harassment (17%), and performance (16%). Issues to do with promotion, redundancy and leave were also relatively common (each mentioned by 15% of those experiencing problems in the two years prior to the survey).

Figure 24. The nature of the most serious problem with fair treatment at work experienced by agency workers in the two years prior to the survey



Base: All agency workers who had a problem relating to fair treatment in the last two years (168). Don't know 2%, Prefer not to say 1%, Can't remember 1%, Other types of leave 3%, Other 1%.

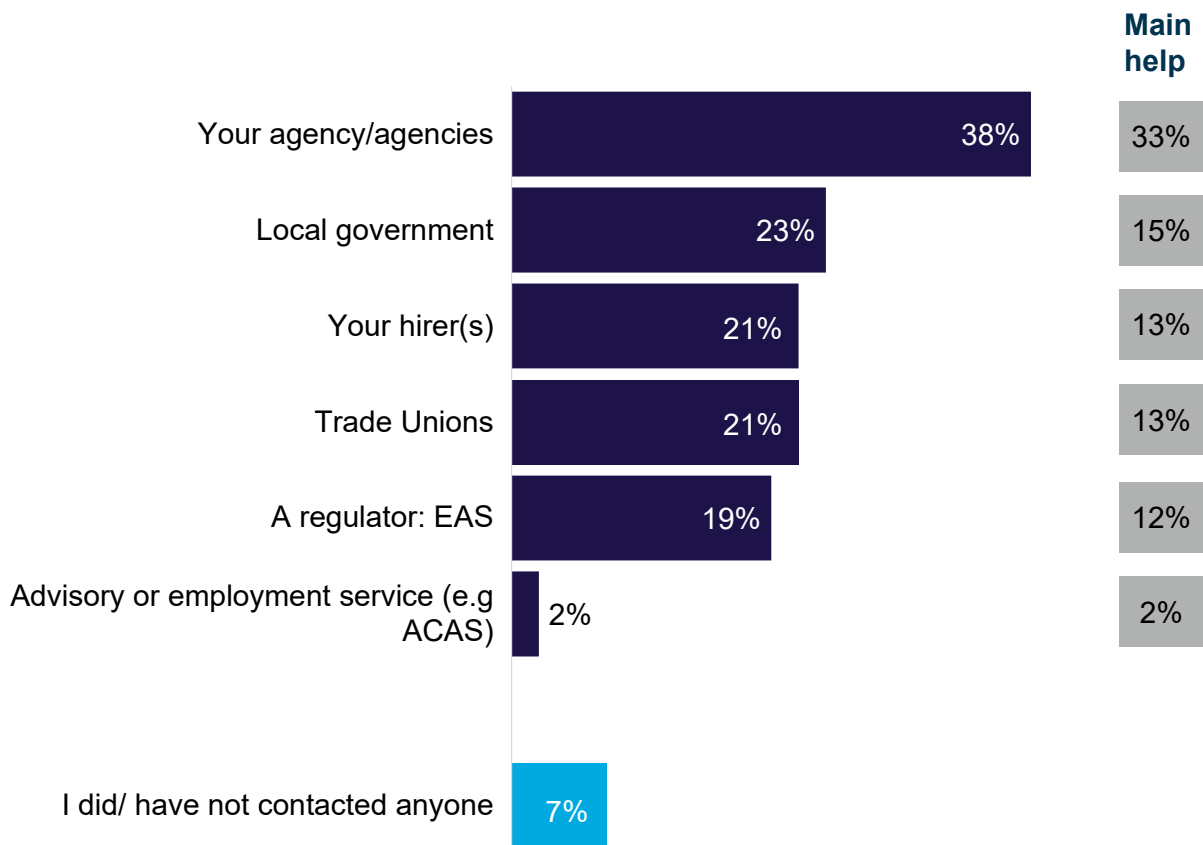
Resolving problems at work

Agency workers who had experienced a problem related to fair treatment in the two years prior to the survey were asked which organisations, if any, they had contacted to try to resolve the problem. Again, if they had experienced more than one problem respondents were asked to answer in relation to the one they considered the most serious.

Agency workers had most commonly contacted their employment agency for help in trying to resolve the problem, mentioned by almost two-fifths (38%). Moreover, agencies were also identified as being the main help in resolving a dispute, as shown in the chart below.

Other organisations contacted to resolve problems included local government (23%), their hirer (21%), trade unions (21%) and a regulator (19%). However, 7% of agency workers did not contact anyone.

Figure 25. Organisations contacted to resolve fair treatment issues

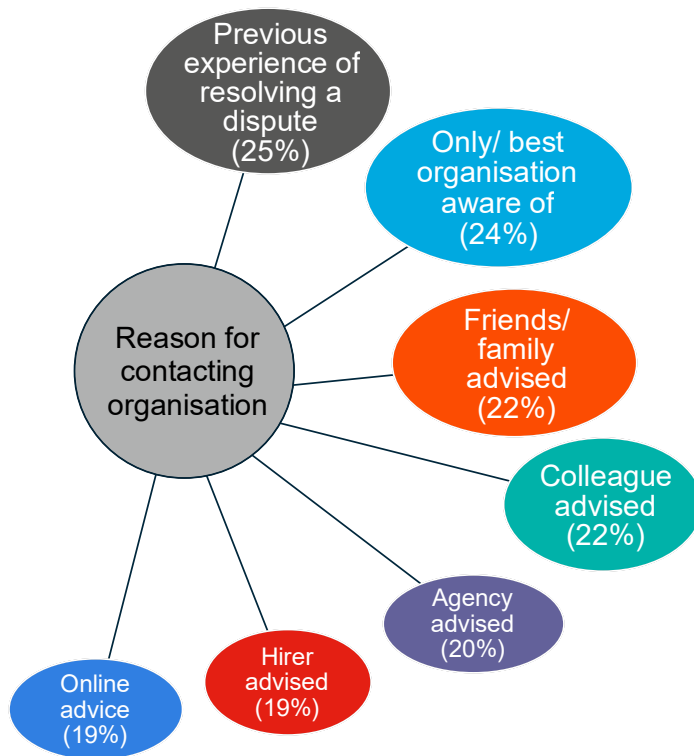


Base: All agency workers who had a problem relating to fair treatment at work in the last two years (168). Don't know 5%, Other (3%).

The organisations most commonly described as being the main help in resolving the problem generally reflected the pattern of usage, in part because most workers had only contacted one organisation. Generally, around three in five of those contacting any of the organisations described that organisation as the most helpful, although this was higher for those that had contacted their agency (among whom roughly nine in ten indicated that they had been the most useful).

Respondents that had contacted any organisations to try to resolve their problems at work were asked why they chose that organisation / those organisations. As shown in Figure 28, a wide variety of reasons were given without any particular responses predominating. These included previous, personal experience of resolving a dispute through the organisation (25%), the organisation being the only or best one the worker knew of to approach (24%), the advice of friends and family (22%) or colleagues (22%), and the advice of agencies (20%) or hirers (19%).

Figure 26. Reasons for contacting particular organisation

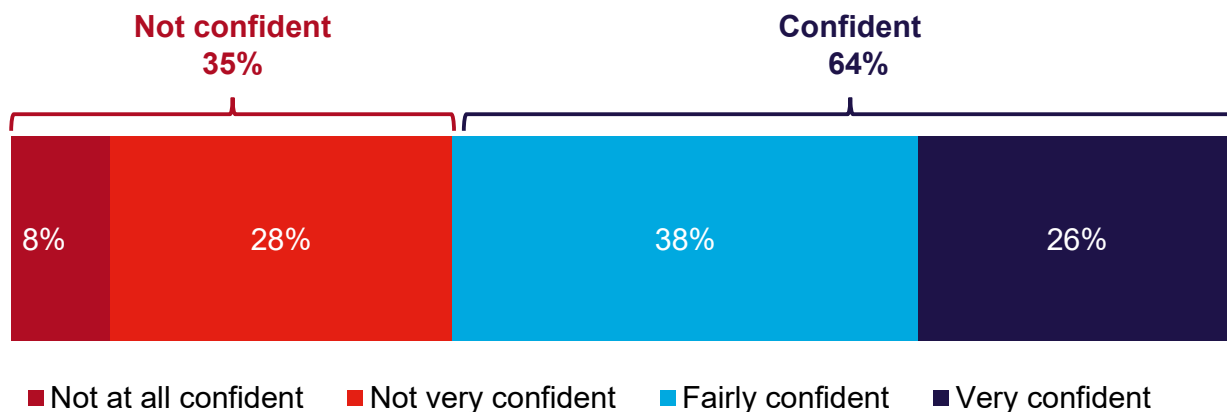


*Base: All agency workers who had a problem relating to fair treatment at work in the last two years and contacted an organisation (149).
Other 1%

Confidence in solving disputes

The majority of agency workers who had experienced a dispute in the two years prior to the survey were confident that the organisation they contacted would be able to resolve it (64% were confident, of which 26% were very confident). Just over a third (35%) expressed little (28%) or no confidence (8%) that the organisation they approached would be able to help.

Figure 27. Level of confidence in organisation to resolve problem



*Base: All agency workers who had experienced a dispute in the last two years AND contacted an organisation (149). *Figures do not calculate to 100% due to the don't know responses (1%) and rounding*

Outcome of the fair treatment at work problem

Most agency workers that had experienced a problem at work related to fair treatment in the two years prior to the survey indicated that the problem (the most serious problem if there had been more than one) was now over (27%) or most likely over (32%). The remainder either indicated that it was too early to say (22%), still ongoing (17%) or were unsure or preferred not to say (2%).

The rest of the chapter explores the experiences of those where the problem was resolved (over or most likely over). This is a base of 99 respondents.

Length taken to resolve the issue and the outcome once resolved

In most cases the length of time between a problem over fair treatment first occurring and being resolved was relatively short; either a week or less (33%) or over a week but less than a month (20%). A fifth (21%) said it took more than a month, though around a quarter were unsure or could not remember (18%) or preferred not to say (8%). Those who earlier in the interview had described themselves as fully aware of their rights as an agency worker were significantly more likely to say their problem was resolved within a week (45%) than those partially or not aware of their rights (13%).

The most common outcome of a resolved problem relating to fair treatment at work was to remain with the same hirer but change assignments (51%). However, it was not uncommon for agency workers to leave their hirer but remain with the agency (34%), to leave the agency (21%) or, less often to leave agency work altogether (13%). Around one in ten of those where the problem was resolved carried on exactly as before (9%).

Satisfaction with outcome

Most agency workers (72%) were satisfied with the outcome of the resolution; 36% indicated that they were very satisfied. When asked why, the reasons largely focused on the outcome being positive for them personally, because it was resolved without further issues arising, and the speed of the process.

One in six (16%) were dissatisfied with how the problem was resolved. Issues such as the problem not being completely resolved, the length of time it had taken to resolve the dispute, and having to leave the job were highlighted.

For some of the findings in this chapter, results among the agency-recruited agency workers differed from those discussed to date among the panel-recruited respondents. In particular, the agency-recruited respondents were:

- Less likely to report having had any problems with fair treatment at work in the two years prior to the survey (22% vs. 30% among panel-recruited respondents).
- Where problems had arisen, they were more likely to be about pay (43% vs. 24% among panel-recruited respondents).
- Where the issue(s) had been resolved they were far less likely to say the outcome was staying with the same hirer but changing assignments (8% vs. 51% among panel-recruited respondents) and far more likely to say nothing changed, they continued as before (24% vs. 9%).

8. Changing to a permanent contract

As an agency worker, even those who have been on long-term placement with a company, there is no obligation on that company to offer a permanent job. However, one of the survey objectives was to assess the proportion of agency workers who want to move to a permanent contract and their reasons for doing so.

Chapter summary

Over half (55%) of agency workers had made a request to move to a permanent contract with a hirer in the 18 months preceding the research study. The main reason for seeking this change was to obtain greater job security, more regular or consistent working patterns, and wanting to continue to do a job they were enjoying (each mentioned by 30% of those that had made a request). Other common reasons were wanting better pay (27%), more agreeable working hours (24%), and the good relationship they had with the hirer (23%).

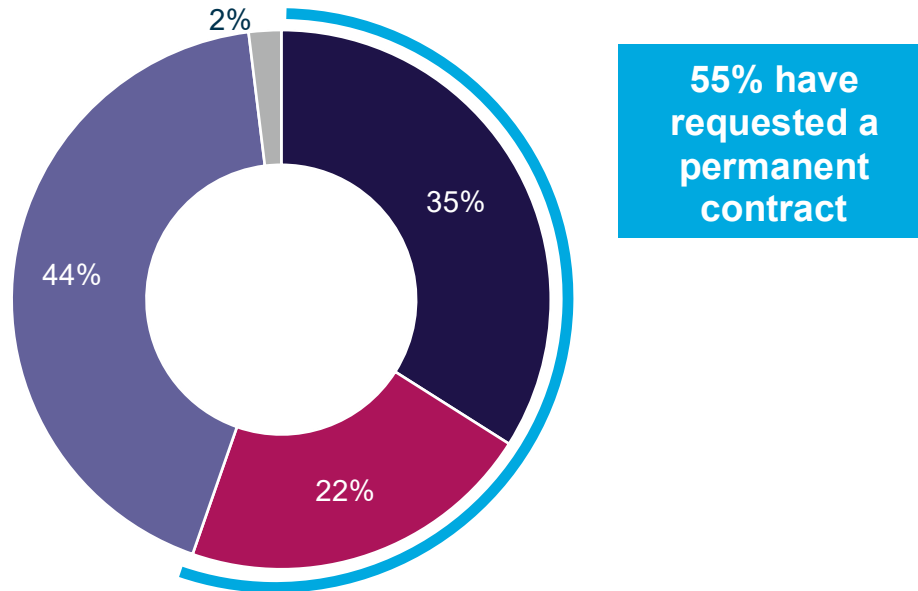
The majority (62%) of agency workers were able to move to a permanent contract, either on a permanent (32%) or fixed term contract (30%). Three in ten (30%) said their request was declined but they were offered more work and 7% said the request was turned down.

Requests for a permanent contract

Over the course of the 18 months prior to the research over half (55%) of agency workers had requested a permanent contract with a hirer. It was more common for the worker to have made the request themselves (35%) than to have asked someone to make the request on their behalf (22%).

Figure 28. Requesting a permanent contract in the 18 months prior to the survey

- Yes – I have personally requested a permanent contract
- Yes – I have asked someone to request a permanent contract on my behalf
- No
- Don't know



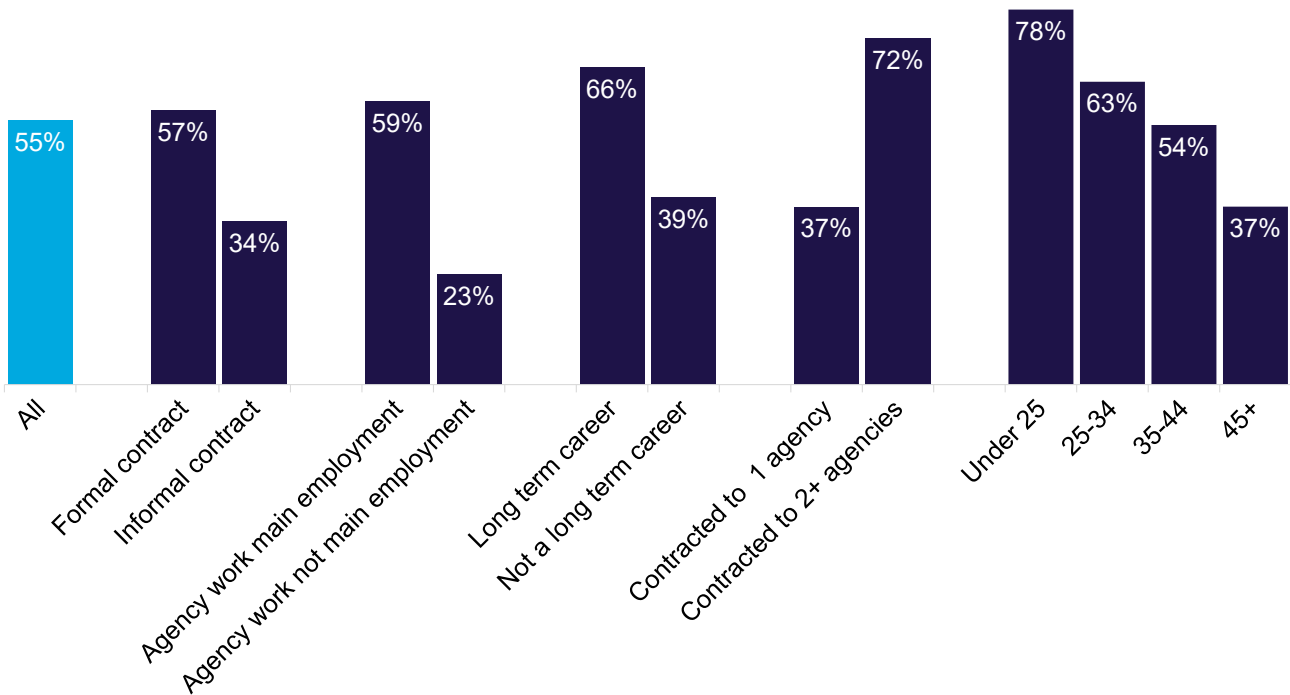
Base: All agency workers (547)

**Multi-code question means 'Yes' answers do not sum to 55%*

**Figures do not calculate to 100% due to rounding*

While overall just over half (55%) of agency workers had requested a move away from temporary agency work in the 18 months prior to the survey, there was wide variations between different groups, as shown in the chart below. It was particularly high for those with an ongoing relationship with two or more agencies (72%).

Figure 29. Requesting a permanent contract in the 18 months prior to the survey, by subgroup



Base: All agency workers (547). Formal contract (503), Informal (54), Main employment (486) Not main employment (61) Long term career (345), Not long term career (191), 1 agency (262), 2+ (273), Under 25 (60), 25-34 (141), 35-44 (175), 45+ (170).

There were also variations by age, with the majority of younger workers under the age of 25 (78%) and those aged 25-34 years (63%) having requested a permanent contract with a hirer in the 18 months prior to the survey, compared with just a quarter of those aged 55-64 years.³²

Reasons for requesting a permanent contract

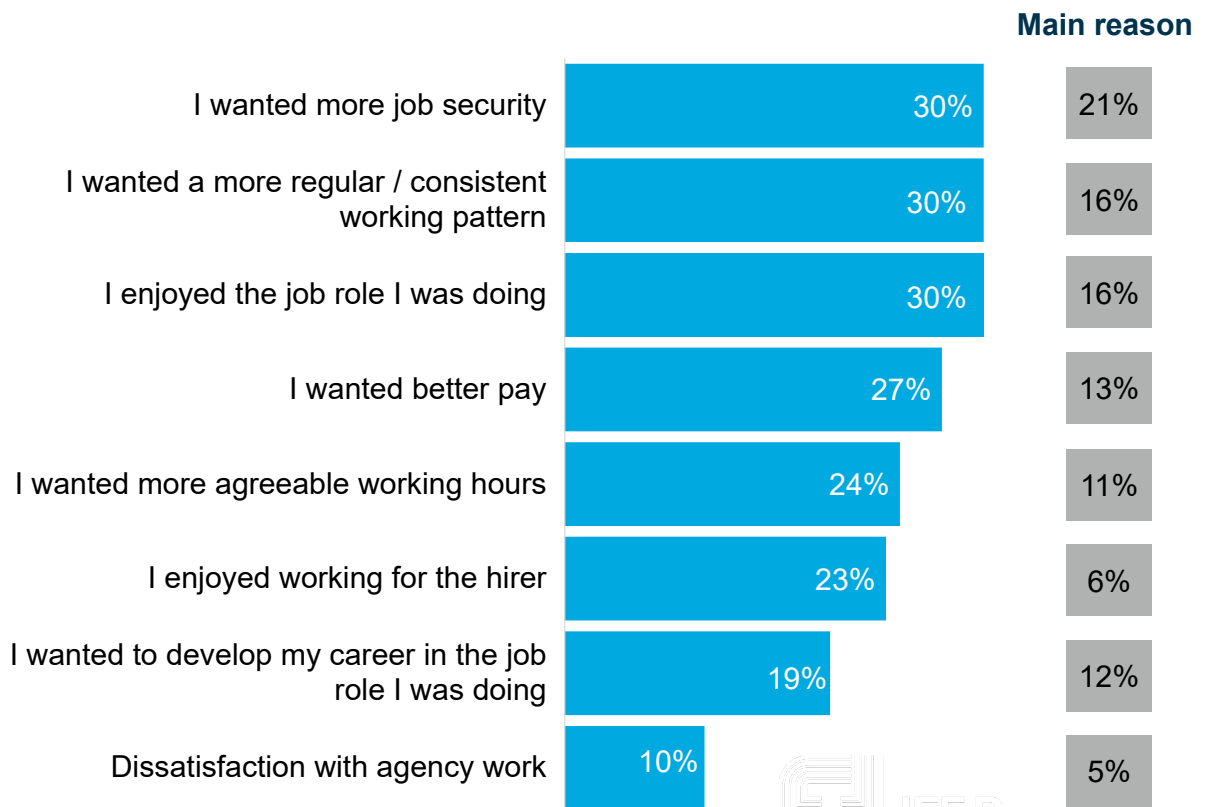
Agency workers who sought a permanent contract with a hirer were asked the reasons for making the request. Overall, the need for greater job security, a more consistent work pattern and the desire to remain in a job that they enjoyed were all key factors (each mentioned by 30% of agency workers). Other common reasons were wanting better pay (27%), more agreeable working hours (24%), and the good relationship they had with the hirer (23%). Only one in ten (10%) cited dissatisfaction with agency work as the reason for moving towards a permanent contract.

As shown in the following chart, when asked to select their main reason for considering a permanent contract, increased job security was the single most likely reason (mentioned by 21%).

The reasons given for requesting a permanent contract are largely consistent across sub-groups.

³² Note small base size of agency workers under the age of 25 (n=60) and aged between 55-64 years of age (n=61).

Figure 30. Reasons for requesting a permanent contract



Base: All agency workers who sought a more permanent contract with the hirer (310)

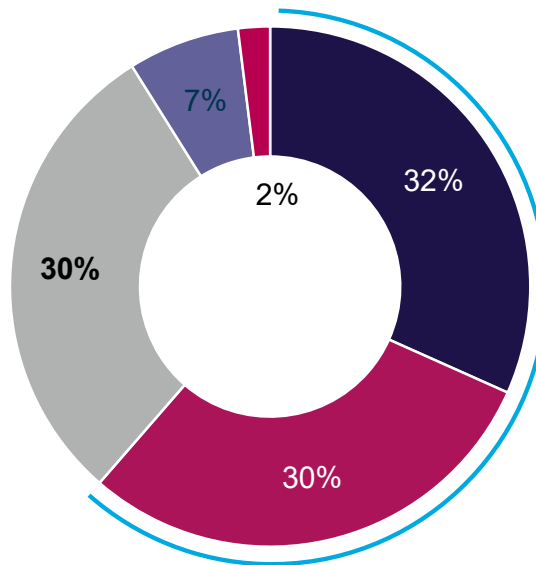
Outcome of request for a permanent position with the hirer

The majority (62%) of requests for a permanent contract made in the 18 months prior to the survey were accepted, either on a permanent (32%) or on a fixed term contract (30%).

Three in ten (30%) agency workers who sought a permanent contract did not have their request accepted but were offered more work. Just 7% had their request declined.

Figure 31. The outcome of the request for a permanent position

- Accepted - given permanent contract
- Accepted - given fixed term contract
- They offered me more work, but no permanent contract
- Declined
- Don't know



**62% accepted
(permanent or
fixed)**

Base: All agency workers who sought a more permanent contract with the hirer (310)

9. Satisfaction and wellbeing

A key aim of the study was to explore agency workers' satisfaction with agency work. In this chapter we examine general and specific satisfaction of employment in agency work. We reflect on the reasons given for satisfaction, as well as dissatisfaction, and pull out subgroups which are significantly more likely to report satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Chapter summary

Three-quarters of agency workers (74%) were satisfied with working through agencies over the 18 months prior to the survey, and around one in ten were (9%) were dissatisfied. Overall, three in ten (29%) were very satisfied, though this was higher among under 25s (40%). Reasons for dissatisfaction centred around poor communication or support, not enough work being available, not liking to work on a zero hours contract, and poor rates of pay.

Agency workers were most satisfied by the flexibility, the hours you work, and the work itself; for each two thirds (67%) were satisfied compared against one in ten (10%) dissatisfied. At the other end of the spectrum, less than half (45%) of agency workers were satisfied with their job security in agency work over the 18 months prior to the survey (21% were dissatisfied). Dissatisfaction was also relatively high for: their benefits package (19% dissatisfied), pay received (17%) and the opportunities to develop their skills (14%).

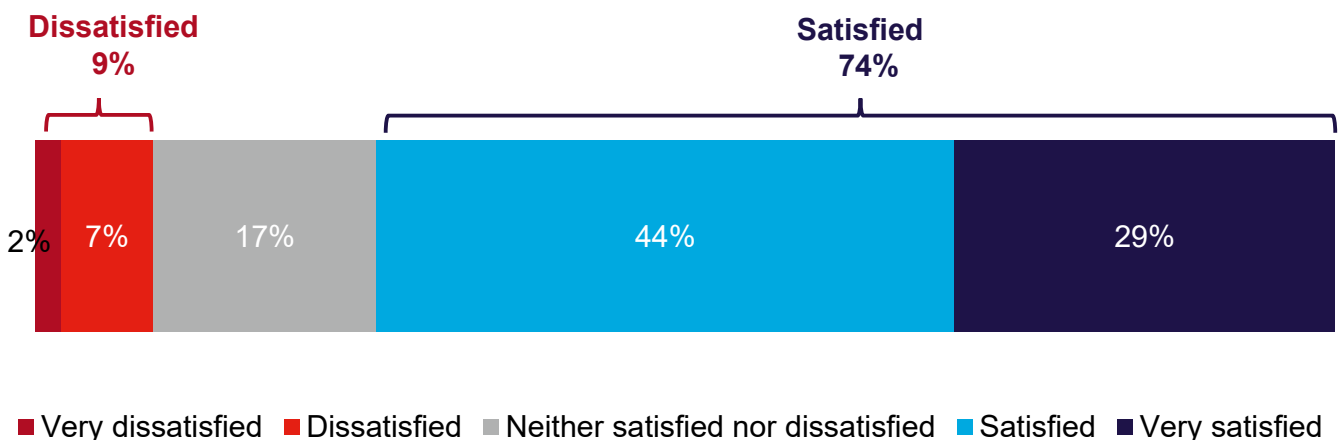
Over three-fifths of agency workers (62%) viewed agency work as their long-term career: just over a third (35%) did not and 3% were unsure.

Overall satisfaction with agency work

Overall satisfaction with agencies

Satisfaction with agency work was reasonably high: almost three-quarters (74%) were satisfied working through agencies over the 18 months prior to the survey. In comparison around one in ten (9%) were dissatisfied, and around a sixth (17%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 32. Agency worker satisfaction level



Base: All agency workers (547). *Don't know 1%

Satisfaction was higher amongst agency workers who viewed it as a long-term career plan (78%, compared with 67% of those who did not) and among agency workers who felt fully aware of their employment rights (83% satisfied compared to 34% of workers who were not aware of their rights). There were some differences by sector, with satisfaction higher among those working in Business and Professional Services (85%) and Public Administration, Health and Education (84%).³³

The proportion very satisfied was higher than the 29% average among those aged under 25 (40%) and, perhaps surprisingly, those that had had a problem at work in the two years prior to the survey relating to fair treatment at work (39%).

Dissatisfaction was higher than the 9% average among:

- Those who do not see agency work as their main source of employment (17%)
- Those nearing the end of their careers (16% of those aged 55-64)
- Those with a working relationship with a single agency (12%).

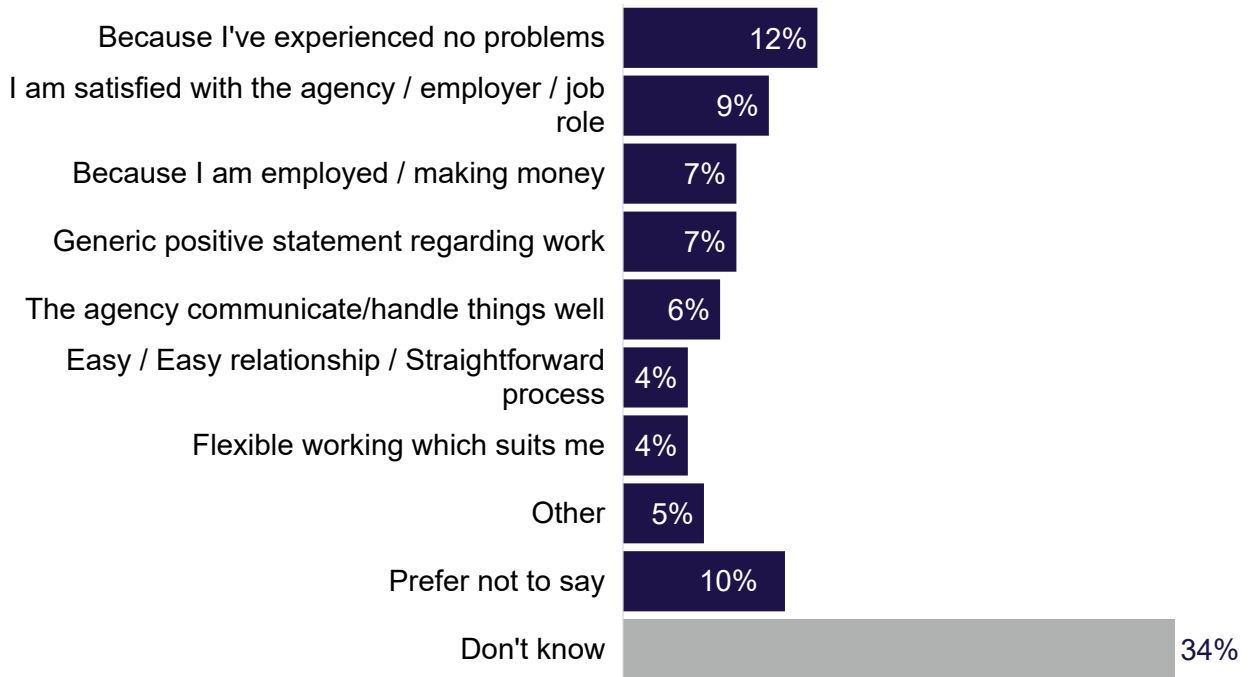
Reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction

Satisfaction

Agency workers who reported being satisfied with working through agencies were asked why this was. Spontaneous responses, as shown in Figure 35 below, included experiencing no problems (12%), general satisfaction with agency/employer/role (9%) and simply being employed/getting paid (7%). Around a third of agency workers (34%) were unable to give a specific reason, and 10% selected prefer not to say.

³³ Note relatively low base sizes for Business and Professional Services (n=61) and Public Administration, Health and Education (n=75).

Figure 33. Reasons for satisfaction with agency work



Base: All agency workers who were satisfied with agency work (413) Codes above 3% reported.

The spontaneous responses were mostly short and often pointed to an absence of problems, with quotes such as:

"I've had no issues and have been paid on time."

"I have had good working experience with my agency and with the company I worked for."

"I haven't had any issues and any queries I have had, has been answered professionally and promptly."

"I have been very impressed by the agency who have been very helpful in all situations during my 6 months with them. Holiday requests, shift changes and swaps have all been dealt with quickly and professionally."

Dissatisfaction

A relatively small number of respondents (48) were dissatisfied with agency work. The low base means the following results should best be treated as indicative. The main spontaneous reasons for dissatisfaction were:

- Lack of communication / information / support (8 respondents)
- Poor rates of pay (5 respondents)
- Not liking zero hours contracts (6 respondents)
- Lack of work available (6 respondents)

The following are examples of responses from agency workers who were dissatisfied with agency work:

“The agency cancels shifts at the last minute and only gives the workers 3 or 4 days a week as they have taken on too many staff.”

“I always felt they take money for nothing. I had to ask for annual leave both from the hirer and the agency. I hate agencies now. It would be better if they didn't exist. How is this possible that I had to work for 5 years through the agency on a zero hours contract? This should be illegal!”

“Contact with the agency is difficult as they are extremely slow to respond. In addition getting information about furlough and payments was extremely poor. It took a few months to even get confirmation that we would receive furlough payments, even though we had not been offered any work since the middle of March.”

“They charge an enormous day rate to the hirer, never contact me except to tell me my contract has been extended and never get back to me when I ask a question until I escalate to a manager.”

For some of the findings in this chapter results among the agency-recruited agency workers differed from those discussed to date among the panel-recruited respondents. In particular, the agency-recruited respondents were less satisfied with agency work: 61% were satisfied (compared with 74% among the panel-recruited respondents) and 18% were dissatisfied (compared with 9% among the panel-recruited respondents).

The main reasons for their being satisfied with agency work were similar to the panel-recruited respondents, with spontaneous responses often focusing on a lack of problems, or there being fewer issues than they had experienced with previous agencies. For example, 16% reported ‘not experiencing a problem’ as their reason for satisfaction.

“They served their purpose, recruited me for a position, provided details necessary to arrive at and complete my job. Pay regularly, consistently and accurately and have been helpful with any concerns I may have had.”

“Some agencies have not been very supportive when I have worked with certain hirers. However, my current agency and hirer are excellent, and I am very happy with them both at present.”

“The old agency was terrible, but [new agency] could not do enough. Restored my faith in agency work.”

Others were more specific, and mentioned for example training and support during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“Never had any issues with any of the people running the agency and it's been [agency name] agents who have helped in aspects of training.”

“With the current situation with COVID-19 and having to self-isolate and a health issue, they have been without question extremely supportive, understanding and have gone the extra mile to ensure my wellbeing.”

Among the 18% of agency-recruited respondents who were dissatisfied, reasons for dissatisfaction centred on perceived unfair treatment compared to permanent employees (45%), followed by a lack of communication from the agency (38%) and not liking zero hours contracts (19%). Examples of reasons for dissatisfaction were as follows:

“You're pretty disposable to them and the company you're hired to work for. Transparency and fair treatment are not values that come across from both the agency and hirer.”

“No furlough available to agency workers means going back on Universal Credit and waiting 5 weeks for not enough money to live on. Constantly being put on emergency tax when changing agency work.”

“I am not treated fair and don't get the same level of respect as the full-time employees”

“You fear for your job, shifts can be cancelled at whim, you turn up for work at 6 a.m. to be told you're not needed. Totally unreasonable. Pay never matches hours worked. They are always trimming 15 minutes here and there - over the week you can lose a couple of hours of pay. I've taken to taking pictures of the clock ins and outs to prove my times worked.”

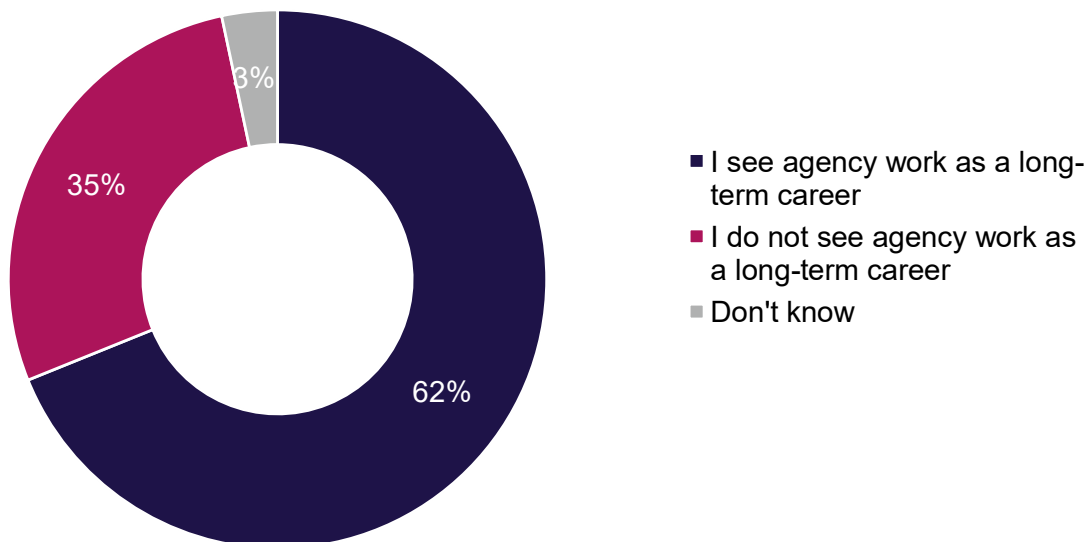
“They can get away with anything, they can sack you at any time so you're on the edge all the time.”

Agency work as a long-term career

Agency workers were asked whether they saw agency work as their long-term career. Around six in ten (62%) agency workers reported this was the case. The remaining third (35%) did not see agency work as their long-term career (3% were unsure).

Figure 34. Agency work as a long term career

Agency work as a long term plan



Base: All agency workers (547)

The following groups were more likely to see agency work as their long-term career:

- Those for whom agency work was their main source of employment (66%).
- Agency workers who were on two or more assignments in February 2020 (70%; this is twice the level found among agency workers that were not contracted to an agency in February 2020 (35%)). This suggests that many agency workers who had taken up this form of employment since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic view agency work as a stop gap rather than as a long-term career plan.

- Those who were satisfied with agency work (65% vs. 38% among those dissatisfied).
- Those who felt they were fully aware of their employment rights (71% compared to 43% among those who were not aware of their rights).

Agency workers in the Primary and Manufacturing sector were less likely to report agency work was their long-term career plan: 55% did not see agency work as a long-term career compared to the average of 35%. This was the only sector with a statistically significant response to this question.

Satisfaction with specific aspects of agency work

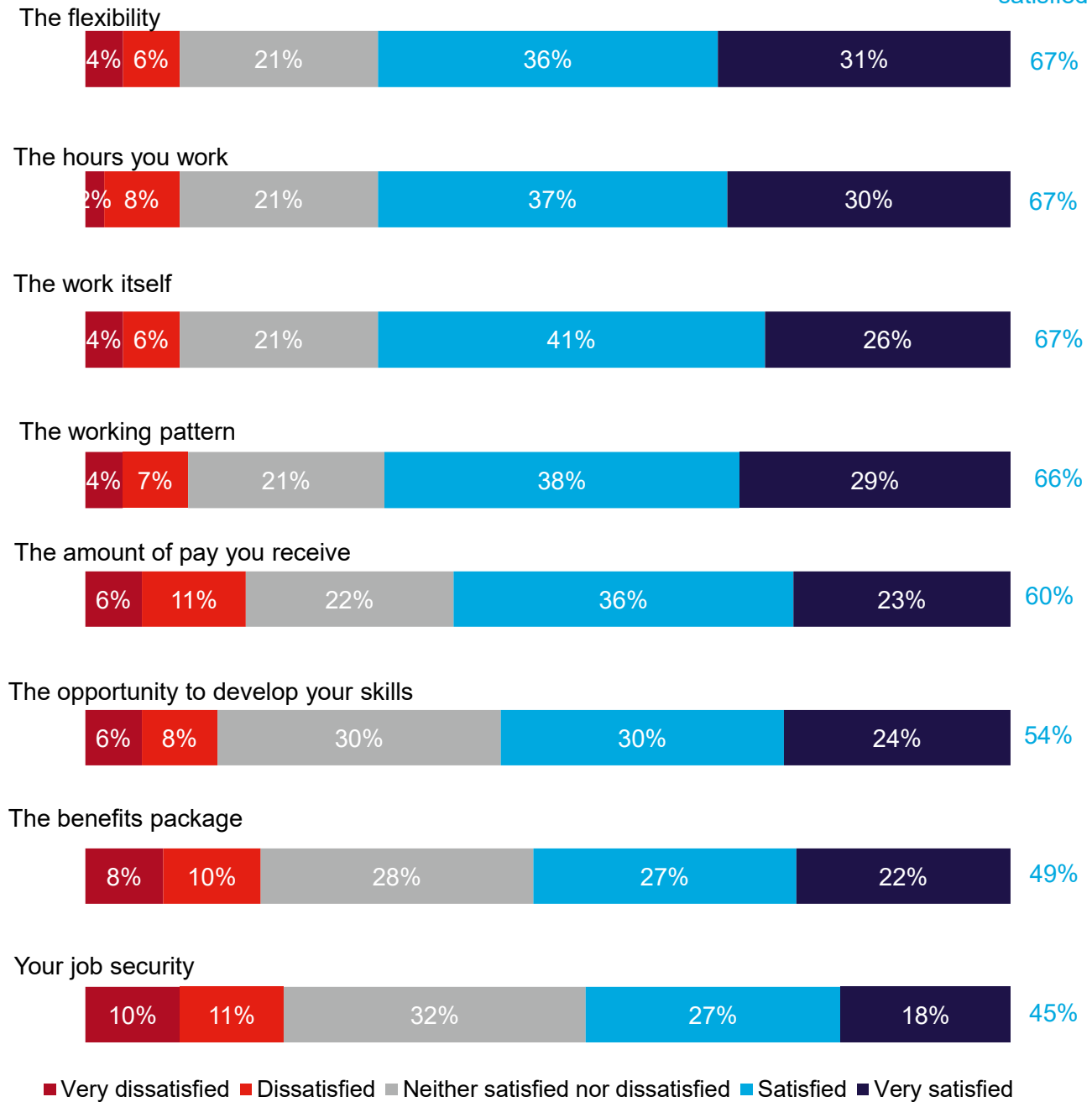
Satisfaction with specific aspects

Agency workers were asked how satisfied they were in the 18 months prior to the survey with eight specific aspects of agency work, as shown in Figure 37.

Agency workers were most satisfied by the flexibility, the hours, and the work itself; for each two thirds (67%) were satisfied compared against one in ten (10%) dissatisfied. At the other end of the spectrum, less than half (45%) of agency workers were satisfied with their job security in agency work over the 18 months prior to the survey (21% were dissatisfied). Dissatisfaction was also relatively high for: their benefits package (19% dissatisfied), pay received (17%) and the opportunities to develop their skills (14%).

Figure 35. Level of satisfaction with aspects of agency work

Total satisfied



Base: All agency workers (547). Don't know max 4% / PNTS max 1%
 *Figures do not always calculate to 100% due to rounding

The following subgroups of agency workers were more likely than average to report being satisfied with each of the eight aspects:

- Agency workers who were fully aware of their rights (for example, on pay 72% were satisfied compared with 60% overall)
- Agency workers in Scotland (with the exception of job security and benefits package); (for example, on pay 75% were satisfied compared with 60% overall).

Some of the main differences in satisfaction by subgroup were as follows:

Flexibility

- Agency workers in London and Scotland were more satisfied with the flexibility of their job as an agency worker compared to the average of all regions (78% and 93% respectively vs. 67% average).

The hours worked

- Those aged under 25 were less satisfied than average with the hours worked (57% vs. 67%).
- Those with contracts/ongoing relationships with multiple agencies were more dissatisfied with the hours they worked (14%) than those with a relationship with a single agency (6%).

The work itself

- Workers in professional occupations and in caring, leisure and other service occupations were more satisfied by the work itself than average (79% and 87% respectively, compared to the 67% average), as were those working in the business and professional services sector (85%).
- Despite being more satisfied than average with job security, agency workers with 5 or more ongoing contracts with agencies were less likely to report being satisfied by the work itself compared to average (54%; 23% were dissatisfied).
- Workers in associate professional and technical occupations were two times more likely than average to be dissatisfied with their working pattern as an agency worker (24% vs. 11%). Workers in the Business and professional service sector were more likely than average to report being satisfied with their working pattern (81%).
- The number of contracts/ ongoing relationships held with agencies impacted on satisfaction with their working pattern, with those with a single contract more satisfied (72%) than those with multiple contracts/relationships (61%).
- Young people (under 25) were less likely than average to report being satisfied with their working pattern (49% vs. 66%).

The amount of pay

- Those in caring roles (86%) and professional positions (70%) were more satisfied than average; those in Associate professional or technical roles were more likely than average to be dissatisfied (33%).

The opportunity to develop their skills

- As found with other aspects of agency work, viewing agency work as a long-term career plan increased the likelihood of an agency worker being satisfied with the opportunity to develop their skills (60% vs. 46% who did not see a long-term career in agency work).
- Workers in the caring, leisure and other service occupations were more satisfied than average with the opportunities to develop their skills in agency work (75% vs. 54%).

The benefits package

- Agency workers who viewed agency work as their main source of employment were more likely to be satisfied with their benefits package compared to workers who did not (51% vs. 36%); the same applied to those who viewed agency work as a long-term career (56% vs. 39% satisfied among those who did not see it as their long-term career plan).

Job security

- Those with a formal contract were more satisfied with job security (47%) than those without (33%).
- Caring, leisure and other service occupation agency workers were significantly more satisfied with their job security in agency work than the average (71% vs. 45%); satisfaction was particularly low among those in associate professional and technical occupations (27%).

- London based agency workers were more likely to be satisfied with agency work job security compared to the average (57% vs. 45%), while those in the East Midlands workers were less satisfied than average (28%).
- Those with an ongoing relationship with a single agency were less likely to be satisfied with job security than average (41% satisfied; 28% were dissatisfied, almost double the level found among those with relationships with multiple agencies (15%)).

Appendix A

The profile of survey respondents

The main report has focussed on the 547 respondents that were recruited for the study via a panel company. The demographic profile of these 547 by gender, age, ethnicity and region are shown in Tables 3 – 6, and for each we show the number of responses, the unweighted and then weighted profile. Note that where weighted data is shown, weighting of the survey data took place by gender, age and ethnicity, hence the weighted data presented on these variables simply reflects the profile of those in a ‘temporary job through employment agency’ in the Annual Population Survey for April 2019-March 2020. The profile of all UK workers is also shown for comparison; this data is also taken from the Annual Population Survey.

As shown, agency workers split evenly by gender. There is a fairly balanced age profile (weighted), with around a quarter to a fifth in each of the following age bands: under 25, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 and 55+. Just under three-quarters of agency workers were White (72%); around one in eight were Black African, Caribbean, Black British or any other Black/African/Caribbean background (12%) and one in ten were Asian/Asian British (10%).

Table 3. Gender of respondents

Gender	Number of responses	Unweighted %	Weighted % (agency worker population)	Profile of all UK workers
Male	273	50%	49%	50%
Female	269	49%	50%	50%
Other	3	1%	1%	-
Prefer not to say	2	<1%	<1%	-

Unweighted base: All agency workers (547).

Table 4. Age of respondents

Age band	Number of responses	Unweighted %	Weighted % (agency worker population)	Profile of all UK workers
Under 25 years	60	11%	19%	13%
25-34 years	141	26%	24%	24%
35-44 years	175	32%	20%	22%
45-54 years	100	18%	18%	23%
55-64 years	61	11%	16%	16%
65+	9	2%	2%	3%
Prefer not to say	1	<0.5%	<0.5%	0%

Unweighted base: All agency workers (547)

Table 5. Ethnicity of respondents

Ethnicity	Number of responses	Unweighted %	Weighted % (agency worker population)	Profile of all UK workers
White	443	81%	72%	87%
Black African, Caribbean, Black British or any other Black/African/Caribbean background	22	4%	12%	3%
Asian / Asian British	44	8%	10%	7%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	30	5%	2%	1%
Another ethnic group	2	<0.5%	1%	2%
Prefer not to say	6	1%	4%	0%

Unweighted base: All agency workers (547)

Table 6. Region

Region	Number of responses	Unweighted %	Weighted % (agency worker population)	Profile of all UK workers
East Midlands	31	6%	5%	7%
East of England	38	7%	7%	9%
London	76	14%	14%	16%
North East	19	3%	4%	4%
North West	49	9%	9%	11%
South East	51	9%	11%	13%
South West	25	5%	5%	8%
West Midlands	55	10%	10%	9%
Yorkshire and The Humber	36	7%	6%	8%
Northern Ireland	4	1%	1%	3%
Scotland	40	7%	6%	8%
Wales	14	3%	2%	4%
Unknown (information not supplied)	109	19%	21%	0%

Unweighted base: All agency workers (547)

Appendix B

Weighting

The core survey data (from the panel) were weighted to the profile of those classified in the Annual Population Survey for April 2019-March 2020 as in a 'temporary job through employment agency'. The weights were applied on the following characteristics: ethnicity, sex and age, as shown in Table 7-9 below.

Table 7 Ethnicity (Weighting)

Ethnicity	Survey responses (n)	Survey responses (%)	Weighting target (%)
White	443	81%	71%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	30	5%	2%
Asian	44	8%	10%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	22	4%	12%
Other ethnic group	2	0%	4%
No response	6	1%	1%
Total	547	100%	100%

Table 8 Gender (Weighting)

Gender	Survey responses (n)	Survey responses (%)	Weighting target (%)
Male	273	50%	49%
Female	269	49%	50%
Other / not specified	5	1%	1%

Table 9 Age (Weighting)

Age band	Survey responses (n)	Survey responses (%)	Weighting target (%)
Under 25 years	60	11%	19%

25-34 years	141	26%	24%
35-44 years	175	32%	20%
45-54 years	100	18%	18%
55-64 years	61	11%	16%
65+	9	2%	2%
Prefer not to say	1	<0.5%	0%

Appendix C

Summary of the methodology

The core survey used online self-completion data collection, completed by a screened panel sample. Additional responses were also obtained by two employment agencies distributing the online questionnaire to their agency workers.

Fieldwork

Mainstage fieldwork with online panels took place between 14th September and 28th September 2020. IFF Research began contacting temporary work agencies to share the survey in June 2020. The survey was shared with workers at the agencies via an email link on 20th October 2020. The survey remained open until 22nd December 2020.

Data reduction and analysis

The core survey data (from the online panels) were weighted to the profile of those classified on the Annual Population Survey as in a 'temporary job through employment agency'. The weights were applied on the following characteristics:

- Ethnicity;
- Sex, and;
- Age.

No weighting has been applied to the responses received directly from two agencies.

The data presented in the main report is based on the core panel respondents only, and it describes their experiences of agency work. It also looks to identify different patterns by key subgroups where relevant. The data from the agencies was presented separately to the core survey, to provide additional detail in some places.

Sampling

To be eligible for taking part in the research, the respondents needed to fit the following definition:

- Have either a written or verbal agreement in place with an employment agency that set out their obligation to support the respondent in finding work;
- Have either a formal, written contract/agreement with an agency, an informal agreement, or another type of contract/agreement with an agency (respondents were screened out if they replied 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' to the type of contract or agreement in place);
- Be on assignment at the time of the survey or in the past (described to them as temporarily working for a hirer for example a 'client' or 'employer') – respondents were screened out if they

said they a contract/agreement in place with at least one agency but have not started any work through them yet; and;

- Not be paid by the hirer (described as the client, employer or the end user i.e. the organisation or individual the respondent performs the work for).

Cognitive testing

A total of 10 cognitive interviews were conducted over Zoom. Respondents were selected to ensure a suitable range by key variables (type of agency work, age, gender, sector). The full profile of these interviews is shown in Table 3.2 below.

Cognitive interviewing is a technique adopted to comprehend the way in which respondents react to, respond to and understand a survey/questionnaire.

Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour and comprised two parts. For the first part, respondents were asked to complete the online survey as though they were completing it “for real”. Respondents did this whilst on the Zoom call with the researcher. In the second part, respondents were taken through a set of structured questions which examined the respondent’s prompted and unprompted thoughts at the overall level, before focusing on specific sections and questions.

For the most part, the survey worked well, though a small number of amendments were agreed in advance of the pilot.

Profile of cognitive testing participants

Current Work Status	Interviews (#)	Contract Type	Interviews (#)
<i>On assignment</i>	7	<i>Written</i>	6
<i>No assignment</i>	1	<i>Verbal</i>	4
<i>On furlough</i>	2	TOTAL	10
TOTAL	10		
Number of agencies contracted to	Interviews (#)	Sector typically worked in	Interviews (#)
1	6	<i>Sales</i>	2
2	0	<i>Education</i>	2
3	1	<i>Admin</i>	2
4	1	<i>Customer service</i>	2
<i>5 or more</i>	0	<i>Babysitting</i>	1
<i>Unsure of exact number</i>	3	<i>Market research</i>	1
TOTAL	10	TOTAL	10

Piloting

The core purpose of the piloting was to test the survey length. The findings from the cognitive phase fed into the design of the pilot questionnaire. The pilot took place through a soft launch with the panel providers. The pilot exercise took place on Monday 24th August 2020, with 16 respondents participating. These 16 responses were checked, to ensure the questionnaire routing was working correctly, as well as ensuring the open-text responses from the respondents did not suggest a need for any new response codes.

As with the cognitive interviews, only few changes were needed to the survey. The average length of the survey in the pilot was 13 minutes and 42 seconds which was slightly under the 15-20 minutes planned for. On this basis a few of the questions that were removed after cognitive testing were re-inserted. These sections were: Section B (requests for a permanent contract); Section C (current employment activities (agencies)); Section I (payslips), and; parts of Section K which had been removed after cognitive testing (general awareness of rights).

Data verification and coding

Responses were verified as part of the data reduction phase, with a view to removing any records that appeared suspect. This is a standard process for cleaning data collected from online surveys where there is a risk of some individuals completing without due care and attention.

This process for the panel sample involved reviewing the following:

- Length of time take to complete the survey;
- The number 'don't know' or 'refused' responses selected;
- The number of grid questions flatlined (i.e. the provision of the same answer to each statement);³⁴
- The number of multi-code questions returned with a single response;
- Whether answers were always selected from the first two or last two options in the list (which may suggest the respondent has simply clicked the same response to get through the interview quickly);
- Where respondents selected one code in the majority of multi code questions, and;
- Where respondents answers at open questions were nonsensical.

Once the above cleaning process was conducted, 95 records were removed.

Analysis

The Agency Worker Survey analysis describes the experiences of the total population of agency workers in the UK. It also looks to identify different patterns by key subgroups. Differences between subgroups that are reported are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless specifically indicated otherwise.

³⁴ A grid question is one that involves a set of statements and a rating scale, such as "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Neither Agree nor Disagree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". Flatlining is the behaviour of selecting the same answer for each, which *might* indicate that the respondent has rushed through without considering the question much / at all.

This publication is available from: [Agency worker survey report - GOV.UK](#)

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