



Department for
Business & Trade

Experiences of workers in insecure work

Research Study

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Key definitions

Guaranteed hours	This refers to the number of hours that an employer guarantees (i.e. commits to making work available to and so paying the worker for) in a worker's contract. The number of guaranteed hours can be on a weekly basis, or another time period.
Consistency of hours	This refers to the extent to which a worker works a similar number of hours each week.
Regularity	By <u>regularity</u> , we mean how regularly workers work for their employer.
Workers in insecure work	This term is used throughout the report to define the sample of this research. It includes any of the following (defined below): agency workers, workers on zero hours contracts, workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly** and workers on temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly**.
Agency worker	This is an individual who has a worker's contract or arrangement with an agency to be supplied to hirers to do work under their direction and supervision. In the survey it is defined as 'Agency work: Temp agency employment with a variety of hours each week'.
Workers on zero hours contracts	Workers on an arrangement between an employer and individual under which the employer is not obliged to offer work. This includes both zero hours contracts (which are a type of worker's contract) and zero hours arrangements. In the survey these are defined as 'Zero hours contract/job: no guaranteed hours each week'.
Workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly	In the survey it is defined as: 'Permanent job/contract: Open-ended with <u>16 hours or less guaranteed</u> each week'.**
Workers on temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly	In the survey it is defined as: 'Temporary/seasonal contract: Fixed-term with a specified end date and <u>16 hours or less guaranteed</u> each week'.**

* Please note, the above terms are not an exhaustive/HMG definition of insecure work but were used for this research specifically.

** Please note, that we use 'workers on permanent or temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly' as a contract type, however many of these workers report working above these 'guaranteed hours'. This is explored in more detail throughout the report.

Executive summary

Background

The Employment Rights Act 2025¹ and the UK Government's 'Make Work Pay'² agenda aim to address the one-sided flexibility of zero hours contracts and provide greater protection for workers in insecure work. The Act is a key pillar of the government's Plan to Make Work Pay, which is aimed at growing the economy, boosting wages, and reducing insecure work. The Act was developed in close collaboration with business and trade unions and will help bring our employment rights legislation into the 21st century, extending modern protections to millions more workers. This research will directly inform the development of secondary legislation. The study addresses a critical knowledge gap about this group of workers, enabling evidence-based policy decisions to be made on thresholds, eligibility criteria, and implementation approaches for the rights to guaranteed hours, reasonable notice of shifts, and payments for short notice cancellations, curtailments or movements of shifts in the Employment Rights Act 2025.

Aims and Objectives

The key research objectives were to describe and quantify the characteristics and self-reported experiences of workers in insecure work, focusing on areas directly relevant to the Employment Rights Act 2025.

The primary **research questions** for this study were as follows:

- **Contractual arrangements:** What are the specific contractual arrangements for workers in insecure work in terms of hours guaranteed?
- **Regularity of work:** How consistently are these individuals working over a defined reference period? How frequently do workers work above their guaranteed hours, receive no work or experience both?
- **Variability of hours:** To what extent do weekly hours fluctuate in relation to contractually stipulated hours?
- **Shift management:** How are shifts organised, cancelled, or rearranged? How far in advance are shifts arranged, how often are they cancelled, and do workers receive any payment in the event of a cancellation?
- **Motivations and impacts:** What are workers' reasons and motivations for being in their insecure roles? What are the personal impacts regarding points above on regularity, variability and shift management?

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-rights-bill-factsheets>

² [Implementing the Plan to Make Work Pay and Employment Rights Act - GOV.UK](#)

- **Experiences of agency workers:** Specifically for agency workers, in addition to the above, what are the effects of this employment model? For instance, for how many end-hirers does a single agency worker provide services to?

Method

The research employed a **sequential mixed-methods** approach with fieldwork conducted between October and December 2025. The quantitative phase comprised **2,381 online surveys with workers (aged 16 to 64 years old) who had experience of insecure work in the past 18 months**. The sample included workers on zero hours contracts, workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, workers on fixed-term contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, and agency workers. Workers were asked to self-select their contract type at the beginning of the survey. Throughout the report we collectively refer to all survey participants as ‘workers in insecure work’ and key differences between the different contract types are highlighted. Please refer to Key definitions on page 3 for full definition of each of the different contract types.

Throughout this report data and analysis are drawn exclusively from workers surveyed only. This is referred to interchangeably as ‘all workers’ or ‘workers surveyed’.

The survey approach combined the **Ipsos Knowledge Panel** (n=1,604 responses), which is recruited via random probability sampling, with additional targeted recruitment through the **Ipsos IIS panel** (n=777) to ensure robust representation across key demographics and sectors. The qualitative phase involved **18 in-depth interviews** with survey participants, using purposive sampling across contract types, sectors, age, and caring responsibilities.

Headline findings

Below is an overview of the main findings from the research, followed by summaries of the key findings from across the report chapters.

1. **Most workers want guaranteed hours that match their usual working patterns:** 58% of workers in insecure work would like consistent and guaranteed hours matching their usual working patterns, with half (50%) of this group stating a preference for weekly guarantees, as opposed to other time frequencies
2. **Misalignment between workers contractual terms and lived experiences:** 41% of workers with zero hours contracts appear to mistakenly report that they have hours guaranteed in their contract. This appears to reflect a gap between workers’ day-to-day experience of regular or consistent work and the actual terms of their contract.
3. **Young workers form a significant proportion of those in insecure work:** Nearly half (44%) of workers in insecure work are aged 16 to 25 years old, with 62% of this age group using these arrangements to fit around education.
4. **Over half of those in insecure work face financial difficulties due to variability in income:** 53% of workers surveyed report that variability in working hours impacts their ability to cover living costs and expenses, with higher proportions seen among agency workers (68%) and those with dependent children (65%).

5. **Short notice of hours or shifts and cancellations is common among workers in insecure work:** 40% of workers receive less than a week's notice (six days or less) for upcoming shifts, whilst 33% have experienced shift cancellations with seven days or less notice. Workers on zero hours contracts are particularly affected by shift cancellations, with 41% typically receiving seven days or less notice of shift cancellations.
6. **Workers desire more notice for cancellation of shifts:** Almost half of all workers in insecure work (46%) want at least 4 days' notice for cancellations - yet 60% receive only 2 days notice or less for cancellations.
7. **Most workers receive no compensation for cancelled shifts:** 59% of all workers in insecure work receive no payment when shifts are cancelled, with this proportion rising to 71% amongst workers on zero hours contracts.
8. **Parents of dependent children report particular challenges with short-notice cancellations:** Amongst parents experiencing cancellations, 86% report difficulties arranging alternative childcare and 87% face impacts on their childcare costs.
9. **Variation exists across sectors and contract types:** The hospitality sector shows higher rates of shift cancellations (44%). Across all sectors, agency workers face distinct challenges with 31% receiving only one day's notice for shifts and 26% receiving no work despite having active contracts.

Profile of workers in insecure work

- **Young workers dominate the insecure worker landscape:** Nearly half (44%) of all workers in insecure work surveyed are aged between 16 and 25 years old. Almost a quarter (23%) of all those in insecure work balance their employment with education commitments.
- **Gender disparities vary significantly by contract type:** Women comprise the majority (62%) of those working on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, often reflecting caring responsibilities (14% of women compared to 6% of men) and working part-time (38% compared to 27% of men). In contrast, men are more likely than women to be an agency worker, with men representing 59% of agency workers. Men are also particularly likely to make up the majority of agency workers in construction and warehousing sectors.
- **Workers in insecure work are often employed in hospitality, retail and key public services:** One in five workers in insecure work (20%) are employed in the hospitality sector. There is also significant representation across retail, schools or colleges, hospitals or health services, and social care, reflecting employment patterns characterised by variable demand patterns and shift-based operations.
- **Many workers have recent or current experience of different contract types:** More than a quarter (26%) of workers in insecure work report having worked on more than one contract type over the past 18 months, reflecting the varied nature of insecure employment patterns.

Contractual arrangements and preferences

- **Misalignment between workers contractual terms and lived experiences:** 41% of zero hours contract workers report having guaranteed hours in their contract, despite these arrangements not including contractual guarantees. This appears to reflect a gap between workers' day-to-day experience of regular or consistent work and the formal terms of their contract. Such misunderstanding leaves workers vulnerable when circumstances change, as they are likely to lack actual contractual protections.
- **Consistent hours are desired by most workers:** Over half (58%) of workers in insecure work express a desire for consistent and guaranteed hours that match the hours they usually work, with half (50%) of this group preferring the hours to be guaranteed in their contract on a weekly basis.
- **Many workers report their insecure working arrangements suit their circumstances:** Nearly three-quarters (72%) of workers in insecure work agree their work arrangement are or were well suited to their lifestyle. This likely reflects satisfaction with aspects such as working part-time hours, evening/weekend patterns, term-time working, or other broader parameters rather than satisfaction with contractual terms themselves (as highlighted, many lack familiarity with their actual contractual arrangements). Those who report having some guaranteed hours indicate higher satisfaction with their working arrangements (79% for permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, 80% for temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly).
- **Working patterns meet some needs but lack security:** While workers report their arrangements suit various aspects of their lives (e.g. fitting around education, caring responsibilities, or other commitments), 58% also report wanting guaranteed hours that match their usual working patterns, indicating these workers seek (greater) security within their working arrangements.
- **Motivations for working in insecure work and variations by life stage:** 62% of younger workers aged 16 to 25 years old fit insecure work around education. Those aged between 26 and 55 years old often cite childcare or other caring commitments including 18% of 26 – 35 year olds, 25% of 36 – 45 years old, and 13% of 46 – 55 year olds. Meanwhile 32% of older workers aged 56 to 64 years old cite work/life balance as a core reason, using these working arrangements to help manage the transition toward retirement or to supplement pension income. Across all age ranges, 13% of workers in insecure work reported that a lack of positions with guaranteed hours available was a reason for them to choose insecure work.

Working patterns and regularity

- **Actual hours worked often differ from contracted hours:** Among workers on permanent or temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly and agency workers, 61% regularly work beyond their contracted hours, with nearly half (48%) doing so on a weekly basis.
- **Income variability directly impacts worker's financial stability:** Over half (53%) of all workers in insecure work report that variability in their working hours directly impacts

their ability to cover living costs and other essential expenses, with this figure rising to 65% among those with dependent children and 68% when specifically looking at agency workers.

- **Workers aged 26-35 face particular financial pressures from income variability:** This age group is most likely to report that variability in working hours had a direct impact on their ability to cover living costs and expenses (62%), with 15% describing these impacts as significant.
- **Lack of work affects workers on zero hours contracts disproportionately:** 36% of zero hours contract workers cite a lack of available shifts as a reason for not working, compared to an average of 25% across all workers in insecure work.
- **Consistency of working hours varies significantly by contract type:** 68% of workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly report consistent working hours (very or mostly consistent) over 12 weeks, compared to 46% of workers on zero hours contracts.

Shift management and notice periods

- **Four in ten workers currently in insecure work (40%) typically receive less than a week's notice for their upcoming shifts:** A similar proportion (45%) of workers currently in insecure work consider less than a week's notice reasonable to find out about their working hours or shifts. However, qualitative findings showed that once presented with a hypothetical offer of at least one week's notice of shifts, workers felt this was fair and could enhance their ability to plan personal and work commitments.
- **Advanced notice of shifts has mixed impact on the likelihood of workers taking additional jobs:** When asked if more advance notice would affect their likelihood of taking on an additional job, 39% said it would make them more likely to take additional jobs, while 38% said it would make no difference.
- **Short notice of working hours or shifts affect multiple aspects of workers' lives:** 60% report impacts on personal life planning, 49% on mental health, and 49% on budgeting ability.
- **Short notice changes often have significant impacts on care arrangements and costs for those with young families:** Among parents experiencing short-notice changes, 78% struggle arranging alternative childcare and 75% report impacts on childcare costs.
- **Workers on zero hours contracts are more likely to experience shift instability:** Two in five (41%) workers on zero hours contracts have experienced shift cancellations with less than seven days' notice, compared to the average of 33% of all workers in insecure work.
- **Most do not receive any compensation for cancelled shifts:** Nearly three in five workers in insecure work (59%) receive no compensation for cancelled shifts.
- **Actual notice of shift cancellation falls short of what workers feel is reasonable:** Among workers on zero hours contracts who experience cancellations, 60% receive only two days' notice or less, despite 46% considering four or more days as reasonable notice of cancellations of shifts.

- **Those working in the hospitality sector are particularly likely to experience shift cancellations and instability:** This sector shows the highest rates of shift cancellation (44% of workers in hospitality have had their working hours or shifts cancelled with seven days or less notice, compared to 33% of workers in insecure work).

Agency worker experiences

The survey included some additional questions specifically asked to agency workers.

- **Agency workers report mixed experiences:** 63% agree agency work suits their lifestyle, though they are the group most likely to experience difficulties covering living costs and other expenses due to variability in working hours (68%).
- **Frequency of work varies:** Most agency workers are signed up with one (45%) or two (25%) agencies. When asked about work received in the past 12 weeks, 26% had received no work at all, whilst 74% had been provided with work from at least one agency.
- **Assignment patterns also vary:** Over the previous 12 weeks, 22% of agency workers had no assignments despite contracts in place, whilst 31% had more than two assignments.
- **Communication channels for shifts vary:** Half (50%) are contacted by their agency about shifts, 27% by the client directly, and 16% by both.

Conclusions

Overall, most (72%) workers in insecure work report that their work arrangements suit their lifestyle, while 58% also report wanting guaranteed hours matching their usual patterns. These findings suggest workers are not seeking to fundamentally change their working patterns, but rather to add security and predictability within existing arrangements.

The research highlights some key challenges due to a lack of security and predictability. Over half (53%) report that income variability affects their ability to cover essential expenses. Most workers receive less than a week's notice for their shifts and cancellations of shifts are common at short notice. This can have an impact on workers personal life (65%), their household finances (57%) and on their mental health (56%). Most (59%) report that they do not receive any payments when their shifts are cancelled, and around one in three report having experienced shifts cancelled with less than seven days' notice. Even among workers who do report having some guaranteed hours in their contract, most (61%) regularly work beyond those hours. Certain groups are more likely to experience insecurity at work and difficulties covering essential expenses, including parents and young people, and those on zero hours contracts and agency contracts. These findings, among others highlighted throughout the report, suggest these working arrangements often fail to provide the baseline of predictability and security that enable workers to plan their lives effectively.

Overall, this research supports measures in the Employment Rights Act 2025 to end one-sided flexibility, and the current consultation to develop final policy positions to deliver the measures. The research highlights the importance of setting threshold and eligibility criteria such that the new rights work effectively across diverse circumstances, preserving the

beneficial aspects of insecure working arrangements whilst providing a baseline of predictability and security. The research also highlights further issues for the Government to consider as part of the consultation and in subsequent secondary legislation and guidance, the evidence that some zero-hours workers seem to mistakenly report having some 'guaranteed' hours, and the distinct and complex employment relationship for agency workers.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research context and policy background

The UK Government's commitment to 'Make Work Pay'³, aims to reshape the employment landscape by addressing issues of low pay, poor working conditions, and job insecurity. This will be done with reforms via the Employment Rights Act 2025⁴, which became law on 18th December 2025. These reforms will provide essential protections for workers while ensuring businesses retain flexibility.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 proposes three core measures to tackle one-sided flexibility: (1) the right to a contract guaranteeing a number of hours that reflect the hours regularly worked over a reference period, (2) the rights to reasonable notice of, and changes to, shifts and (3) the right to payment for short notice changes, curtailments or cancellations of shifts (short notice payments).

This research informs the development of secondary legislation for the Employment Rights Act 2025 by seeking to develop the understanding of this segment of the workforce.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The primary objective of this research is to **describe and quantify the characteristics and self-reported experiences of workers in insecure work**, focusing on areas directly relevant to the implementation of the one-sided flexibility measures in the Employment Rights Act 2025. By gathering detailed information on workers' demographics, work patterns, and experiences, the research will provide crucial insights to understand the potential impacts of policy decisions in respect to numbers of workers affected, particularly when setting thresholds and levels for eligibility. The evidence from this research will also feed into Department for Business and Trade's (DBT's) internal modelling and scenario planning, informing its assessment of the potential reach and impact of the proposed legislation.

1.3 Methodology (Questions & Answers)

Who was the target sample for this research?

The target sample is individuals employed in insecure work in Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland). The definition includes all individuals aged 16 years and over who, in the last 18 months (prior to interview), experienced any of the following:

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-plan-to-make-work-pay-and-employment-rights-act>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-rights-bill-factsheets>

1. Working on zero hours contracts or arrangements
2. Working on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly
3. Working on temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly
4. Working for an agency

For the purposes of this report these are collectively referred to as ‘**workers in insecure work**’.

Who was eligible to take part in the research?

The target audience is workers in insecure work of working age (aged 16 to 64 years old). We also extended eligibility to those unemployed or under different employment contracts at the time of the survey, provided they had been in insecure work within the last 18 months. Throughout chapters 4 and 5 where we examine notice of shift patterns, cancellations and changes, and regularity and variability of work the data presented focuses on workers currently employed in insecure work. This is due to the relevance of their experiences and because they are more likely to recall their working patterns accurately (than workers previously employed on insecure contracts within the last 18 months)

What methodology was used?

A sequential mixed-methodology was used commencing with a robust quantitative survey, followed by a qualitative phase to explore the nuances of the topics (with a subset of survey participants). The quantitative data provides the evidence and statistics that allow for wider analysis. The qualitative stage complements this by providing greater depth and understanding to the core issues that emerged in the quantitative stage.

How many quantitative interviews were conducted?

In total, **2,381 quantitative surveys were conducted**: 1,604 interviews from the Ipsos UK KnowledgePanel and 777 interviews from the Ipsos Interactive Services panel.

What was the sampling strategy?

The quantitative survey was conducted using a tiered sampling approach that combined data from two online panels: the Ipsos UK **KnowledgePanel**⁵, which offers a robust random probability sample, and Ipsos Interactive Services (IIS) proprietary panel **iSay**, which is an opt-in panel. This strategy aimed to achieve a minimum of 1,400 participants. Two panels were used in this research to ensure the robustness and representativeness of the sample.

⁵ [UK KnowledgePanel | Ipsos](#)

The research began with the KnowledgePanel, which ensures a demographically representative baseline of the GB population. This provides a strong foundation for representativeness due to the quality of its sampling frame. This used screener questions to identify the incidence rates (percentage of population that meets a certain criteria) of workers in insecure work who met the criteria for the study, who then continued into the main stage survey. Importantly, the KnowledgePanel's inclusion of digitally excluded individuals (who are provided with internet access and tablets at recruitment to the panel) ensures broader reach across all audiences, including workers in insecure work.

Subsequently, the Ipsos Interactive Services (IIS) iSay panel, an opt-in panel, was then used to target specific demographics more likely to be on insecure work contracts and those working in key industries (retail, hospitality, hospitals and social care). This approach enhances the overall diversity and comprehensiveness of the sample, facilitating a more detailed understanding of the experiences of workers in insecure work. By integrating these two panels, the research maximises its reach and accuracy in representing the experiences of workers in insecure work.

How robust and representative is the sample?

With a sample panel of over 30,000 people in the UK, the KnowledgePanel uses the highest quality probability-based sampling methodology for recruitment. This is the gold standard in UK survey research and is as reliable and robust as is feasible. For further information please see Appendix 1.

We then used the demographic profile of respondents from the KnowledgePanel interviews to create a more balanced targeting strategy for the IIS panel recruitment. To prevent skew, we set standard quotas on the Ipsos Interactive Services (IIS) iSay panel (primarily age and gender) and created a final weighting scheme based on the KnowledgePanel data to adjust for any remaining imbalances.

Were quotas used?

No quotas were used on the UK KnowledgePanel sample. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the sampling approach used in this survey. The survey link was sent to the entire panel, which is representative of the GB population. Screening questions were then used to identify those meeting the specific criteria as a worker on an insecure contract. This approach, starting with a representative sample, ensures the responding segment accurately reflects the characteristics of our target audience within the broader GB population. Furthermore, the incidence figure derived from this process provided a robust prevalence of the target audience.

This stage enabled hard quotas to be set for the IIS panel stage. Quotas at this stage were set on age, gender and whether the participant was a current worker on an insecure contract. In the IIS panel sample, all workers who were not currently working in insecure work were screened out (including those who had experience in the past 18 months but not at present).

Figure 1.1 Sampling approach

Ipsos UK KnowledgePanel Fieldwork – (Interviews =1,604)

Nationally representative panel – no targeted quotas. Workers in insecure work who met the criteria for the study continued into the main stage survey.



Interactive Services (IIS) proprietary panel iSay – (Interviews =777)

Targeted quotas: Gender, Age, Current Insecure Worker

Within the IIS panel sample the number of agency workers and those working in key sectors: retail, restaurants or hotel, hospital or health care and social care were boosted to ensure they were fully represented and to maximise the robustness of these sub-groups within the findings.

How did we contact participants?

All participants were contacted with an online survey link. The same survey link was used across both panels, enabling the collation of data into a single datafile.

How was the questionnaire designed and tested?

The questionnaire was developed through a rigorous process to ensure it effectively captured the experiences of workers in insecure work. A collaborative mapping exercise was conducted to align the questionnaire with the DBT's policy needs and analytical requirements.

The questionnaire was then subject to multiple rounds of feedback and comments, **which included 10 cognitive interviews to test and refine the screening questions and question wording**. These interviews ensured clarity and resonance with the target audience, highlighting comprehension, recall, and effectiveness of the screening criteria.

The survey design intentionally allowed for workers to interpret key questions based on their own circumstances and lived experiences to provide insight into the way they understand what these core (and often technical) terms and concepts mean.

How were participants in insecure work identified in the survey?

To ensure the achieved sample size was robust enough for granular analysis by sub-groups (particularly zero hours contract workers, a key sample group of the survey) the reference period for considering contracts and work situation was extended within the questionnaire to incorporate participants' experiences of the past 18 months. This approach increased the eligible sample size whilst maintaining data quality.

The questionnaire established which types of working contracts the participant had experienced during the previous 18 months. Participants were first asked if they had been in any type of paid employment, then asked to select which contracts they had held during this period.

As individuals might have held multiple jobs over the past 18 months (concurrently and/or sequentially), participants could select all contract types that applied to them. Those selecting multiple types were subsequently asked to identify their 'main' contract type, defined as the contract under which they had worked the majority of their hours over the past 12 weeks, or for those with multiple jobs, where they worked the most. This self-identification approach aided recall accuracy. Subsequent survey questions focused on this 'main' contract type to gather evidence about the job representing the greatest proportion of the individual's recent work experience, where recollection would be most reliable.

The response options were not mutually exclusive from the perspective of a single job. For example, an individual might select both 'zero hours contract' and 'agency work' for the same position. In such cases, the selection of a 'main' type likely reflects what participants viewed as the dominant characteristic of their employment.

When the report refers to 'a worker on a zero hours contract', this includes: 1) workers whose only employment in the last 18 months was zero hours contract work (including agency workers on such contracts), and 2) workers with multiple jobs over this period where the zero hours contract was their main employment. This approach focuses on those for whom zero hours contracts have the most significant impact and strengthens the data through increased sample sizes.

How was the data weighted?

This study employed a two-stage approach to achieve representative findings. For further details of how the data was weighted please see Appendix 1.

How was the data analysed?

Descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses⁶ were used to analyse the survey data. This included detailed subgroup analysis by key variables, including demographic sectors (health and social care, education, retail, transport, manufacturing and hospitality), and contract type (zero hours contract, agency worker, low-hour worker).

⁶ Descriptive statistics are methods for summarising the main features of research data to provide a clear snapshot of a sample's distribution and variability without making inferences beyond the data. Bivariate analysis is the examination of the relationship between two variables to identify and test patterns and differences without implying causation.

What was the aim of the qualitative research and how was this conducted?

Qualitative research delved deeper into the experiences, motivations, and decision-making processes of workers in insecure work. By conducting in-depth interviews, the research aimed to explore the nuanced aspects of working under such employment arrangements, beyond what is captured in the quantitative survey. This qualitative phase focuses on **understanding the personal stories behind the statistical data, gathering insights into how insecure contracts impact workers' lives and why they might choose these types of contracts** despite potential downsides.

The qualitative research was conducted through a series of in-depth interviews with a subset of participants from the UK KnowledgePanel survey. Participants were recruited based on specific profiles identified during the KnowledgePanel interviews to ensure a range of people were interviewed across key categories of worker and background. The interviews were designed to be comprehensive, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes each, allowing for an exploration of a range of topics including working patterns, preferences, and the impacts of variability on their personal and professional lives.

The discussion guides used in these interviews were formulated based on preliminary quantitative data findings to ensure relevance and focus on the areas of greatest interest or concern. This iterative approach allowed for adjustments to be made in real-time to address emerging themes or concerns.

How many qualitative interviews were conducted and how were participants incentivised?

A total of 18 qualitative interviews were conducted. Purposive sampling⁷ was used, with quotas reflecting the demographic profiling established during the quantitative phase of fieldwork. Quotas were set on gender, age, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), contract type and work sector to ensure a strong representation across key variables. Each respondent who took part in the qualitative interviews received 5,000 KnowledgePanel points, which is equivalent to a £50 voucher.

1.4 Interpreting the findings

Significant differences

Throughout the report, statistically significant differences are highlighted when the relevant sub-group finding is significantly different to the overall average. Key statistical differences between sub-groups are also highlighted. Statistical significance tests are conducted at the 95% confidence level. Showing where findings are statistically different is helpful because it provides evidence that the observed effect is likely to be real and not just the result of random variation.

⁷ Where participants are chosen because they fit a specific profile.

Small sample sizes

Throughout the report we have indicated where findings are based on small sample sizes (referred to as small base sizes), around which there will be larger margins of error. This is defined as a base size of 30 – 100 participants. Survey findings based on sample sizes of below 30 respondents have not been included in the report.

Contract types and lived experiences

As noted above, individuals were able to self-select the contract types they had held during the past 18 months based on their perceptions and understanding of their jobs. Throughout, the report is based on the perceptions of workers in insecure work drawing on their own lived experiences of their contract. Survey responses reflect participants' subjective interpretations of the questions based on their individual circumstances and personal understanding of their own work experiences.

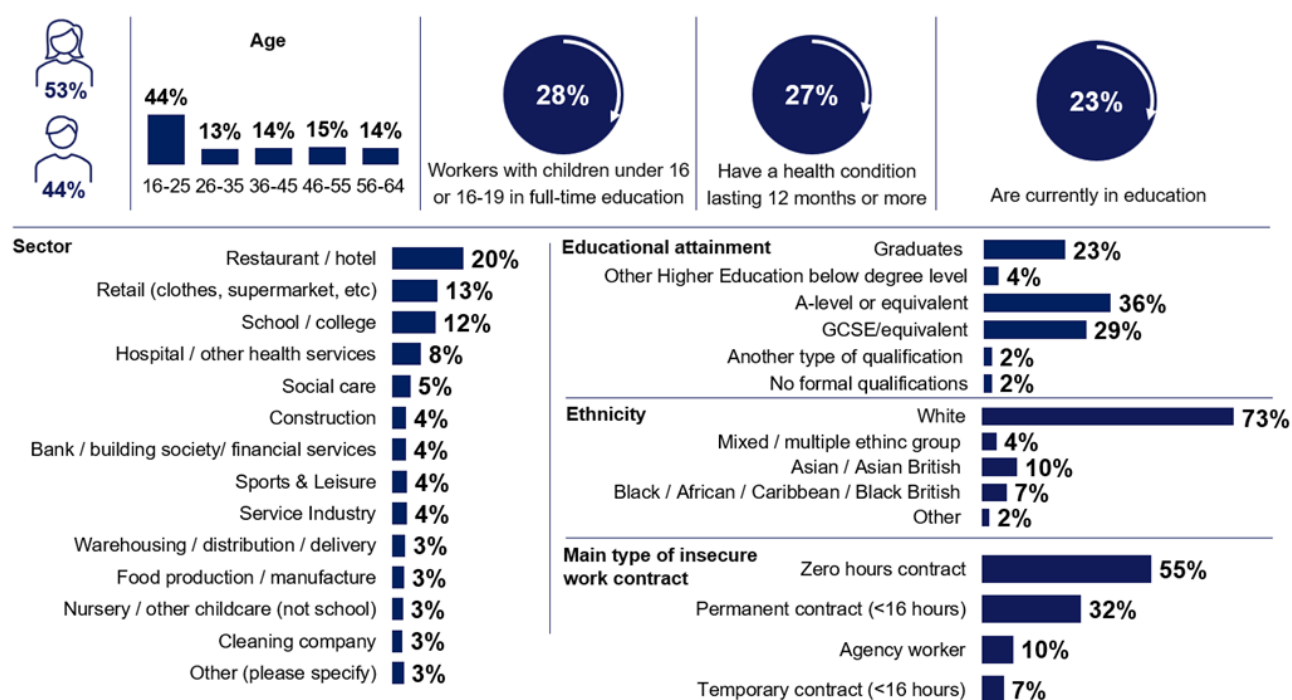
Who we spoke to

2.1 Demographic and sector overview

- We surveyed a representative sample of workers in insecure work during the quantitative fieldwork (n=2,381). This included: 1,110 workers on zero hours contracts, 850 workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, 186 workers on temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly and 269 agency workers.
- Women make up a larger share of those workers in insecure work (made up of 53% women compared to 44% men, with 3% prefer not to say/other).
- 44% of all workers in insecure work are aged between 16 and 25 years old, with 23% of those in insecure work still in education.
- 27% of all workers in insecure work have a health condition. This is higher than the 20% of the working-age population reported to have a work limiting health condition in the Keep Britain Working Review (2025)⁸.
- A fifth of all workers in insecure work (20%) work(ed) in the hospitality sector.
- There is some degree of overlap in the contracts held by workers in insecure work, with 26% having more than one type of contract. Figure 2.1 includes the distribution of workers' 'main' contract types and Figure 2.2 outlines how these were self-reported during the interview.
- Further details of the demographic profiles of workers in insecure work can be found in Appendix 3

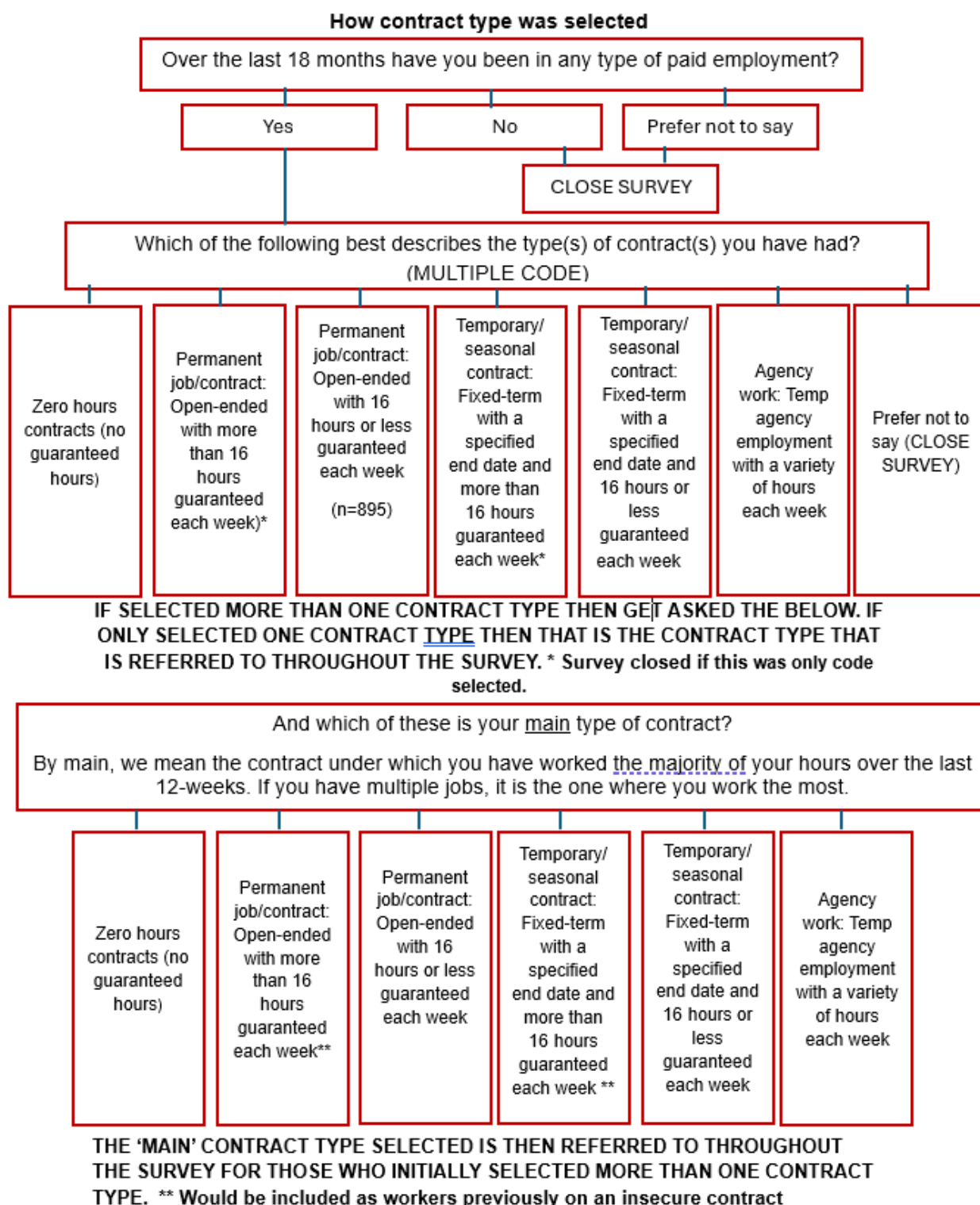
⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-britain-working-review-discovery/keep-britain-working-review-discovery>

Figure 2.1. Demographic profile of Workers in insecure work - Overall



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381) This infographic presents demographics of the workforce we explored within this research including age, sector, education, ethnicity, whether a worker has children or a health condition and contract types. The infographic shows that the sample is 53% women and 44% men. Most workers are aged 16-25 (44%), 13% are 26-35, 14% are 36-45, 15% are 46-55 and 14% are 56-64. Around 28% are workers with dependent children or 16-19 in full time education, 27% report having a health condition lasting 12 months or more, and 23% are currently in education. The largest employment sectors are hospitality (20%), retail (13%) and schools/colleges (12%). Educational attainment is mainly A-level or equivalent (36%), GCSE or equivalent (29%), and degree level (23%). Most workers identify as White (73%), followed by Asian/British Asian (10%) and Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (7%). Main contract types are zero-hours contracts (55%), permanent contracts with fewer than 16 guaranteed hours (32%), agency work (10%), and temporary contracts with fewer than 16 guaranteed hours (7%).

Figure 2.2 How contract type was selected during the interview (based on all those in insecure work)



Flow chart showing how participants selected their contract type during the survey. Participants were first asked whether they had been in any type of paid employment during the last 18 months. Those answering no or prefer not to say led to the survey closing. Those answering yes were asked which contract types they had held, with the option to select multiple responses. Options included zero-hours contracts, permanent contracts with more than 16 guaranteed hours per week, permanent

contracts with 16 hours or fewer guaranteed hours per week, temporary or seasonal contracts with more than 16 guaranteed hours per week, temporary or seasonal contracts with 16 hours or fewer guaranteed hours per week, and agency work. Participants who selected more than one contract type were then asked to identify their main contract type, defined as the contract under which they had worked the majority of their hours over the previous 12 weeks, or the job in which they worked the most if they held multiple jobs. The selected main contract type was then used throughout the survey.

3. Contractual arrangement & preferences

3.1 Contractual arrangement & preferences – Key findings

- Just under three quarters (72%) of all workers in insecure work surveyed agree their working arrangements are or were well suited to their lifestyle. This likely reflects satisfaction with aspects such as part-time hours, evening/weekend patterns, or term-time working rather than satisfaction with contractual terms themselves.
- Over half (58%) of all workers in insecure work would like consistent hours, with half of this group (50%) reporting they would like hours to be guaranteed weekly. This indicates workers seek security and predictability within their existing working patterns. Moreover, workers in insecure work without guaranteed hours who experience consistent and regular work often feel like they have some form of verbal or unofficial guaranteed hours, regardless of any contractual confirmation.
- Age and industry type are key drivers behind why workers chose insecure work. Younger workers often balanced work with study or education, whereas older workers often took on insecure work to improve work/life balance or help boost retirement funds in later life.
- Workers on zero hours contracts report that unpredictability in working hours or shifts is a persistent challenge. This is especially the case where unpredictability created financial and budgeting pressures.
- Almost half (46%) of workers in insecure work with dependent children have experienced difficulties managing work alongside childcare or other caring responsibilities.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of workers in insecure work have declined extra hours or overtime that was offered, with the majority not experiencing any consequences. However, some workers raise concerns about who is in control when it comes to negotiating extra hours or overtime.

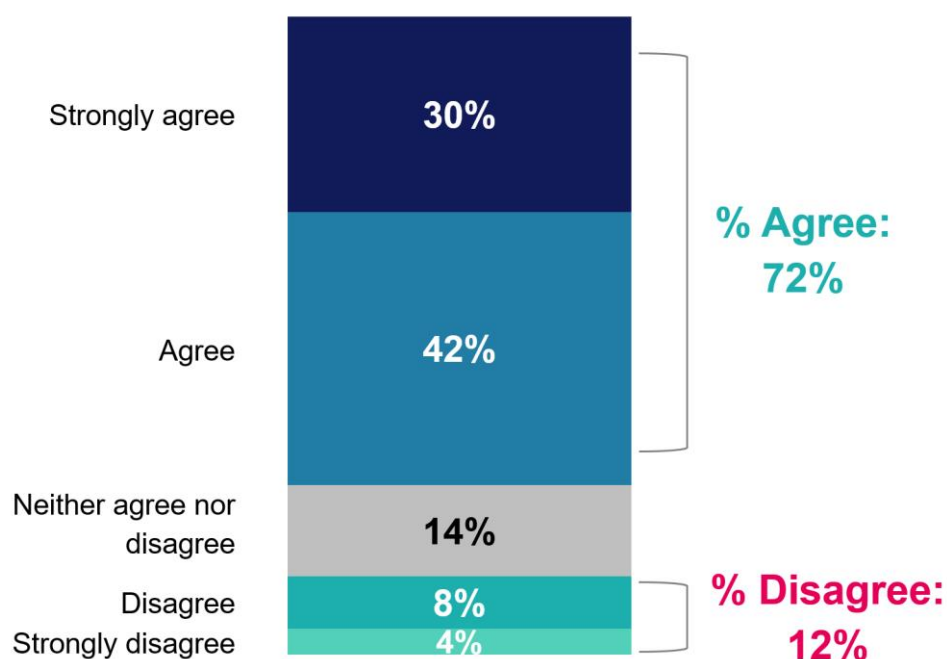
3.2 Extent to which insecure working arrangements suit lifestyles

Just under three quarters (72%) of all workers in insecure work surveyed agree or strongly agree that their working arrangements are or were well suited to their lifestyle. Across different contract types, those with some form of guaranteed hours were more likely to report satisfaction (79% for workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, 80% for workers on temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly) than workers on zero hours contracts (68%). When interpreting these findings, it is important to note that workers are very likely responding about their overall work situation, such as being able to work part-time, evenings/weekends, or term-time, rather than their specific contractual terms, with which many are unfamiliar.

As explored further in Section 3.3 (Understanding guaranteed hours), over half (58%) of workers in insecure work would like consistent and guaranteed hours matching their usual working patterns. This is not contradictory; workers value aspects of their working patterns (fitting around other commitments) while also seeking the security and predictability that

guaranteed hours would provide. Consistent with other findings in this research, many workers are keen to maintain their existing working patterns but with added financial stability through guaranteed hours.

Figure 3.1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: My contract is well suited to me, and my lifestyle



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381) – Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Those working in schools or colleges are more likely (81%) to agree that their contract is suited to their lifestyle when compared to the average of 72% of all workers in insecure work. Qualitative findings from interviews with workers in insecure work in school or college settings highlighted that **being able to work flexibly around the school term was a key driver to taking an insecure contract with low or no guaranteed hours**. Many workers felt their working arrangement gave them greater control over the amount of work they are responsible for.

“They let me get on with my work. That is largely due to the fact that I've built up a reputation with this agency for being incredibly reliable.” – Agency worker, School or college, 16 to 25 years old

“What I like about it [contract] is that I am paid for the hours I do and rolled in with some extra stuff, which I probably don't get paid for but I like that I can do my job without being involved in the management of resourcing and people's time.” – Temporary contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, School or college, 46 to 55 years old

Despite the reported control over the amount of work they are responsible for, workers in insecure work mentioned they are often **saddled with additional marking and unpaid**

hours that fall outside of their usual hours, regardless of whether they have guaranteed hours in their contract.

“I spend a lot of time, more than half my time, on stuff that doesn’t generate money - preparing for stuff, speculative stuff, course design - so the actual hours they have to be well paid hours and the [employer] doesn’t pay that well.” – Zero hours contract, School or college, 46 to 55 years old

Qualitative feedback suggests that although the contract types explored in this research provide greater flexibility and control over the amount of work, boundaries are frequently tested by employers. Some workers in schools or colleges reported **feeling some pressure to accept additional unpaid work** out of concerns for not being provided with paid work in the future.

“I’ve suggested that they’re taking advantage with the amount of marking that I have to do that you don’t get necessarily paid for. So, I have suggested that that isn’t particularly fair, but I don’t feel in a very strong position to challenge that because, you know, I want the work and I don’t want them to stop offering it to me.” – Temporary contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, School or college, 46 to 55 years old

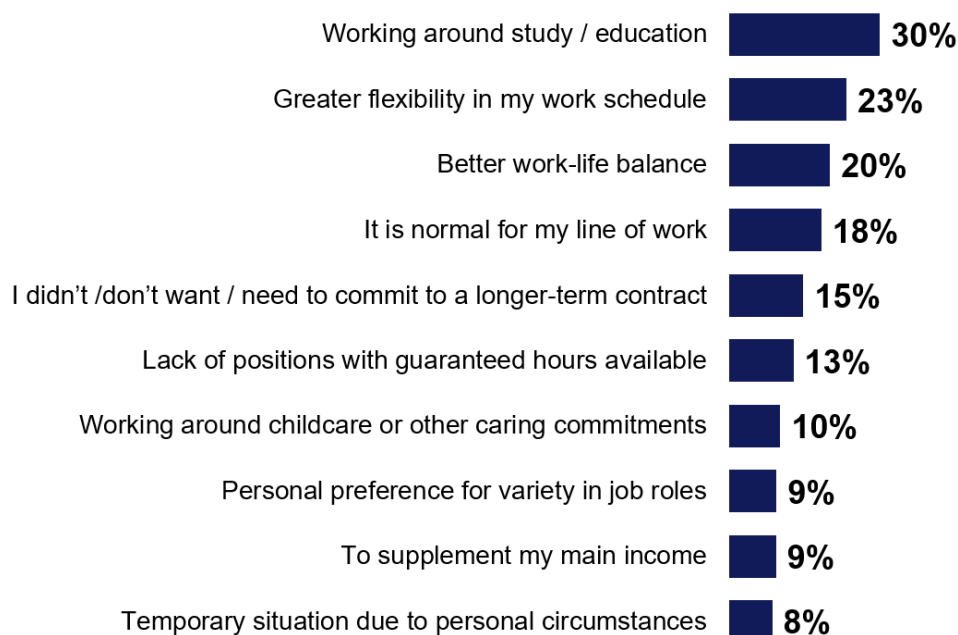
When looking at the top ten reported reasons for taking an insecure contract, **an individual’s age and the specific industry type are key drivers** behind the personal reasons workers gave for choosing insecure work. Younger workers often balanced work with study or education, whereas older workers often took on insecure work to improve work/life balance or help boost retirement funds in later life.

3.2.1 Working around study and education

Working around study or education was the most frequently cited reason for choosing insecure work (30% overall), with younger workers aged 16 to 25 particularly likely to mention this (62%).

However, this overall finding partly reflects the profile of those in insecure work, rather than relative importance – nearly half (44%) of all workers surveyed were aged 16 to 25. Therefore, while working around education is the most commonly mentioned reason, this does not necessarily mean it carries greater weight than other factors for individual workers' decisions.

Figure 3.2: Most common reasons for choosing insecure work



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381 – Chart shows top mentions)

Across all age ranges, younger workers in insecure work aged 16 to 25 years old are the most likely to be working in the hospitality and retail sector, with 33% of those aged 16 to 25 years old working in hospitality and 15% working in retail. It is in these two sectors where workers in insecure work are significantly more likely than the average across all workers in insecure work to report the main reason for taking this type of contract was to fit around study or education (53% hospitality and 41% retail, compared to an average of 30% of all workers in insecure work).

The quantitative and qualitative findings together present an image of a younger person at school or college working over weekends in a shop or restaurant for additional income.

Among workers in insecure work who selected working around study or education as a reason for taking on insecure work, a quarter (25%) also cited greater flexibility in their work schedule.

Flexibility is a prevalent factor as to why younger workers, aged 16 to 25 years old in insecure work feel that insecure work is well suited to working around study or education. In qualitative interviews, younger workers emphasised that a top priority is the ability to negotiate with their employers regarding shifts and work hours. This flexibility allows the prioritisation of educational schedules and other commitments.

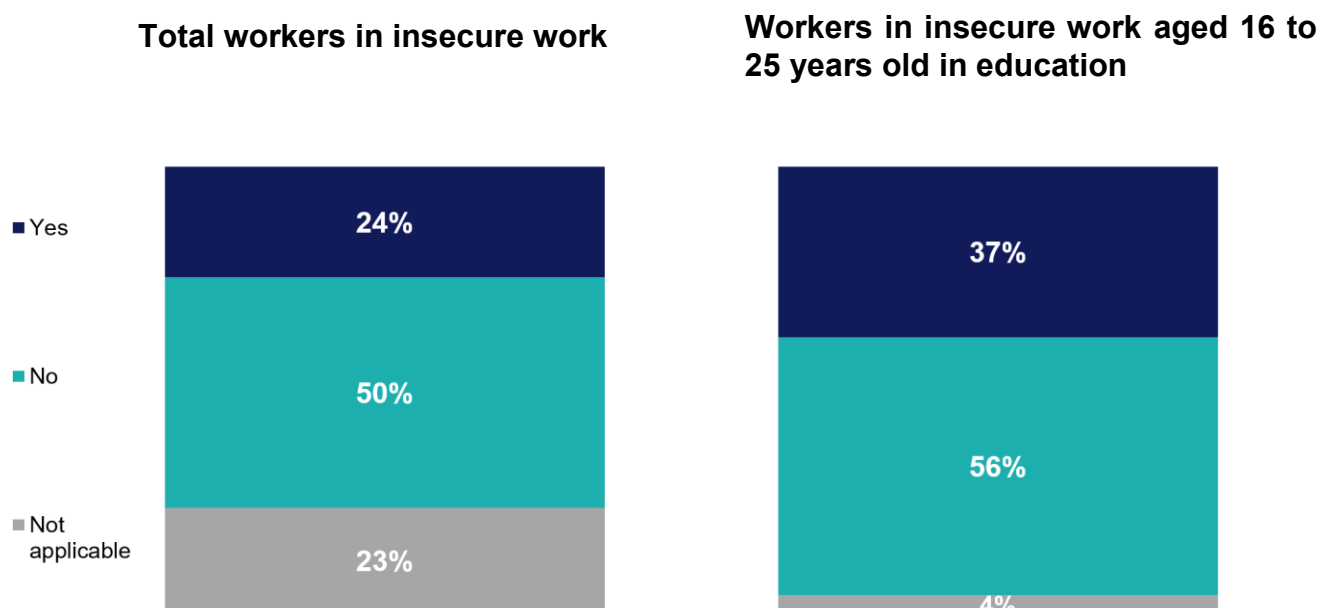
“The four hours is good because I'm doing it alongside college, so it's very easy for me to do and then come home, do other work, as well as see my friends on top of that. So it's very flexible.” – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Retail (clothes, supermarket, department store etc), 16 to 25 years old

However, there are frustrations among some younger workers in insecure work who do not receive as many hours or shifts as they would like from their employer that match with their educational schedule, despite their desire to work. This is illustrative of how, in the absence of guaranteed hours, **workers' hours are dependent on the employer's decision-making around scheduled hours or shifts.**

“Sometimes I won't get any hours, like for that week or the days I want to work, I won't be able to work.” – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 16 to 25 years old

When workers in insecure work were asked if they had ever experienced any difficulty with managing work alongside study or education, younger workers aged 16 to 25 years old who were in education were significantly more likely (37%) to say they had, compared with the average of 24% of all workers in insecure work. This is shown in Figure 3.3 and reflects that the consistency and regularity of working hours are critical for whether younger workers feel their contract type fits their lifestyle and subsequent educational commitments.

Figure 3.3: As a result of working your current / previous [contract type], have / did you ever experience/d any difficulty with any of the following? – Managing work alongside study / education



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381) – Charts do not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers.

Base: Workers in insecure work aged 16 to 25 years old in education (n=101).

Within the qualitative interviews younger workers expressed desires to swap contract types (from permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly to zero hours contracts and vice versa) to suit lifestyle changes in their study or education, such as moving away from home for university but wanting to retain the role as a summer job.

“I think right now the contract that I'm on is good because it gives me a very good college work/life balance. But I do think in the future that maybe a zero hours contract would be good purely based on the fact that when I come home [from university] I can pick up extra shifts.” – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Retail (clothes, supermarket, department store etc), 16 to 25 years old

3.2.2 Giving greater flexibility in work schedule

Just under a quarter (23%) of workers in insecure work surveyed reported taking an insecure hours contract for greater flexibility in their work schedule. This is significantly higher among workers with zero hours contracts (27%) and those in the hospitality sector (31%).

Among those who selected greater flexibility in their work schedule as a reason for their contract, over a third said it was also for a better work/life balance (36%), a quarter because they did not want or need to commit to a longer-term contract (26%), and a quarter because it is normal for their line of work (25%).

Maintaining the balance between flexibility and consistency is a consistent theme among workers in insecure work, particularly among workers on zero hours contracts who have a personal preference for a variety of job roles. As qualitative interviews illustrate, this is often to pursue work in other sectors.

“I've been very fortunate in what I've done to not have to jump from zero hours. They may as well have been contracts, the length of time I've been with each employer It's because of the acting. I struggle to commit to a contract in case an audition, a self-tape casting, a job, whether it be stage or television or voiceover, if one of them crops up.” – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 36 to 45 years old

The precarity of having no guaranteed hours and unpredictability in the regularity of work is highlighted as a persistent challenge among workers who took part in the qualitative interviews. Especially where unpredictability due to work being inconsistent and irregular created financial and budgeting pressures.

“So, you're on the books but you're not. There's no regular work and if you don't work that month, you don't get paid anything that month or whatever.” – Zero hours contract, Retail, 56 to 64 years old

During qualitative interviews, workers on zero hours contracts expressed the importance of having regular hours alongside a degree of consistency as important to work/life balance. Subsequently, when irregular hours impacted their income, workers without other income sources struggle to budget for household bills and other essential expenses. See section 4.3.2 for more information on the impact of the variability of working hours.

“Maybe you have long driving times or long gaps between clients, your wage can fall drastically and it can make a big difference, especially if you've got other bills to pay.” – Zero hours contract, Social care, 56 to 64 years old

3.2.3 Better work/life balance

Workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are more likely to report taking an insecure hours contract for a better work/life balance (24%) compared to workers on a zero hours contract (17%). Additionally, older workers aged 56 to 64 years old are significantly more likely to report a better work/life balance (32%) as a reason for taking an insecure hours contract compared to 20% of all workers in insecure work.

Qualitative findings illustrate how some older workers on either permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly or temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are able to utilise this to better plan their time outside of work to pursue personal hobbies and interests, such as travel.

"I wanted more time for me"... "So motivation for me to earn a little bit more pocket money is to go and travel to these lovely places that you often see." – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Hospital or other health services (e.g. GP surgery), 56 to 64 years old

"What I like about it is that it gives me my summers off so I can do gardening and nice things like that." – Temporary contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, School or college, 46 to 55 years old

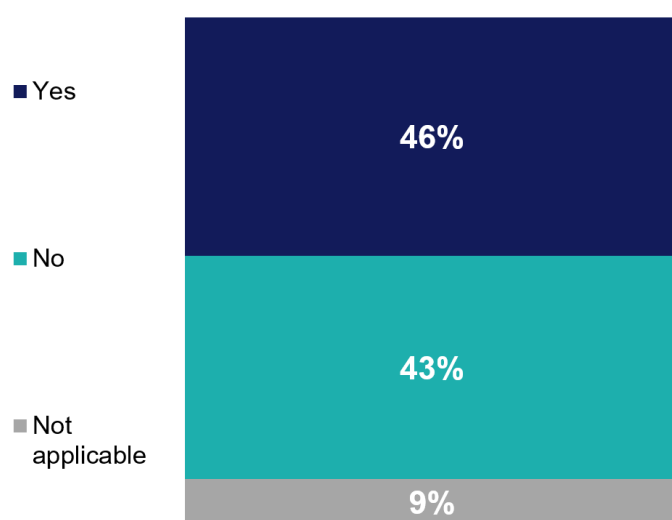
It is important to note that quantitative findings show personal finances and security among older workers in insecure work varied and influenced decisions to work. Older workers in insecure work, aged 56 to 64 years old, are significantly more likely (29%) to report a total household income of up to £25,999, compared to 22% of all workers in insecure work. In qualitative interviews, some older workers in insecure work highlighted being motivated to work an insecure hours contract as a middle ground between needing more money to retire and not wanting to be bound to longer or full-time equivalent work. Findings suggest older workers in insecure work tend to earn more and as mentioned in Section 3.2 (Extent to which insecure working arrangements suits lifestyles) seek out insecure work to improve work/life balance. Subsequently, older workers sometimes view zero hours contracts as temporary roles to fit around their lifestyle (rather than something they are reliant upon); therefore they are more likely to leave if it stops meeting their needs compared to other workers in insecure work across the sample.

"I swither between thinking I don't have enough money in my pension fund and not really wanting to be tied into any other long-term work." – Zero hours contract, Retail, 56 to 64 years old

3.2.4 Impact of childcare

Almost half (46%) of all workers in insecure work with dependent children⁹ reported experiencing difficulties with managing work alongside childcare or other caring responsibilities, as shown in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4: As a result of working your current / previous [contract type], have / did you ever experience/d any difficulty with any of the following? – Managing work alongside childcare or other caring responsibilities



Base: All workers in insecure work with dependent children (n=808) - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers).

During qualitative interviews, workers on both zero hours contracts and workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly reported positive experiences of balancing their work with childcare or other caring commitments, for example through being able to take time off work to attend essential hospital appointments, childcare arrangements, or school performances. Workers noted that the understanding demonstrated by their employer was a driver to their satisfaction within their current role.

"Very positive, very accommodating, very helpful, very caring. Obviously they wanted something and then. But if we wanted something slightly different, they were very willing to, you know adjust and adapt to our requirement as well." – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Warehousing or other, 36 to 46 years old

"I can look after my mother-in-law in the morning; I can pick up my daughter from schools and drop her off to mosque. I can get all that done and have the job as well, so the flexible

⁹ Base: All workers in insecure work with dependent children (n=808) By dependent children we mean any children under the age of 16, or children aged 16-19 who are still in full-time education or training below University level.

hours are very handy. I can't do a nine-five because there's nobody for her [mother-in-law] then." – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 46 to 55 years old

Both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that **receiving less notice of shifts than usual was a key factor in why workers in insecure work experienced difficulties managing childcare** alongside work. Workers with dependent children who experienced less notice than their usual notice, at least a few times a month or more, are more likely (56%) to report difficulties managing work alongside childcare and other caring responsibilities, compared to 46% of workers in insecure work with dependent children.

"I've got babysitting duties too so I'd have to find a babysitter for short notice. If he were to give me a shorter notice, I wouldn't be able to do that" – Zero hours contract, Restaurant, 46 to 55 years old

3.3 Understanding guaranteed hours

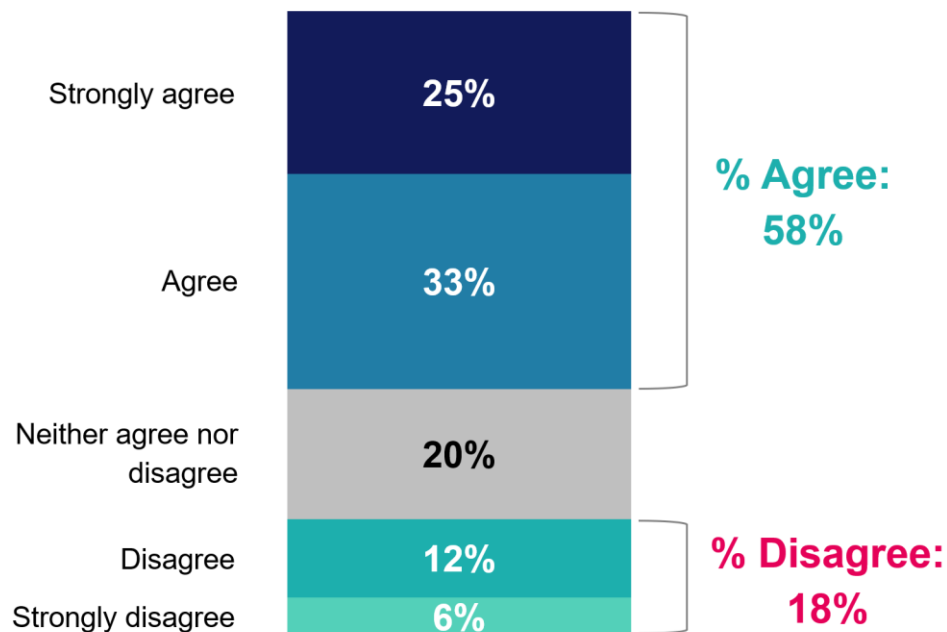
3.3.1 Consistent and guaranteed hours

Over half (58%) of all workers in insecure work surveyed would like consistent and guaranteed hours which are the same as the hours they usually work, as shown in Figure 3.5. Among workers currently employed in insecure work, this rises to seven out of ten (70%).

However, this research suggests there is significant misunderstanding about what guaranteed hours actually means. While workers on zero hours contracts, by definition, have no guaranteed hours, 41% report having them (see finding in section 3.3.2) - **suggesting many workers mistake regular working patterns or discussions with their employer for contractual rights**, or more generally lack familiarity with the concepts of guaranteed hours and/or contracts. As throughout the report, the findings illustrate the lived experiences of those in insecure work are open to personal interpretation (which may differ from actual contract terms). It is worth noting though that, even if a worker's written contract provides that they have no guaranteed hours, it is possible that based on the facts, they may have a contractual right to guaranteed hours¹⁰.

¹⁰ This is because the true agreement between the parties is to be gleaned from the circumstances of a case, of which the written contract is only part.

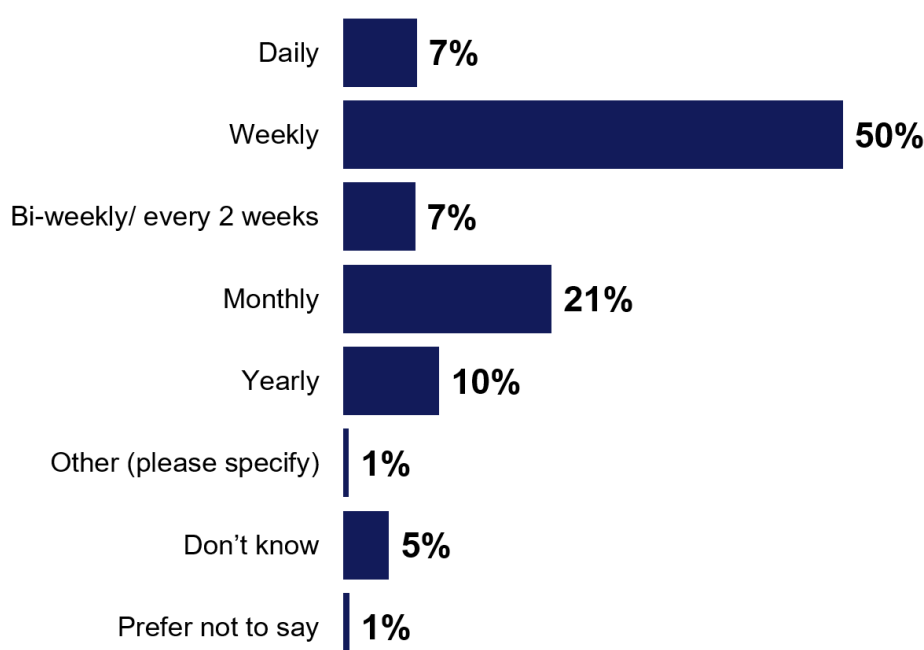
Figure 3.5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I would like consistent and guaranteed hours in my contract which are the same as the hours I usually work



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Of those who agree with the statement that they would like consistent and guaranteed hours in their contracts which are the same as the hours they usually work, half (50%) would like their hours to be guaranteed in their contract weekly (see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Over what time period would you like / would you have liked your hours to be guaranteed in your contract?



Base: Those would like consistent hours (n=1,406 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly highlighted in interviews that having guaranteed hours that aligned with the number of hours they wanted to work gave them an ideal balance between flexibility and consistency.

"I kind of like the idea of going into work on a Monday, Tuesday, doing the two days and then having the rest of the week off" – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Hospital or other health services (e.g. GP surgery), 56 to 64 years old

"When I was starting the job, I wanted to do 12 hours a week, which would have been three four-hour shifts, but that was when I initially started. So since then, I haven't tried to negotiate any more hours because I figured that the eight hours is actually pretty good for my schedule and it fits in with everything else I want to do." – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Retail (clothes, supermarket, department store etc), 16 to 25 years old

Those working within the banking and financial sector are significantly more likely (76%) than the average (58%) of workers in insecure work to say they would like consistent and guaranteed hours which are the same as they usually work.

Workers aged 56 to 64 years old are significantly more likely to not want consistent and guaranteed hours, with 23% expressing this view compared to 18% of all workers in insecure work. This highlights some additional preference for flexibility amongst this age group.

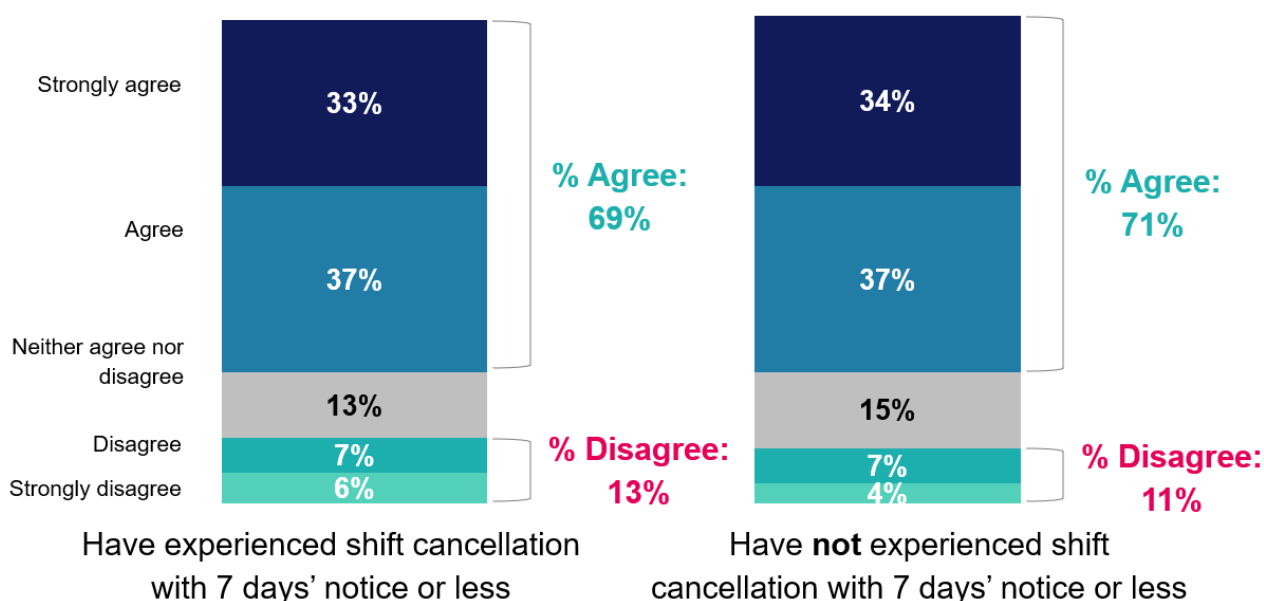
Workers on zero hours contracts are also more likely to disagree that they would like consistent and guaranteed hours which are the same as they usually work (22%), compared to 18% of all workers in insecure work. Similar to those aged 56 to 64 years old, this indicates that among workers on zero hours contracts this group prefer the perceived flexibility afforded by not having consistent and guaranteed hours. However, it should be noted that these groups still represent less than a quarter (23% and 22%) of all workers in insecure work surveyed.

Qualitative findings suggest that some workers on zero hours contracts who report being in demand from their employer (for example workers mentioned being told by their employer they are short staffed or have extra hours to assign) and receive consistent hours or shifts feel they have more negotiating power over their work schedules. **Although the absence of any contractually guaranteed hours means an employer can effectively withhold work from a worker, workers on zero hours contracts who receive work consistently feel it is easier to negotiate when they can or cannot work.**

"I like the flexibility of zero hours. I do tend to work four days a week anyway...It's a strange setup. I think they kind of expect me in those four days and I sometimes have to remind them that I'm on zero hours. So if I'm unavailable, there's no agreed notice, but I try and give them as much notice as possible." – Zero hours contract, Hospital or other health services (e.g. GP surgery), 46 to 55 years old

As highlighted previously, seven in ten (70%) workers currently employed in insecure work agree they would like consistent and guaranteed hours which are the same as the hours they work. When looking at this group further, there is no statistically significant variation between workers who have experienced a short-notice cancellation (seven days' notice or less) than those who have not (69% who had experienced a shift cancellation and 71% who had not experienced a previous shift cancellation) - as shown in Figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7: Extent would like consistent and guaranteed hours in contract by whether had experienced short notice shift cancellations



Base: Current workers in insecure work (n=1,507 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Exploring a scenario of guaranteed hours

During qualitative interviews, workers were asked to consider a series of hypothetical scenarios about insecure work contracts related to guaranteed hours, reasonable notice of shifts, and payments for short notice changes, curtailments or cancellations of shifts. Workers were not provided with background details on why these scenarios were chosen but were told that the purpose was to help DBT better understand which aspects of insecure hours contracts benefit or are challenging for workers.

The first scenario presented to workers about guaranteed hours was as follows:

I'd like you to consider a scenario where workers have a chance to receive an offer of guaranteed hours from their employer. This would be dependent on a worker working consistently over a period of time and would be dependent on whether the number of hours they work currently falls below a required hours threshold. How might this possible offer of guaranteed hours affect your decision to stay on an insecure hours contract?

Once presented, **workers interviewed across all contract types favoured an offer of guaranteed hours**, feeling it was right for employers to reward regular and consistent work. Workers felt that having guaranteed hours helped with planning household expenses and budgeting. They also reduced financial anxiety by giving certainty about pay and hours worked.

“That would be brilliant because you would know what your minimum was going to be every month, you would be happy because you’ll be working off that and then any extras would just be a bonus for your savings part.” – Zero hours contract, Social care, 56 to 64 years old

Anxieties about income from hours or shifts worked and experiences of inconsistencies in scheduling are key reasons why workers desired guaranteed hours. Workers who reported having consistent and regular hours within interviews often believed they had some form of ‘unofficial guaranteed hours’ with their employer, even if their written contract did not reflect this. This is illustrated by a worker on a zero hours contract who had asked for guaranteed hours from their employer and the employer had ‘verbally agreed’ to give them 16 hours of work a week but had since not confirmed their agreement in writing.

“I did ask him, let’s put it down as a contract. We were going to do it at the beginning, but then it didn’t happen. I’ve been going for two years...It’s 16 hours, he has to give me 16 hours.” – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 46 to 55 years old

Those workers interviewed who experienced consistency and regularity in the hours or shifts worked under their contract without guaranteed hours felt stable and secure in the absence of disruptions. However, whenever any inconsistencies arise, they have little negotiating power without guaranteed hours in their contract if the employer decides to either cancel, move, or curtail their hours or shifts.

When workers interviewed were asked if they think they could work the number of hours required of them if they had guaranteed hours in their contract and any challenges they may encounter in meeting them. Workers tended to express confidence that they could if it remained similar to their current hours, however, some were still unsure if they would be able to commit to the consistency required by having guaranteed hours in their contract.

“It’s the battle between financial stability and the mental worry. Yeah, the mental worry of not meeting the guaranteed hours and not being able to commit.” – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation service, 36 to 45 years old

3.3.2 Hours guaranteed each week

Just over half (54%) of all workers in insecure work surveyed reported being guaranteed 1-16 hours in their contract, as shown in Figure 3.8.

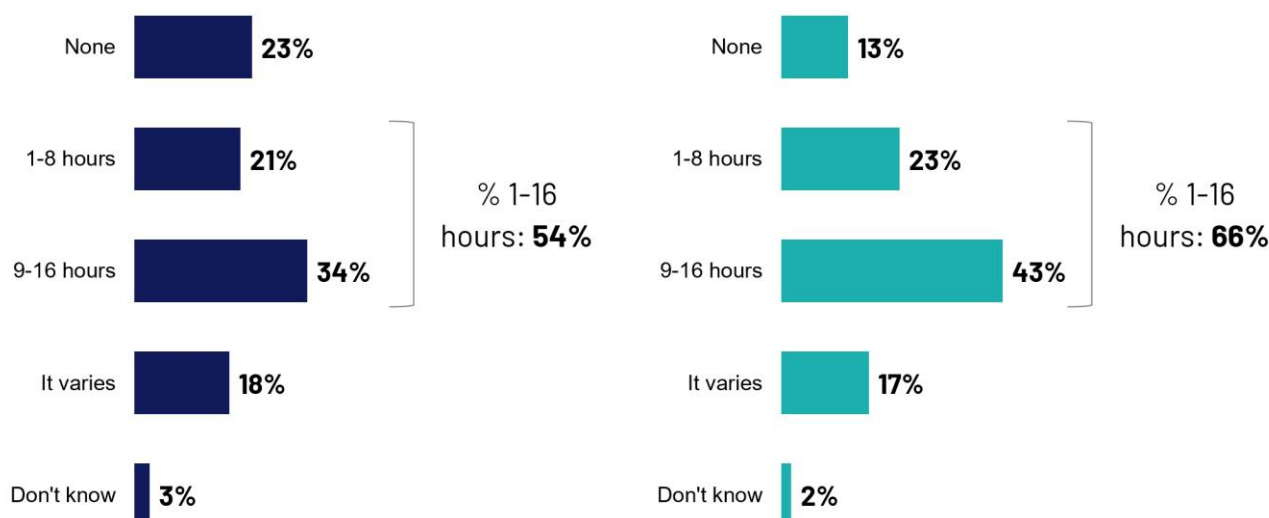
However, a recurring theme we encounter within the research is a **misunderstanding or misperception among workers on zero hours contracts as to what guaranteed hours are**, with two in five (41%) reporting having some form of guaranteed hours in their contract.¹¹

¹¹ In some places throughout the report, we have presented the results showing those who are working on zero hours contracts only and those who report working on more than one contract type.

Figure 3.8: In your main / previous employment, roughly how many working hours are / were you guaranteed in your contract each week?

Total workers in insecure work

Excluding those on zero hours contracts*



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381 - Chart does not include prefer not to say answers)

**Workers in insecure work excluding zero hours contracts (n=1,539)*

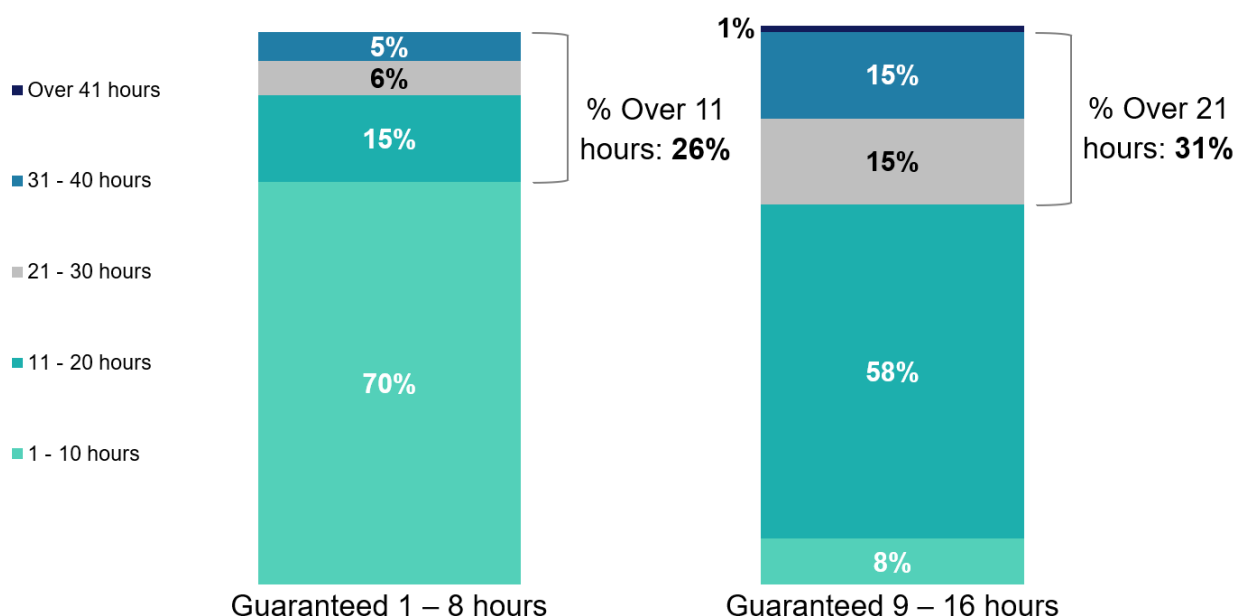
Figure 3.8 shows that when zero hours contract workers are excluded from the analysis, those reporting having no guaranteed hours in their contract drops by 10 percentage points from 23% to 13%. The remaining 13% is predominantly comprised of agency workers, among whom just under a quarter (23%) report having no guaranteed hours in their contract each week. There is no other significant difference by contract types. **Qualitative findings indicate workers in insecure work without guaranteed hours who experience consistent and regular work often feel like they have some form of verbal or unofficial guaranteed hours, regardless of any contractual confirmation. This will likely explain some of the responses from those on zero hours contracts reporting having some guaranteed hours¹²**

Workers in insecure work, excluding zero hours contract workers, are working more hours than are contractually guaranteed, with just over a quarter (26%) of those guaranteed between 1-8 hours a week typically working over 11 hours each week. As shown in Figure 3.9, just under a third (31%) of those guaranteed between 9-16 hours a week are typically working over 21 hours each week. Agency workers (57%) are significantly more likely to work over 21 hours a week compared to 31% of workers in insecure work with 9 – 16 hours guaranteed, as are those aged 36 to 45 years old (43%) and those working in construction

¹² However, as above, in some cases, workers whose written contract is a zero hours contract may actually be guaranteed hours.

(65%). This suggests those with guaranteed hours are more likely to be working hours that are regularly closer to their contractually agreed hours.

Figure 3.9: And still thinking of your main/previous employment, typically how many hours do/did you work each week?



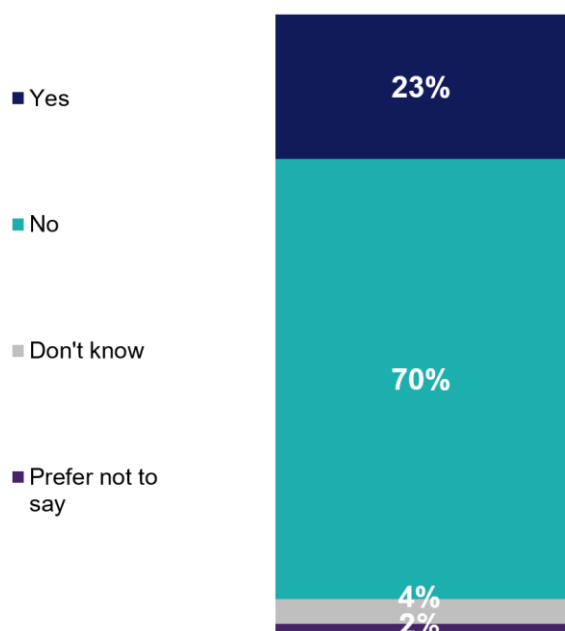
Base: All workers in insecure work, excluding zero hours contracts, with 1 – 8 hours guaranteed (n=240), All workers in insecure work with 9 – 16 hours guaranteed (n=639) Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers

3.3.3 Asking for more guaranteed hours

Around a quarter (23%) of workers in insecure work surveyed have asked for guaranteed hours or more guaranteed hours in their contract, though the majority (70%) have not (see Figure 3.10). Within the qualitative interviews some workers mentioned they had not asked for more guaranteed hours but noted they were more likely to ask for extra hours or overtime when they needed it.

“I’ll probably ask her for more hours because I have more free time now, because now I’m in year 13...So I’d rather like I could work during the week more.” – Zero hours contract, Hospitality, 16 to 25 years old

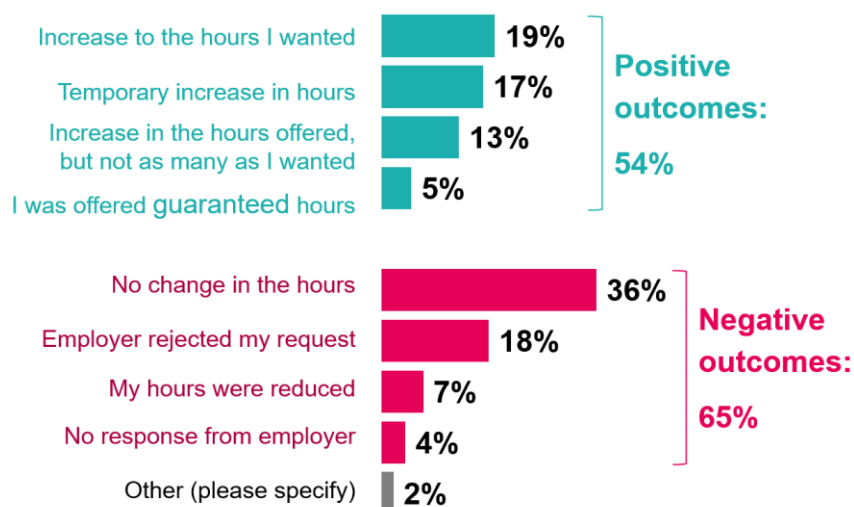
Figure 3.10: Have you ever asked/did you ever ask your current/previous employer for guaranteed hours/more guaranteed hours in your contract?



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381)

As shown in Figure 3.11, workers reported mixed success when asking for more guaranteed hours, citing a range of positive and negative outcomes. There are few differences between outcomes by contract types. However, workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are significantly more likely to report having had an 'Increase to the hours I wanted' (26%) and 'Increase in the hours offered, but not as many as I wanted' (21%) when compared to the average amongst all workers in insecure work.

Figure 3.11: And what, if anything, was the outcome of asking for guaranteed/more guaranteed hours in your contract?



Base: Those who have ever asked for more guaranteed hours (n= 514) – NB: multi-choice question so could select more than one answer to this question

Within the qualitative interviews, workers thought the ability to manage work schedules and the demand for work influenced whether employers were open to offering guaranteed hours. Workers felt employers, particularly those in fast-paced industries with high turnover like retail and hospitality, did not guarantee hours as they did not want to commit in case the demand for hours changed.

"He has said if it gets busier, he will, but he's got a lot of employees wouldn't want him to cut anyone else's hours. But when it gets busier, he'll give me extra hours" – Zero hours contract, Restaurant, 46 to 55 years old

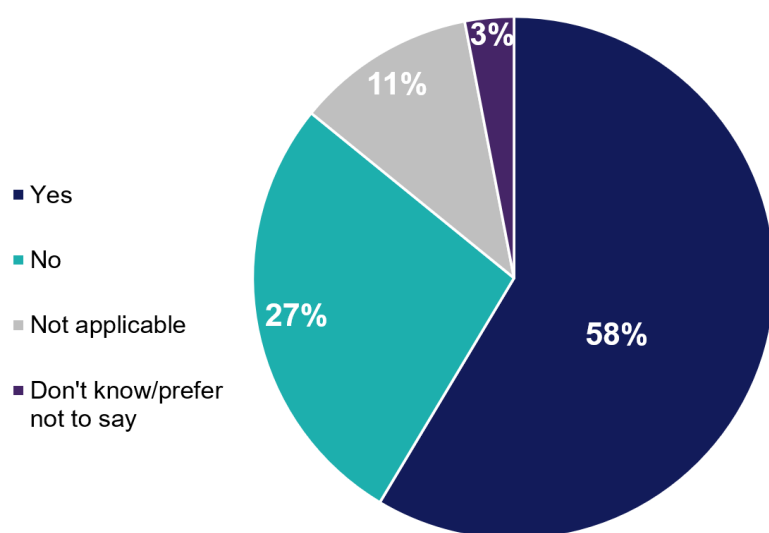
Among agency workers interviewed, it was assumed that guaranteed hours could contradict the nature of agency work contracts, which are designed to provide flexible resourcing to agency clients. Moreover, agency workers questioned if guaranteed hours would influence the ways in which the agency organisation decide to hire and resource staff.

"When you go into agency work that is a zero hours contract and it's sort of assumed if you don't want a zero hours contract, don't work for an agency." – Agency work, Warehousing or Other, 56 to 64 years old

3.4 Negotiating extra hours & overtime

Over half (58%) of workers have been offered extra hours or overtime within their contract. Across contract types, workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (69%) are significantly more likely to have been offered overtime compared to the average of 58% of all workers in insecure work. It should be noted for the purpose of interpreting findings in this section, that workers on zero hours contracts cannot work overtime as they have no guaranteed hours in their contract, they can, however, work 'extra hours'. Workers were free to interpret 'extra hours' themselves. For example, this could include working a longer shift than originally planned. Workers with some form of guaranteed hours in their contract, such as **workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed** **workers on temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly** can work overtime. The survey question was worded to cover both extra hours or overtime, with no formal definitions or eligibility criteria. Participants may have interpreted in line with their own perceptions of extra hours/overtime. This contrast in understanding and language can be seen below through qualitative findings, with workers on zero hours contracts in retail describing an 'overtime culture' within their workplace despite not being able to contractually work overtime.

Figure 3.12: Have you ever been/were you ever offered extra hours/overtime in your main/previous employment?



Base: All workers in insecure work (n=2,381)

During the qualitative interviews, workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly reported that overtime was often communicated through a line manager or senior colleague and was usually offered due to colleagues being unwell or a last-minute change in scheduling.

"You'll be guaranteed for 16 hours, but You could cover for somebody if somebody is sick, you know, that day, if you're there, you could maybe stay for another few hours and that would become 18 hours. And then you will get paid." – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Warehousing or other, 36 to 45 years old

Preferences for advance notice of overtime are mixed; some are comfortable with very short notice (such as on the day or one day prior) if overtime became available. Arranged hobbies, family commitments, and childcare and other caring responsibilities are key drivers as to why workers expressed a desire for longer advance notice ahead of overtime.

"I need to know in advance if they want me to do extra hours. And I'd like to sort of know if, you know, a week or so in advance...they know that my situation is that I go out and about a lot on my days off" – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Hospital or other health services (e.g. GP surgery), 56 to 64 years old

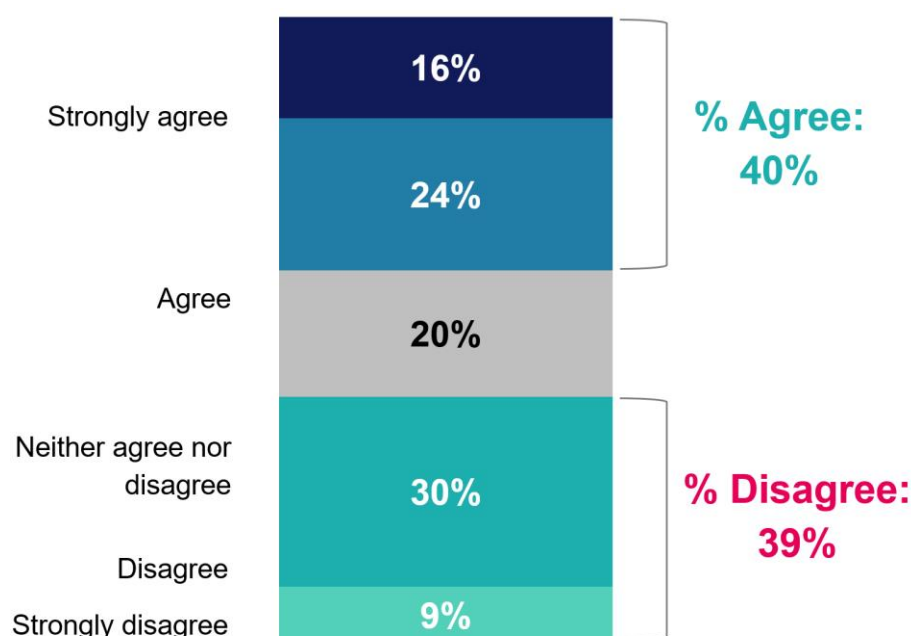
Younger workers aged 16 to 25 (64%) and workers in retail (78%) are both significantly more likely to have been offered extra hours or overtime when compared to the average of 58% across all workers in insecure work. Workers in retail and hospitality described in interviews an overtime culture which exists within their workplaces. Notably, **interpersonal relationships are seen to play an influential role over who was offered extra hours or overtime**, particularly where workers had positive relations with senior colleagues or their

employer. These positive relations, particularly when directly with their employer, made workers feel a degree of security and confidence they would be offered extra hours or overtime, however it also created additional pressure to be 'on call' and to accept any extra hours or overtime when it was offered.

“So, I was booked in for a five hour shift on the rota. But then, when I clock out, my boss is like, oh two hours more, and that's just on the day so you have to work a bit more. It's unexpected, and that's often the case in retail.” – Zero hours contract, retail, 26-35

Views among workers are split, as shown in Figure 3.13, with two fifths respectively agreeing (40%) and disagreeing (39%) that they are expected to accept extra hours or overtime when it was offered. Workers aged under 46 years old (44%) are significantly more likely to feel they are expected to accept extra hours or overtime than those aged over 46 years old (29%).

Figure 3.13: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When I am/was offered extra hours/ overtime, I am/was expected to accept it



Base: Those who were offered extra hours / overtime (n = 1,359 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Among younger workers in the qualitative interviews, additional pay was a key motivating factor for accepting extra hours or overtime, particularly where additional work could follow or extend scheduled shifts, meaning there was little requirement on workers to go out of their way to complete the extra hours or overtime. Workers who had previously negotiated their hours or shifts with their employer to suit their needs felt more comfortable accepting requests for extra hours or overtime.

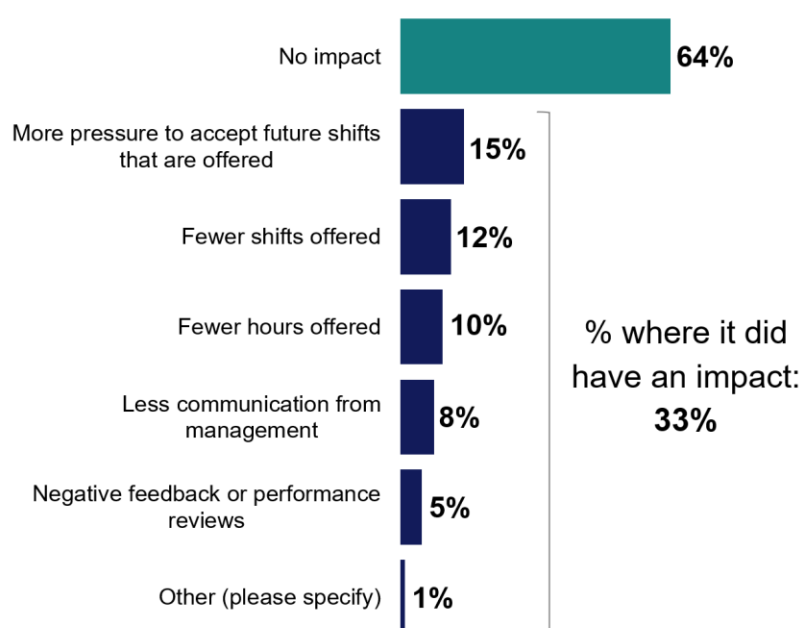
However, workers who reported in interviews having low confidence sometimes felt pressured to accept extra hours or overtime to demonstrate they are not letting others down.

"But at the same time, it can be like mentally distressful if you decline that request not because, legally, you have the responsibility that you have to be there, it's more like a moral standard. Like, morally speaking, you feel like, because you're part of the team ... you build this relationship with your colleagues or manager, and you feel like you left them alone. So, it's mental distress." - Zero hours contract, Retail, 26 to 35 years old

Overall, workers on zero hours contracts are not statistically more likely than those on other contract types to feel a pressure to accept extra hours, though **there was a larger minority of these workers who 'strongly agree' (20%) that they are expected to accept extra hours or overtime when it was offered, compared to 16% of workers who declined extra hours/overtime.**

As Figure 3.14 shows, around a third (33%) of workers report having experienced some form of impact as a result of turning down extra hours or overtime. Workers in hospital or other health sectors were significantly more likely to feel more pressure to accept future shifts that are offered (27%) when compared to 15% of workers who declined extra hours/overtime.

Figure 3.14: After turning down work/extra hours/overtime that was offered to you, did / have you experienced any of the following that you feel were due to not taking these additional hours?



Base: Those who declined extra hours/overtimes (n= 959 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers) – NB: multi-choice question so could select more than one answer to this question

The pressure on health and social care services to meet patient demand was noted in the qualitative interviews, and how this can regularly mean having shifts extended by their employer with inconsistent communication or notice of when this is going to happen.

*“They normally ring you and ask you will you do these extra hours? Or if it's just a couple, they stick them on the end of your rota without asking. I look at my rota on an evening, and I read all the notes from people I'm going to see to get up to date. The next morning, I wake up and I go to my rota and I refresh it and it's changed. And it'll change during the day. Somebody will disappear often at lunchtime, and a couple of people will go on at the end. So, when you think you're finishing at six, you're not. You're finishing at half seven.” – **Zero hours contract, Social care, 56 to 64 years old***

4 Regularity of work

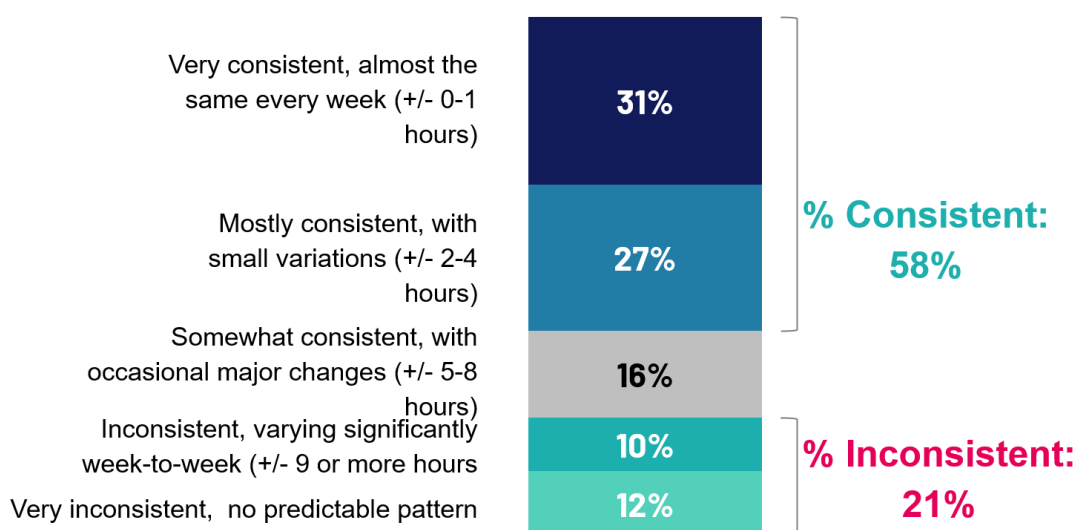
4.1 Regularity of work – key findings

- Over half (58%) of workers in insecure work who had worked in the previous 12 weeks reported their working hours being very or mostly consistent. This drops to 46% among workers on zero hours contracts.
- Among workers who report some form of guaranteed hours in their contract, 61% had worked more than their contracted hours in the previous 12 weeks. Among this group, just under half (48%) reported this as a weekly occurrence.
- Older workers, aged 56 to 64 years old (42%), are more likely to report taking planned holiday or time off as a reason for weeks out of work, compared to the average of 31% across all workers in insecure work who did not work the full 12-week period.
- Workers on zero hours contracts are significantly more likely to report a lack of available work or shifts as a reason for not working (36%), compared to the average of 25% of all workers in insecure work who did not work the full 12-week period.
- Just over half (53%) of workers in insecure work who had worked in the previous 12 weeks reported that variability in their working hours impacted their ability to cover living costs and other expenses. This rises to 68% among agency workers and 65% of those with dependent children.

4.2 Consistency in working hours

Over half (58%) of workers in insecure work who had worked in the past 12 weeks (before being surveyed) reported their working hours were consistent. Workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are significantly more likely (70%) to have worked consistently over the past 12 weeks compared to the overall average of 58% of all insecure workers. Workers who reported having no guaranteed hours in their contract each week and had worked in the past 12 weeks (before being surveyed) are significantly less likely (42%) to report that their working hours were consistent compared to workers in insecure work who reported having some form of guaranteed hours (63%).

Figure 4.1: Over the past 12 weeks, how would you describe the consistency of your working hours on a weekly basis?



Base: Current workers in insecure work who have worked at least one week in the past 12-weeks (n= 1,431 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

During qualitative interviews, workers with some form of guaranteed hours (based on their contract type) typically described their working patterns as 'consistent' and 'reasonable', feeling they were generally given reasonable advanced notice of scheduled hours or shifts. The main cited reason for a change in the consistency of hours was overtime, though this tended to be infrequent and did not influence their perception of the consistency of hours they worked. Workers highlighted that consistent hours were often key in planning personal time, family commitments, and travel to and from work.

"I want to have that consistency so that I can make plans and know exactly what I'm doing and know when I'm starting and finishing." – Temporary contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, School or college, 46 to 55 years old

By contrast, workers on zero hours contracts are significantly more likely to report inconsistent working patterns over the past 12 weeks (30%), compared to the average across all workers in insecure work (21%). In interviews, workers on zero hours contracts described experiencing inconsistent working patterns due to the variability in the demand for work within their business/industry, and as a result, there can be periods where there was not enough work to allocate between workers. Notably, workers in insecure work in restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services are significantly more likely to be on zero hours contracts (30%), when compared with the average among all workers in insecure work (20%).

A point of consideration is that some workers on zero hours contracts may prefer inconsistent weekly working patterns, where flexible hours or shifts allow them to work around existing commitments. One worker interviewed mentioned they had been offered more consistent and guaranteed hours through a permanent contract but had turned it down because they

preferred the flexibility of a zero hours contract. However, they mentioned that when they received fewer hours than they would like to work in financing their lifestyle, they ask for extra hours which their employer is often able to provide. As noted in Section 3.3 (Understanding guaranteed hours) workers on zero hours contracts who receive work consistently feel it is easier to negotiate when they both can or cannot work; however, they have little negotiating power without guaranteed hours in their contract if their employer decides to either cancel, move, or curtail their hours or shifts.

“The contract would lose that flexibility. Basically, that contract would be, this is your shift, you have to work it.” – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 36 to 45 years old

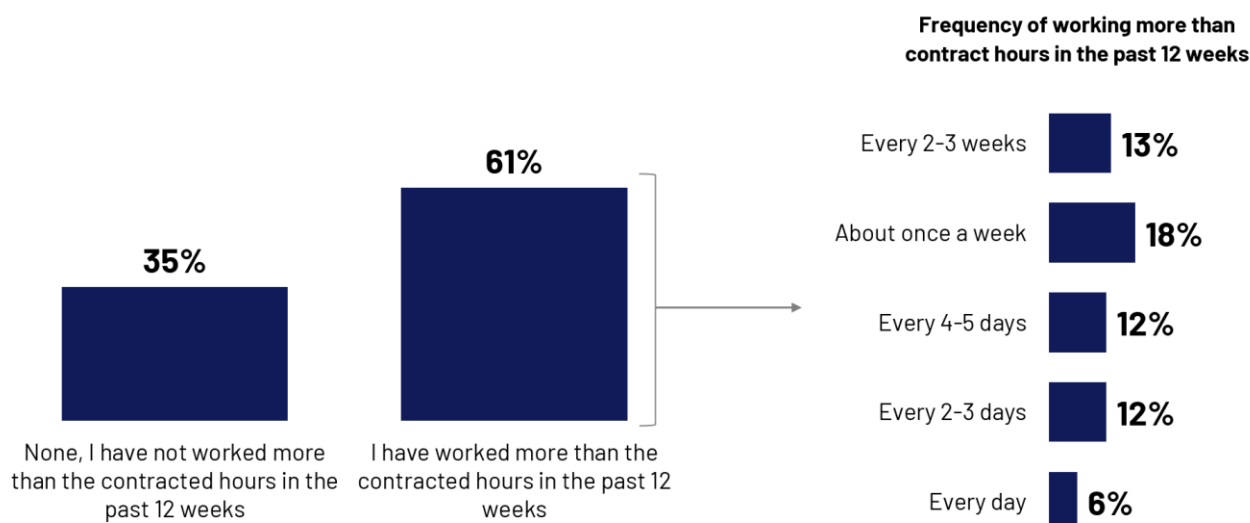
During interviews, some workers highlighted that poor shift management in notifying workers about upcoming hours or shifts contributed to inconsistencies in working patterns, particularly where short notice was prevalent due to mismanagement. Moreover, workers reported having to, in instances, chase their employer for confirmation of upcoming hours or shifts.

“Shift management is unpredictable and it’s unreliable. If I don’t chase them, I feel I could quite easily be forgotten.” – Zero hours contract, School or college, 46 to 55 years old

4.2.1 Working more than contracted hours

Among workers in insecure work with some form of guaranteed hours in their contract, over half (61%) had worked more than their contracted hours in the past 12 weeks (before being surveyed). As shown in Figure 4.2, among this group, just under half (48%) reported this as a weekly occurrence. Workers aged 46 and over are significantly more likely to report not having worked more than their contracted hours in the past 12 weeks (45%), compared to the average across all workers in insecure work (35%), as are workers in the schools or college (47%) sector. As mentioned in Section 3.2 (Extent to which insecure working arrangements suits lifestyles), those working in schools or colleges are significantly more likely (81%) to say their contract is suited to their lifestyle when compared to the average across all workers in insecure work (72%). There are no other significant differences by subgroups among workers.

Figure 4.2: In the past 12-weeks, roughly how often did you work more than your contracted hours



Base: Current workers in insecure work on minimum hour contracts¹³ who have worked at least one week in the past 12-weeks (n=846 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

4.3 Reasons for weeks without work and impact of variability in working hours

4.3.1 Reasons for weeks without working

Workers in insecure work were asked about the main reasons for weeks when they did not have any scheduled hours or shifts. Workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (36%) and older workers, aged 56 to 64 years old (42%), are significantly more likely to report taking planned holiday or time off, compared to 31% of current workers in insecure work who did not work the full 12-week period. This is consistent with findings in Section 3.2.3 (Better work life balance) where those on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (24%), and older workers aged 56 to 64 years old (32%), are significantly more likely to report a better work/life balance as a reason for taking an insecure hours contract when compared to the average across all workers in insecure work (20%).

¹³ Base excludes zero hours workers and includes all other contract types.

Figure 4.3: Thinking about the weeks where you did not work any hours, what were the main reasons for not working?



Base: Current workers in insecure work who did not work the full 12-week period (n=1,408 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

As described in Section 3.2.3 (Better work/life balance), older workers with permanent or temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly described in interviews that knowing when they would be working and how many hours/shifts were expected of them made it easier to plan their personal life and pursue personal hobbies or interests.

"I kind of like the idea of going into work on a Monday, Tuesday, doing the two days and then having the rest of the week off" – Permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, Hospital or other health services (e.g. GP surgery), 56 to 64 years old

By contrast, workers on zero hours contracts (36%) are significantly more likely to report a lack of available work or shifts as the reason for not working, compared to 25% of current workers in insecure work who did not work the full 12-week period. These findings are consistent with Section 4.2 (Consistency in working hours) where workers on zero hours contracts (30%) are significantly more likely to report inconsistent working patterns over the past 12 weeks, compared to the average across all insecure workers (21%). Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that in restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services where zero hours contracts are more prevalent (30% compared to the average of 20% of all workers in insecure work), workers on zero hours contracts can struggle to be allocated shifts.

"They have a lot of like students working there, like younger people. So, there's, there's like not always enough hours for everyone, I suppose. But I guess, you know, I get, I work at least I say in a month, probably 12 hours." –Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 16 to 25 years old

Agency workers are significantly more likely (32%) to report family or personal responsibilities (including childcare) as a reason for not working, compared to 15% of current workers in insecure work who did not work the full 12-week period. During interviews, agency workers mentioned they liked being able to set their own hours more effectively to fit around personal commitments such as family, in particular the ability to work either compressed or longer workdays to meet an hours threshold agreed with their employer. This meant that for some agency workers they could work their hours within fewer days to spend more time with family.

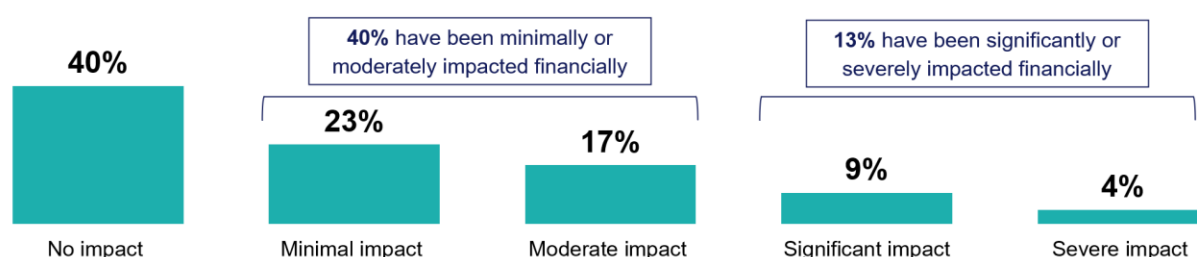
“It suits my lifestyle and it works with my family. We moved to be nearer to our family and having four days off a week makes that much better. I still do the hours, sort of do a minimum 12 hours a day, sometimes 15 hours a day quite regularly. I'm just getting them done in, in four days rather than five which gives me a much better weekend to do stuff with the family.” Agency worker, Warehousing or other, 56 to 64 years old

Workers in the health sector (23%) are also significantly more likely to report family or personal responsibilities (including childcare) as a reason for not working, compared to 15% of current workers in insecure work who did not work the full 12-week period.

4.3.2 Impact of variability in working hours

As shown in Figure 4.4, just over half (53%) of workers in insecure work who had worked in the past 12 weeks (before being surveyed), reported that variability in their working hours impacted their ability to cover living costs and other expenses.

Figure 4.4: To what extent has the variability in your working hours over the past 12 weeks had a direct impact on your ability to cover your living costs and other expenses?



Base: Current workers in insecure work who have worked at least one week in the past 12-weeks (n=1,431 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

There are notable variations in the impact of variability in working hours by contract type and age.

Impact by contract type

Workers on zero hours contracts (59%) and agency workers (68%) are significantly more likely to report their living costs and other expenses being impacted as a result of variability

in their working hours compared to workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (46%).

Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that workers with no guaranteed hours within their contract are more at risk of being financially impacted when working hours vary, as they have no minimum threshold for weekly hours or shifts worked they can rely on. Even when work proves to be consistent most of the time, when hours do vary, workers without guaranteed hours do not have the certainty they will receive pay for at least the minimum number of hours guaranteed in their contract.

“That is the fear that I live in that one day a rota will come out and instead of the 16, 24 hours I’m used to, I’m down to eight for no real reason.” – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 36 to 45 years old

As mentioned in Section 3.3 (Understanding guaranteed hours), during interviews when workers were presented with a hypothetical scenario in which they could receive an offer for guaranteed hours in their contract, **workers favoured the offer as having guaranteed hours helped with planning household expenses also reduced financial anxiety by giving certainty about pay for hours worked.**

“I would certainly consider it. I have to, you know, as a dad of two and the mortgage, I have to consider any kind of financial stability.” – Zero hours contract, Restaurant or hotel or other food and accommodation services, 36 to 45 years old

Impact by age

Older workers (56 to 64 years old) are significantly more likely (65%) to report that variability in their working hours **did not impact** their ability to cover living costs and other expenses, compared to the average of 40% of current workers in insecure work who have worked at least one week in the past 12-weeks. These findings are similar to those explored in Section 3.2.3 (Better work/life balance) in which older workers were more likely to report a greater household income than the average and Section 4.3.1 (Reasons for weeks without working) in which older workers are more likely to report taking planned holiday or time off as a reason for not working than average.

By contrast, workers aged 26 to 35 years old (62%) are significantly more likely to report that variability in their working hours **had impacted** their ability to cover living costs and other expenses, compared to the average of 53% of those in insecure work who have worked at least one week in the past 12-weeks.

Moreover, workers aged 26 to 35 years old are more likely to report being significantly impacted in their ability to cover living costs and other expenses (15% compared to 9% of workers in insecure work) or severely impacted (11% compared to 4% of all workers in insecure work).

Impact among those with dependent children

Lastly, those with dependent children are significantly more likely (65%) to say they had been impacted financially by variability in their working hours compared to the average of all workers in insecure work (53%). This is likely reflective of the wider social and economic costs associated with childcare arrangements.

5 Shift management

5.1 Shift management – Key findings

- Most workers in insecure work find out about their forthcoming shifts through online channels, emails or via text and work group chats.
- The period of advanced notice varies. Whilst most workers in insecure work are aware of their hours or shifts at least a few days beforehand, among those interviewed, there was strong support for a mandatory one week's notice as it would greatly enhance workers' ability to plan both personal and work commitments.
- Workers on zero hours contracts (41%) are more likely to have had shifts cancelled with less than seven days' notice compared to the average of 33% across all workers in insecure work.
- The hospitality sector shows more unpredictability in terms of shift patterns with a higher proportion of short notice shift cancellations compared to other sectors (44% had shifts cancelled with less than seven days' notice). This volatility notably affects younger workers, particularly those aged 16 to 25 years old, as a significant portion of this age group is employed within the hospitality sector.
- More than half of workers (59%) do not typically receive any compensation when a shift is cancelled, rising to 71% for those on zero hours contracts. Separately, among those experiencing short-notice changes/cancellations, workers on zero hours contracts (61%) are more likely than workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (49%) to report impacts on their ability to budget for household expenses.
- Nearly half (47%) of workers in insecure work would consider four or more days' notice for shift cancellations to be reasonable; however, in practice, 60% receive two days' notice or less.
- Two-thirds (65%) of workers reported that short notice changes or cancellations had impacted their ability to plan or manage their personal life. This was followed by financial implications including household finances and their ability to budget for household or other expenses (both at 57%).

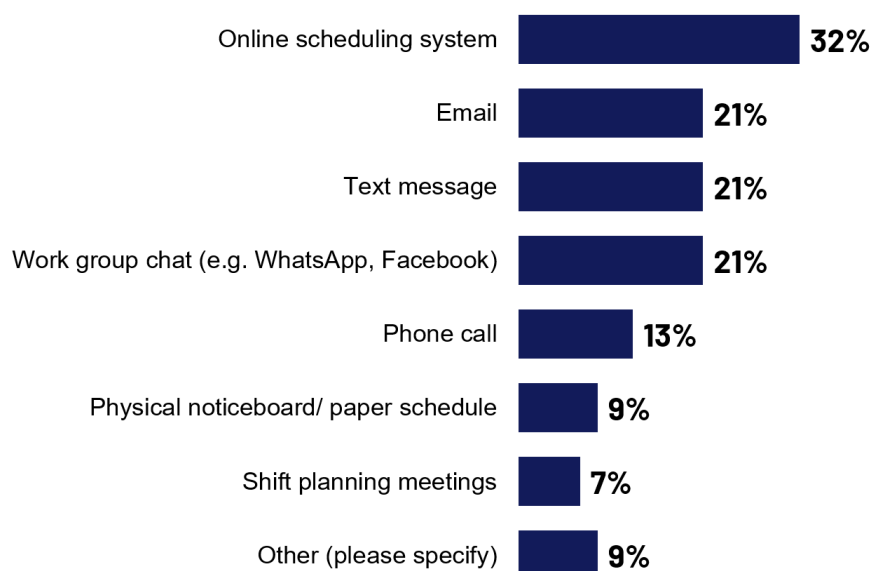
5.2 Communicating upcoming shifts

This section of the report details the findings about the amount of notice workers in insecure work receive about their working hours or shifts, including how this is communicated with them. The survey specifically asked all respondents to think about the main organisation that they have sourced work from. The definition of 'main' in this instance was the organisation where they had worked the majority of their hours during the last 12-weeks (at the time of the interview). Again, it was stressed that if they had multiple jobs, we were interested in the one where they worked the most.

As shown below in Figure 5.1, workers in insecure work most commonly find out about their forthcoming shifts through an online scheduling system (32%), followed by email, text message, and work group chat (each 21%). Around one in ten workers heard about upcoming work via 'Other' means. This included options such as workers in insecure work having

consistent working hours each week (without need for communication), self-management of own working hours, verbal communications with supervisors or managers and having fixed or contracted hours.

Figure 5.1: How do you typically find out about your upcoming working hours or shifts?



Base: Current workers in insecure work (n=1,507 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers) NB: multi-choice question so could select more than one answer to this question

Communication of shift patterns varied by contract type. Those on a fixed-term contract are more likely than the average across all workers in insecure work to find out about upcoming shifts via an online scheduling system (51%, small base). Agency workers are more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to find out about shifts via email (32%, small base), however their most prevalent channel of communication was also an online scheduling system. Those on zero hours contracts are more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to receive communications via text message (28%), which was also the most common category for that group.

Those working in retail are more likely than the average across all workers in insecure work to hear about upcoming shifts from an online scheduling system (56%), those working in bank or financial (43%, small base) and school or college sectors (36%) are disproportionately more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to hear about work via email, and those working in distribution are the most likely sector to hear about upcoming shifts via text message (36%, small base).

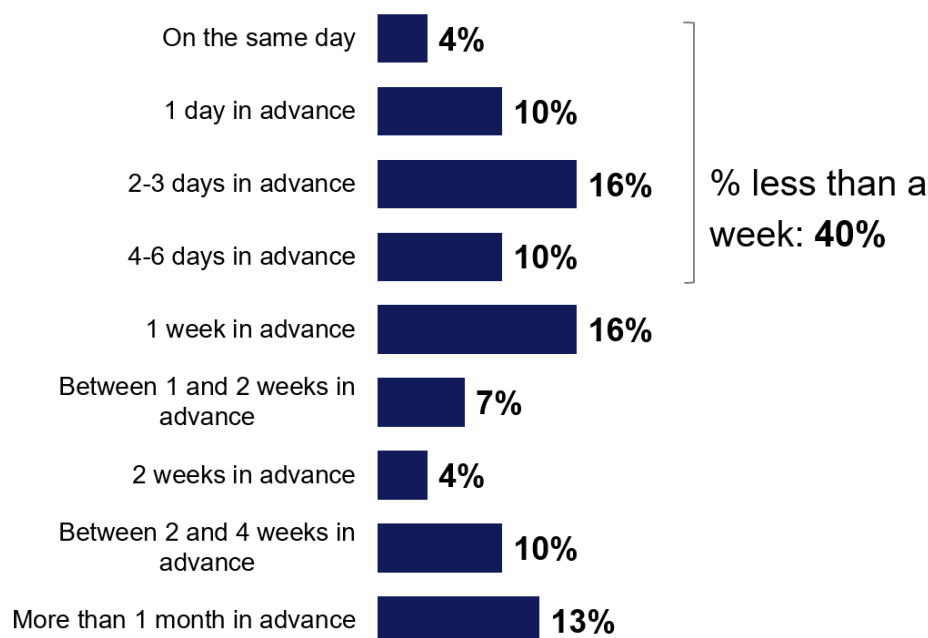
5.3 Advance and reasonable notice of hours of shifts

5.3.1 Advance and reasonable notice of hours or shifts

There was significant variation among workers in insecure work on the advance notice of upcoming working hours or shifts, shown in Figure 5.2. Most workers are made aware of their

hours or shifts at least a few days beforehand, with the most prevalent periods being one week in advance (16%) and two to three days in advance (16%).

Figure 5.2: How far in advance are your working hours or shifts usually offered to you?



Base: Current workers in insecure work (n=1,507 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

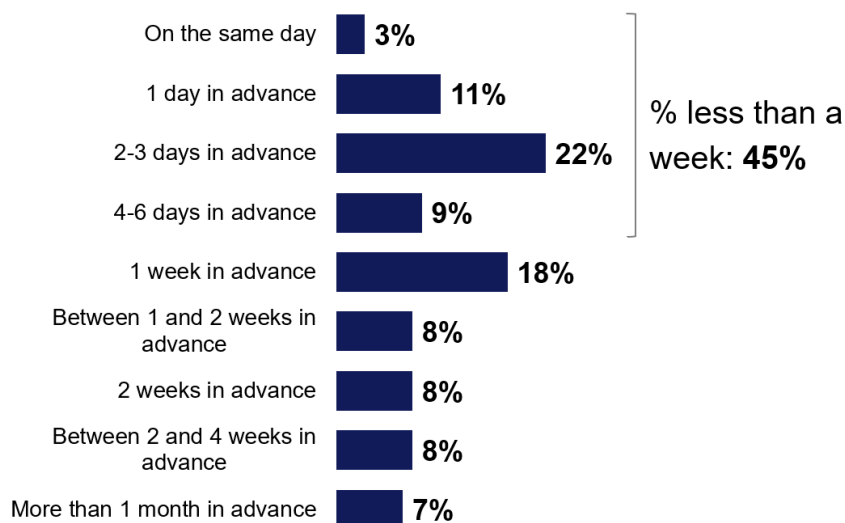
Agency workers typically received the least amount of notice with 31% (small base) receiving one day's notice of hours or shifts which was a significantly higher proportion than the average across all workers in insecure work, where 10% received notice one day in advance of their hours or shifts. Those on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are given more notice of hours or shifts than other contract types and are more likely than the average across all workers in insecure work to receive more than one month's advance notice (20% compared to the 13% average).

Those working in school or college sectors, and those working in health, are more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to receive more than one month's advance notice (24% and 22% respectively, compared to the 13% average). Those working in banking or financial sectors (38%, small base), social care (32%, small base) and hospitality (25%) all tended to receive less notice, being more likely than average across all workers in insecure work (16%) to receive two to three days advance notice.

Workers' desire for more notice

Workers were asked what they would consider to be a reasonable amount of notice to find out about working hours or shifts. The results are shown in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3: What would you consider to be a reasonable amount of notice to find out your working hours or shifts?



Base: Current workers in insecure work (n=1,507 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Overall, 45% of workers in insecure work would consider receiving less than one week's notice of their working hours reasonable, compared to 49% who felt one week or longer was reasonable notice.

Whilst agency workers most commonly reported receiving one day's notice of shifts, almost half preferred to receive two to three days' notice (47%, small base). This proportion was more than double the average across all workers in insecure work (22%). Those with zero hours contracts most frequently preferred receiving one week's notice (21%) but were more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to be happy receiving one day advance notice (14% compared to 11%). Those on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, tended to receive the most notice of hours or shifts and are also more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to consider 2-4 weeks (12%) and more than one month's notice (9%) reasonable.

Those working in health, and those working in school or college sectors, were more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to receive more than one month's notice, are also more likely to consider this notice period reasonable (14% and 10% respectively). Those working in banks or finance, were more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to receive two or three days' notice of their working hours or shifts (38%, small base and 16% respectively). Additionally, 51% considered this to be a reasonable notice period, higher than average across all workers in insecure work (22%).

Exploring scenario of reasonable notice

During qualitative interviews, workers in insecure work were asked to consider a hypothetical scenario in which employers had to give at least one week's notice of shifts. The scenario presented was as follows:

I'd like you to consider a hypothetical scenario in which employers had to give at least one week's notice of your shifts. How might this kind of change to reasonable notice of your shifts affect your decision to take an insecure hours contract?

Participants typically felt that one week's notice was fair and could enhance their ability to plan personal and work commitments and improve their employer-worker relationships and interactions.

"I think that's amazing if that's the case because in my experience it's often not even 24 hours. If someone can deliver one weeks' notice prior, I think that's just amazing that that can really help with a lot for people like me." – Zero hours contract, Retail, 26 to 35 years old

"From an employer's perspective I think is a positive thing because you can get the staff rota nailed down. The reality, with these things is that real-life quite often intervenes." – Agency worker, Financial service, 56 to 64 years old

Workers in insecure work with caring responsibilities acknowledged that having one week's notice was beneficial. However, they expressed a preference for even more notice, highlighting how care plans could change with little warning. These participants felt that having an open and transparent dialogue with workers was as important as giving reasonable notice

When asked in the survey if they had extra notice for their working hours or shifts, to what extent would they be more or less likely to take on an additional job, two in five (39%) reported they would be more likely. A similar proportion (38%) said it would make no difference, and one in ten (11%) would be less likely to take on the work with more notice.

5.3.2 Receiving less notice of hours or shifts than normal

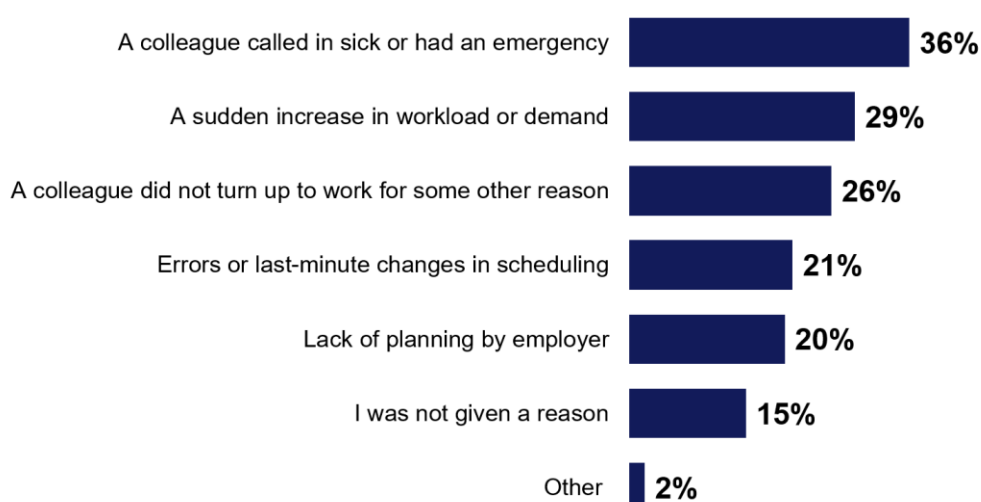
Workers who received one day or more notice for upcoming hours or shifts were asked how often they typically receive less notice than normal. Around one in three sometimes received less notice (35%), whilst one in ten (10%) frequently did. In contrast, a third rarely received less notice (33%) than usual and one in five (20%) never received less notice than normal.

In line with previous findings, those on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly tended to have more stable notice periods when compared to average across all workers in insecure work, with one quarter (26%) never receiving less notice than normal.

Similarly, those working in a school or college are more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to never receive less notice than normal (31%).

Those who had received less notice about hours or shifts than normal were asked why (shown in Figure 5.4). The most common reason was a colleague being sick or having an emergency (36%), followed by a sudden increase in workload or demand (29%) and a colleague not turning up (26%).

Figure 5.4: For which of the following reasons, if any, have you been given less than your usual notice about your working hours or shifts?



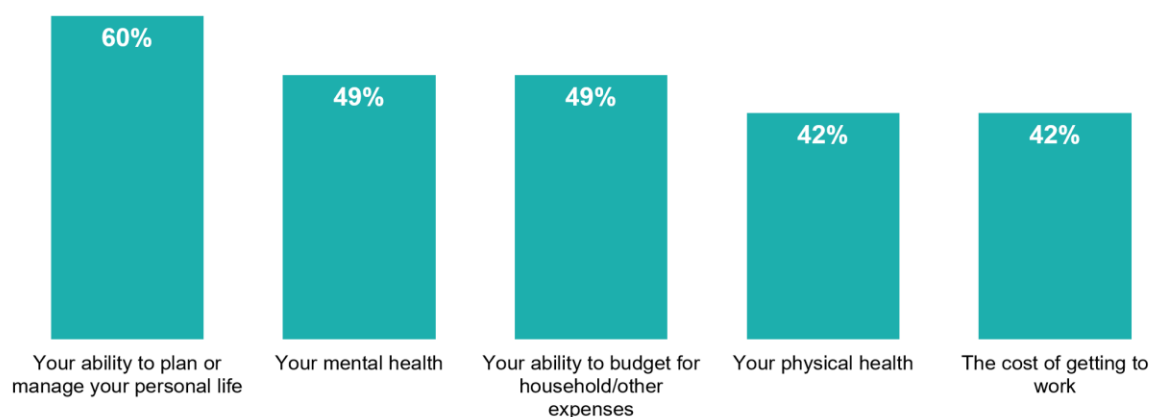
Base: Current workers in insecure work who received less notice than usual (n= 936 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers) NB: multi-choice question so could select more than one answer to this question

Compared to the average across all workers in insecure work, agency workers are significantly more likely to receive less notice due to a colleague not turning up for reasons other than sickness or emergency (44%, small base). Those on zero hours contracts are more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to report issues related to employer errors, including errors or last-minute changes in scheduling (26%) and lack of planning by their employer (25%).

5.3.3 Impact of short notice hours or shifts

Workers in insecure work were asked if over the past 12 weeks, short notice of hours or shifts had negatively impacted them. As shown in Figure 5.5, three in five (60%) reported that short notice had impacted their ability to plan or manage their personal life (combining those who noted a 'Minimal impact', 'Moderate impact' or 'Significant impact'). The next most common impacts were on their mental health (49%) and their ability to budget for household or other expenses (49%).

Figure 5.5: Over the past 12 weeks, what impact, if any, has short notice of working hours or shifts had on the following?



Base: Current workers in insecure work (n=1,507 – NB: multi-choice question so participants could select more than one answer to this question)

Workers with children were also asked whether short notice of hours or shifts had impacted their childcare arrangements. Around three-quarters reported that short notice impacted their ease of arranging childcare (78%) and the cost of childcare (75%).

Agency workers and those on zero hours contracts are disproportionately impacted by short notice. Almost three in four agency workers (73%, small base) experienced impacts to their ability to plan or manage their personal life, and around three in five (63%, small base) experienced impacts to the costs of getting to work, both significantly higher than average across all workers in insecure work (60% and 42% respectively). Almost two in three workers on zero hours contracts reported that short notice had impacted their ability to manage their personal life (64%) and over half (56%) reported it had impacted their mental health, both higher than average across all workers in insecure work. These disproportionate impacts are likely because workers on these contracts are also more likely to receive short notice hours or shifts compared with those working on other contract types.

5.4 Shift cancellations

5.4.1 Cancellations and compensation

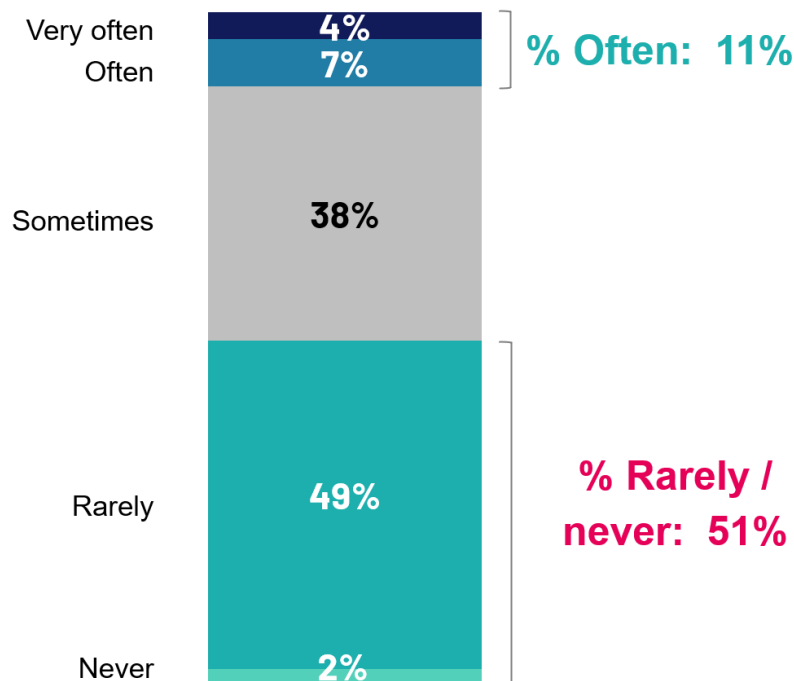
One in three workers in insecure work (33%) had experienced cancellation of hours or shift cancellations with seven days' notice or less. **Compared to the average across all workers in insecure work, short-notice cancellations are more common for those on zero hours contracts (41%), those working in the hospitality sector (44%) and those aged 16 to 25 years old (41%).** As seen in Chapter 3 a higher proportion of younger workers (aged 16 to 25 years old) work in hospitality (33%) so this volatility in shift cancellations notably affects them.

Of those workers who had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less, this was generally not a regular experience. As shown in Figure 5.6, for half (51%), this happened rarely or

never, and for almost two in five (38%) it occurred sometimes. However, for one in ten (11%), it happened often or very often.

Compared to the average across all workers in insecure work, those working in the hospitality sector were more likely to experience short notice of working hours or shift cancellations (44% compared to 33%).

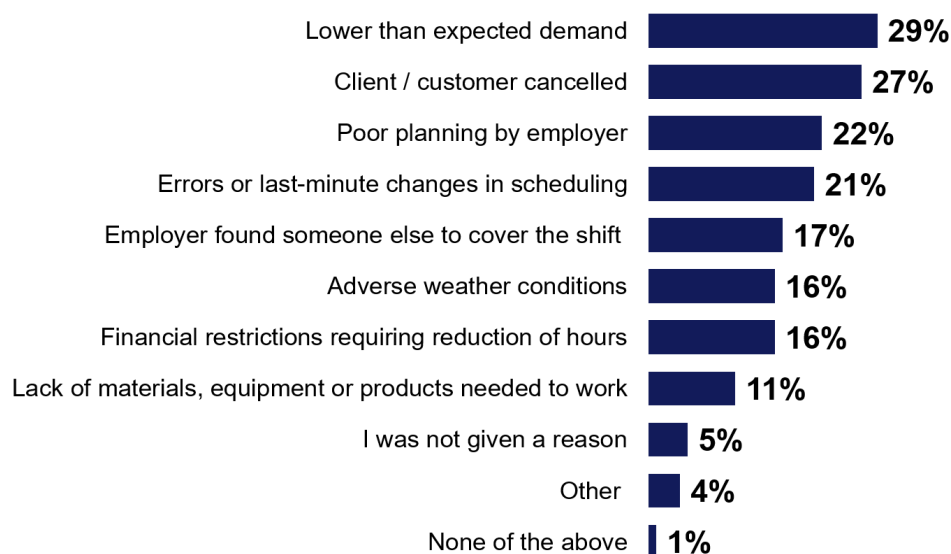
Figure 5.6: You mentioned your working hours or shifts have been cancelled with seven days' notice or less. How often does this tend to happen?



Base: Current workers in insecure work who have had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less (n=448 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Workers who had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less were asked why this had occurred (Figure 5.7). Lower than expected demand was the most common reason, selected by three in ten (29%). This was followed by a client or customers cancelling (27%). Over one in five also selected reasons related to employer errors, including poor planning by their employer (22%) and errors or last-minute changes in scheduling (21%).

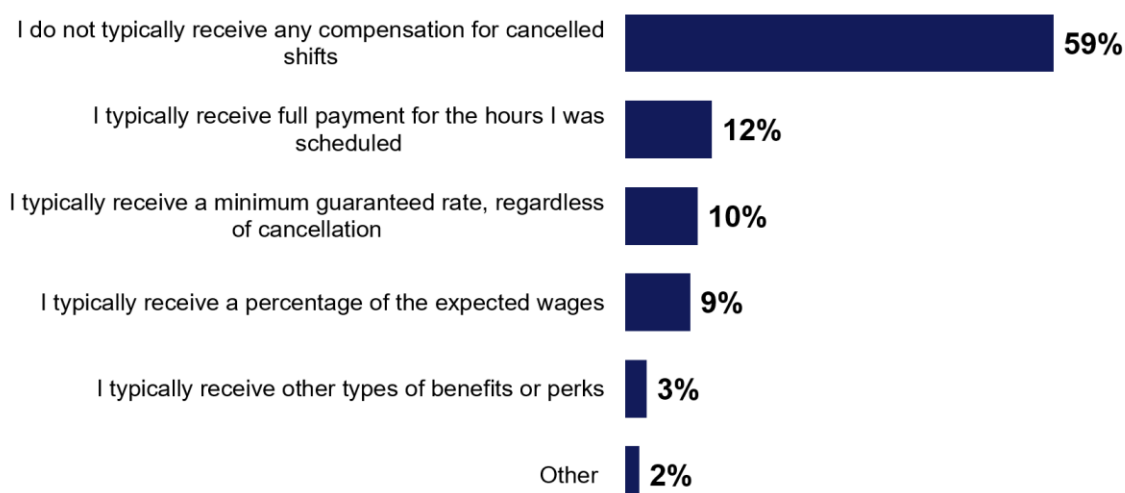
Figure 5.7: For which of the following reasons, if any, have you had your working hours or shifts cancelled?



Base: Current workers in insecure work who have had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less (n=448)

Of those workers had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less, nearly three in five (59%) did not receive any compensation for cancelled shifts. Around one in ten received full payment for the scheduled hours (12%), a minimum guaranteed rate regardless of the cancellation (10%) or a percentage of the expected wages (9%), shown in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8: When you have had a shift cancelled, how have you been typically compensated, if at all?



Base: Current workers in insecure work who have had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less (n=448 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Across workers who had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less (59%), those on zero hours contracts are more likely to receive no compensation (71%). Comparatively, those on

permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are more likely than average across workers who had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less to receive a minimum guaranteed rate (21%, small base).

Exploring scenario of short notice payments

During qualitative interviews, workers in insecure work were asked to consider a hypothetical scenario in which employers were required to give short notice payments to their employees. The scenario¹⁴ presented was as follows:

I'd like you to consider a hypothetical scenario in which employers were required to give short notice payments to employees. For example, if their working hours or shifts were cancelled, moved, or curtailed (reduced) at short notice and a higher payment amount if they were cancelled, moved, or curtailed (reduced) at very short notice. How might this kind of change to short notice payments affect your decision to take an insecure hours contract?

In response to the scenario, **workers felt strongly that knowing they would receive short notice payments would make them more confident to work insecure hours contracts**, highlighting the benefits of protection against unexpected income loss from changes and cancellations. **Short notice payments were described as particularly significant when they ensured that changes and cancellations did not disrupt workers' abilities to pay for household expenses or childcare.** Those interviewed felt these payments could allow workers to financially plan and have peace of mind about being paid. However, they also raised concerns that short notice payments could put pressure on small businesses and might deter some from offering insecure hours contracts. They also felt very short notice payments might influence how employers organise upcoming shifts.

"It would make me want to work for a variable hours contract still, it would make me think less about leaving, which I'm thinking about because of those very things." – Zero hours contract, Social care, 56 to 64 years old

"Managers will have that at the back of their mind so they'll be extra careful with booking shifts and stuff... potentially you will get less hours." – Zero hours contract, Retail, 26 to 35 years old

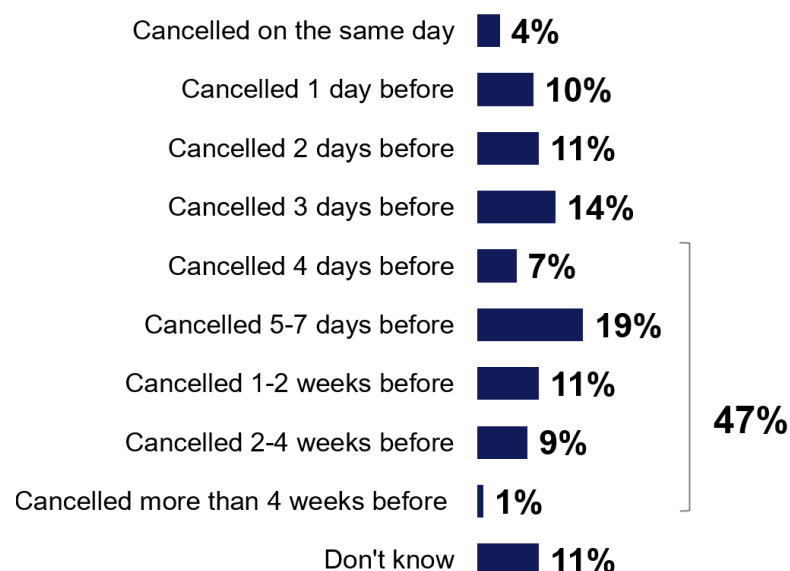
5.4.2 Actual and reasonable notice for cancellations

Workers were asked what they consider to be reasonable notice for a cancellation of their working hours or shifts (Figure 5.9). Almost half (47%) would consider 4 or more days' notice

¹⁴ In the following scenario the term 'very short notice' does not have a defined definition or time period to allow qualitative participants to interpret the term in relation to their own lived experiences.

reasonable (composite of '4 days', '5-7 days', '1-2 weeks', '2-4 weeks' and 'more than 4 weeks'). A small proportion, 14%, considered one day or same day notice to be reasonable.

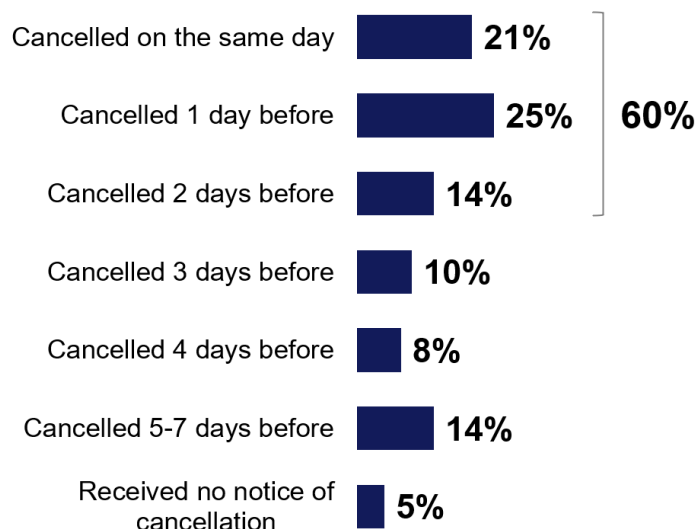
Figure 5.9: What would you consider to be a reasonable amount of notice about the cancellation of your working hours or shifts?



Base: Current workers in insecure work (n=1,507 - Chart does not include prefer not to say answers)

As shown in Figure 5.9, almost half (47%) of workers in insecure work, would consider 4 or more days notice about the cancellation of working hours or shifts as reasonable (composite of '4 days', '5-7 days', '1-2 weeks', '2-4 weeks' and 'more than 4 weeks'). However, as shown in Figure 5.10, 60% of workers in insecure work typically receive 2 days or less notice for the cancellation of working hours or shifts. This suggests that **workers generally receive less notice for shift cancellations than what they would consider reasonable.**

Figure 5.10: And how much notice have you typically received about the cancellation of your working hours or shifts?



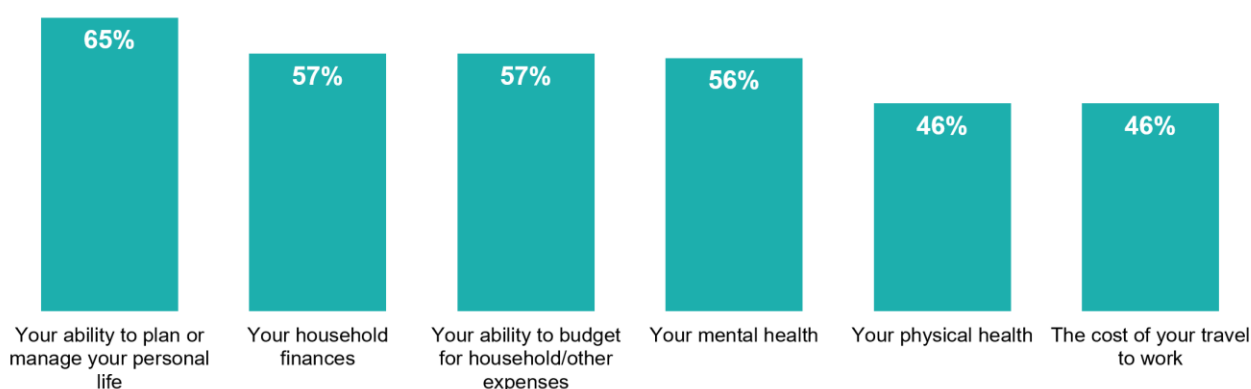
Base: Current workers in insecure work who have had shifts cancelled with seven days' notice or less (n=448) - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

5.5 Impact of shift changes and cancellations

This section of the report includes those who had experienced changes to their working hours or shifts (by which we referred to changes to the time a shift starts and ends or changes to the number of hours worked) and also shift cancellations.

Workers who had shifts changed or cancelled at short notice were asked what impact this had on them, if any. As shown in Figure 5.11, almost two-thirds (65%) of workers reported that short notice changes or cancellations had impacted their ability to plan or manage their personal life. This was followed by financial implications including household finances and their ability to budget for household or other expenses (both at 57%).

Figure 5.11: Over the past 12 weeks, what impact, if any, have changes or cancellations of shifts had on the following



Base: Current workers in insecure work who have had shifts changed or cancelled with seven days'

notice or less (n=716) – NB: multi-choice question so could select more than one answer to this question

Workers with children were also asked whether short notice changes or cancellations had impacted their childcare arrangements. Large majorities reported that this had impacted the cost of childcare (87%) and their ease of arranging childcare (86%).

Compared to those on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly, those on zero hours contracts are more likely to report that changes and cancellations had impacted their ability to budget for household expenses (61% compared to 49%).

Age was a factor in the impacts of changes or shift cancellations. Compared to the average across all workers in insecure work, those aged 26 to 35 years old are more likely to experience impacts on their:

- Ability to budget for household expenses (71%, small base)
- Household finances (70%, small base)
- Physical health (70%, small base)
- Mental health (71%, small base)

Similarly, those in the 36 to 45 year old age bracket are more likely than average across all workers in insecure work to experience impacts on their:

- Ability to budget for household expenses (77%)
- Ability to plan or manage personal life (76%)
- Household finances (70%)
- Physical health (59%)

Those in the qualitative interviews who worked in social care, or in warehousing or distribution or delivery who experienced very short notice of changes or cancellations to shifts mentioned the loss of personal time due to travel, particularly if they were en route to a client when they were informed of the change or cancellation. Those in social care also commented on the impact of petrol costs and time spent waiting between appointments if scheduling changes were very short notice.

"You're not paid for your traveling time... and that traveling time can be three hours. So not only are you stuck on the side of the road waiting, that you're not paid for your petrol to get from one to the other either." – Zero hours contract, Social care, 56 to 64 years old

6 Agency workers

6.1 Agency workers – key findings

- Over six in ten (63%) agency workers agreed that working for an agency was well suited to them and their lifestyle.
- A larger proportion of agency workers are typically working in the following sectors than other contract types, construction (28%), warehousing and distribution (27%), social care (19%), hospital and other health service (16%) and schools/colleges (12%).
- Most agency workers (70%) are signed up with one or two agencies (45% with one and 25% with two). Among those currently signed up, 62% had received work from one or two agencies in the last 12 weeks, though 26% had received no work at all.
- Agency workers typically work for one organisation at a time, though around one in five (22%) have not had any assignments in the past 12 weeks. 28% of all agency workers report receiving one assignment in the past 12 weeks.
- Half of agency workers (50%) are contacted by the agency regarding shifts, 27% by the client, and 16% by both.

6.2 Working for an agency

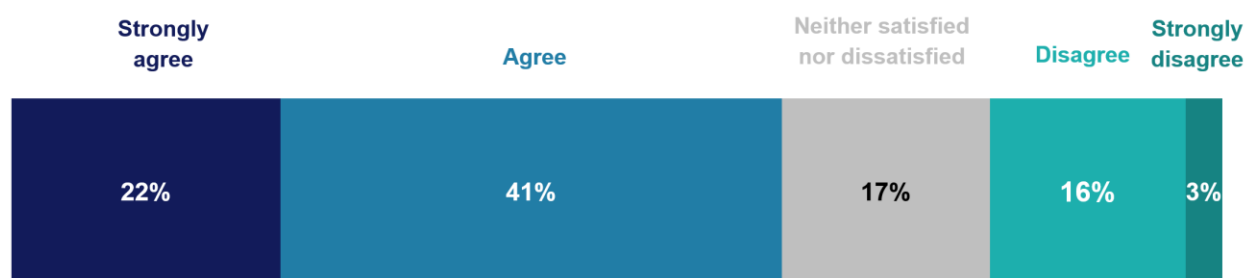
The survey included some additional questions specifically asked to agency workers.

Amongst agency workers surveyed, agency workers most commonly reported working in the following sectors, construction (28%), warehousing and distribution (27%), social care (19%), hospital and other health service (16%) and schools/colleges (12%).

Workers currently signed up with an agency were asked who generally contacted them about their scheduled shifts or upcoming changes in shifts. Half (50%) received communication from the agency directly, whilst around one in four (27%) heard from the organisation or individual directly, and 16% heard from both. The remaining 1% selected 'Other'.

As shown in Figure 6.1, over six in ten (63%) of agency workers agreed that agency work is well suited to them and their lifestyle (composite of 'strongly agree' and 'agree'). Almost one in five (19%) disagreed that agency work suited them and their lifestyle (composite of 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree') and 17% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 6.1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Working for an agency is well suited to me and my lifestyle**



Base: Agency workers currently signed up with an agency (n=244)

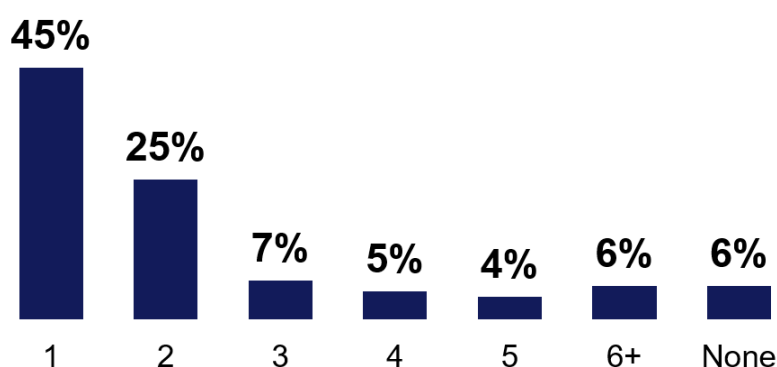
This was generally corroborated in the qualitative interviews, as illustrated by one participant:

"It suits my lifestyle, and it works with my family. We moved to be nearer to our family and having four days off a week makes that much better." – **Agency worker, Warehousing or Other, 56 to 64 years old**

6.3 Frequency of work and assignments

Most agency workers (70%) are signed up with one or two agencies (shown in Figure 6.2). A small proportion (10%) are signed up with five or more. The proportion who answered none (6%) were all previous agency workers.

Figure 6.2: How many agencies are you signed up with?

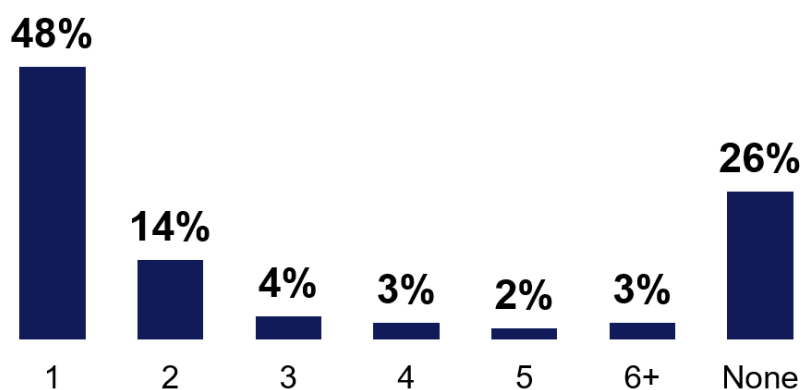


Base: Agency workers (n=269 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Agency workers who are signed up to just one agency are most likely working for a school or college (24%). Those agency workers who worked for more than one agency are typically working in the following sectors: construction (19%), hospital or other health service (16%), social care (12%) or warehousing or distribution or delivery (12%).

Of those currently signed up with an agency, around six in ten (62%) had received work from one or two agencies in the last 12 weeks (Figure 6.3). However, one in four (26%) had not received work from any agencies in the last 12 weeks.

Figure 6.3: In the past 12 weeks, how many agencies have provided you with work?



Base: Agency workers currently signed up with an agency (n=244 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

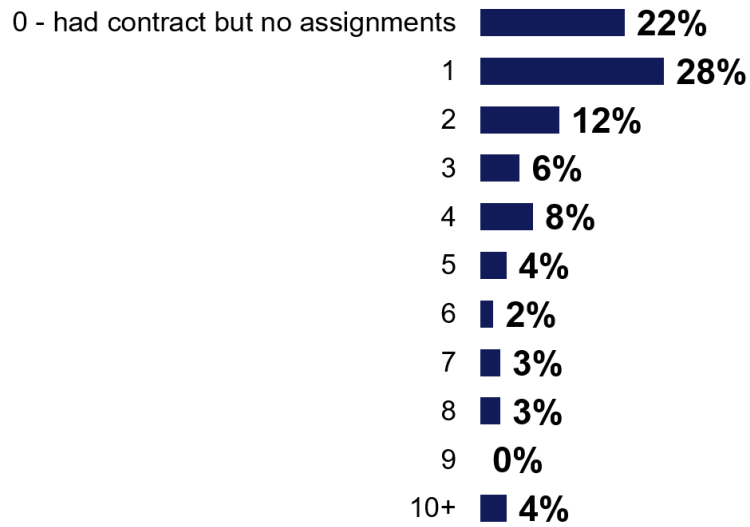
Those agency workers who had received work from one agency are most likely working in a hospital or other health service (18%), social care (18%) or school or college (18%). Whereas those agency workers who had received work from more than one organisation are comparatively more likely to be working in the construction industry (24%).

Those who had received no work are comparatively more likely to be working in a school or college (24%, small base).

Around half of workers currently signed up with an agency (48%) provided work for one organisation in the past 12 weeks.

In terms of number of assignments worked on, almost three in ten agency workers (28%) had received one assignment in the past 12 weeks and 12% had received two assignments (Figure 6.4). Three in ten (30%) received more than two assignments, however, around one in five (22%) received none.

Figure 6.4: In the past 12-weeks, how many organisations / individuals have you provided work for?



Base: Agency workers currently signed up with an agency (n=244 - Chart does not include any don't know/prefer not to say answers)

Those agency workers who had received no assignments are most likely working in a school or college (35%, small base).

7 Conclusions and considerations

Conclusions

The study reveals a complex landscape where flexibility and precarity intersect, **with workers navigating both benefits and challenges** inherent for workers in insecure work. 44% of workers in insecure work are young people aged 16 to 25 years old, often balancing work with education, while others use these contracts to manage caring responsibilities, health conditions, or transition towards retirement. Just under a fifth (18%) of workers in insecure work reported this was normal for their line of work and 13% reported that a lack of positions with guaranteed hours available was a reason for them to choose insecure work. This diversity of circumstances underscores that **insecure contracts serve markedly different purposes across the workforce**.

Contract Suitability and Worker Preferences

Just under three quarters (72%) of workers in insecure work agree their work arrangement is well suited to their lifestyle. This satisfaction is particularly pronounced among those with some form of guaranteed hours – permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (79%) and temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (80%) – compared to workers on zero hours contracts (68%). The qualitative findings reveal **that age and industry type are critical factors shaping these preferences** with younger workers valuing flexibility around education while older workers seek work/life balance or supplementary retirement income.

However, this apparent satisfaction masks significant challenges. **The research highlights a range of concerns and impacts of zero hours contracts**: 30% report inconsistent working patterns over 12 weeks (compared to 21% average of all workers in insecure work), where unpredictability creates substantial financial and budgeting pressures. Almost half (46%) of workers with dependent children report difficulties managing work alongside childcare responsibilities.

Balancing Flexibility and Security

Findings reveal how different groups balance flexibility and security differently. While nearly a quarter (23%) of all workers in insecure work cite greater flexibility as a reason for their contract choice (rising to 27% for workers on a zero hours contract and reaching 31% for those working in hospitality), more than half (53%) of all workers in insecure work report that income variability directly impacts their ability to cover living costs, rising to 68% among agency workers.

Young workers show particular tensions – 36% of those aged 16 to 25 years old experience difficulty managing work alongside education (versus 24% average of all workers

in insecure work), yet 62% chose these contracts specifically to accommodate study. Older workers aged 56 to 64 years old show different patterns, with 23% disagreeing they want guaranteed hours (versus 18% average of all workers in insecure work) and 42% taking time off for planned holidays (versus 31% average of all workers in insecure work), suggesting greater control over their working patterns.

Parents face compounded challenges – 46% of workers in insecure work with dependent children report difficulties managing caring responsibilities, 78% report impacts on childcare arrangement ease, and 75% on childcare costs when shifts change at short notice.

Guaranteed Hours confusion

The study suggests that there is **misunderstanding from workers about guaranteed hours**. Despite zero hours contracts, by definition, offering no guaranteed hours, 41% of workers on zero hours contracts report having some form of guaranteed hours in their contract. This apparent misperception appears to stem from workers experiencing consistent work patterns developing a sense of "unofficial guaranteed hours" through discussions or established patterns, despite lacking contractual protection.

A desire for greater security is evident, with 58% of all workers in insecure work wanting consistent and guaranteed hours matching their usual working patterns. Among these, half (50%) would prefer weekly guarantees, while 7% prefer fortnightly and 21% monthly. Workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly show even stronger preference at 68%. The qualitative interviews showed workers favouring guaranteed hours as a means to plan household expenses, reduce financial anxiety, and achieve greater stability. Notably, even when workers experience consistency most of the time, the **absence of guaranteed hours can leave them vulnerable when disruptions occur**.

There is some mismatch between guaranteed and actual hours: 26% of workers in insecure work, excluding zero hours contract workers, who are guaranteed 1-8 hours typically work over 11 hours weekly, while 31% of those guaranteed 9-16 hours typically work over 21 hours weekly. This represents a significant minority who are consistently working over their contractually guaranteed hours.

Shift Management, reasonable notice and compensation

The research reveals considerable variation in how shifts are managed and communicated. Most workers receive at least a few days' notice of their shifts (40% of workers in insecure work typically receive six days or less notice for their upcoming shifts). A similar proportion (45%) of workers currently in insecure work consider less than a week's notice reasonable to find out about their working hours or shifts. However, qualitative findings showed that once presented with a hypothetical offer of at least one week's notice of shifts, workers felt this was fair and could enhance their ability to plan personal and work commitments.

With shifts cancellations, workers typically receive less notice than what they consider reasonable – while 47% consider four or more days reasonable for cancellations, 60% actually receive two days or less.

Workers on zero hours contracts are particularly disadvantaged, with 41% experiencing shift cancellations with less than seven days' notice (compared to 33% of workers in insecure work). The hospitality sector shows even higher rates at 44% reporting shift cancellations.

With regards to compensation and potential financial strain, **59% of all workers in insecure work receive no payment for cancelled shifts**, rising to 71% for workers on a zero hours contract. Around one in ten workers in insecure work received full payment for the scheduled hours if cancelled (12%), a minimum guaranteed rate regardless of the cancellation (10%) or a percentage of the expected wages (9%).

The qualitative research identified that **workers felt strongly that knowing they would receive short notice payments would make them more confident to work insecure hours contracts**, highlighting the benefits of protection against unexpected income loss from changes and cancellations. **Short notice payments were described as particularly significant when they ensured that changes and cancellations did not disrupt workers' abilities to pay for household expenses or childcare**. Those interviewed felt these payments could allow workers to financially plan and have peace of mind about being paid. However, concerns were raised about the potential pressure on small businesses and the possibility that short notice payments could influence shift scheduling by employers.

This research provides robust evidence that while insecure contracts suit many workers' needs, improvements could address insecurity which can lead to negative financial and other impacts. The three proposed measures – guaranteed hours that reflect the number of hours regularly worked over a reference period, reasonable notice of shifts and changes to these, and payment for short-notice changes – have strong potential to address the key challenges identified while preserving beneficial flexibility.

Considerations

Overall, this research supports measures in the Employment Rights Act 2025 to end one-sided flexibility, and the current consultation to develop final policy positions to deliver the measures. The research highlights the importance of setting threshold and eligibility criteria such that the new rights work effectively across diverse circumstances, preserving the beneficial aspects of insecure working arrangements whilst providing a baseline of predictability and security. The research also highlights further issues for the Government to consider as part of the consultation and in subsequent secondary legislation and guidance, the evidence that some zero-hours workers report having some 'guaranteed' hours despite these not being set out in contracts, and the distinct and complex employment relationship for agency workers.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Further detail on methodology and sample

How robust and representative is the Ipsos UK KnowledgePanel?

Potential participants are recruited via a random, unclustered, address-based sampling method (using the Postcode Address File/PAF) – the gold standard in UK survey research. This ensures every household in the UK has a known chance of being selected, unlike traditional quota-based or opt-in online panels. Invited members register via a short online questionnaire or paper form, with up to two members per household eligible. This methodology, supported by academic research demonstrating the superior reliability of address-based sampling compared to opt-in methods, ensures a representative and robust sample. As a random probability panel, KnowledgePanel employs robust stratification methods, not quotas, to ensure a representative sample.

How was the data weighted?

This study employed a two-stage approach to achieve representative findings.

- 1) For general GB 16 to 64 population estimates (including the prevalence of precarious work):** All KnowledgePanel members aged 16 to 64 years old were invited to participate in this study. The responding sample (comprising all those who answered as far as they could, whether just screening questions, or the full survey if they qualified as workers in insecure work) was weighted to official population benchmarks specific to 16 to 64 year olds in Great Britain, derived from recent Mid-Year Population Estimates and the Census. This ensures the weighted sample is representative of the GB 16 to 64 year old population. Consequently, findings from this sample, including the estimated proportion of GB 16 to 64 year olds who are workers in insecure work, can be interpreted as representative of the wider GB 16 to 64 year old population. In turn, the workers in insecure work sub-sample within this weighted data is representative of such workers in the wider population.
- 2) For the detailed profile of workers in insecure work:** The KnowledgePanel and IIS samples of workers in insecure work were merged. To weight this combined sample, we established the weighted demographic profile of workers in insecure work from the KnowledgePanel sample (as described above) across key characteristics: age-by-gender, region, education, ethnicity, disability, work status, contract type, work hours, work sector, and current versus previous workers in insecure work. This weighted KnowledgePanel profile served as proxy population targets, applied to the merged sample to ensure representativeness of workers in insecure work specifically.

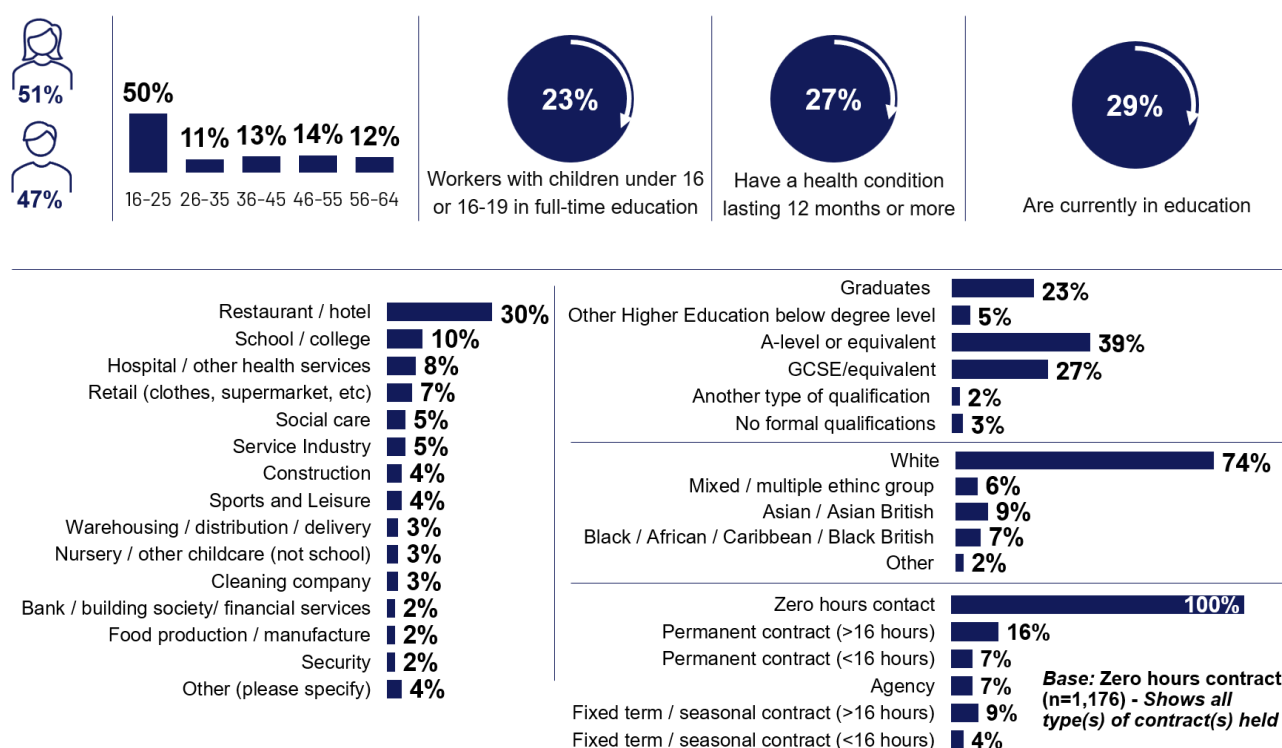
Appendix 2: Interpreting the findings

- Percentages referenced throughout the report may not always equal 100% due to rounding.
- We have not presented any findings of sub-groups that have a sample size of 30 or under. This is because the base size is too small to produce statistically reliable or meaningful results. Some relatively small bases (30-100) have been included in the report and marked throughout as a small base size where relevant. This often occurs where specific subgroups result in a base lower than 100 respondents of interest. While findings with small bases can offer some insight into the target population they should be treated with caution in drawing any conclusions from these results.
- If a participant held multiple contract types they were asked to focus on their 'main' contract type. Participants self-selected the contract type(s) that they had held over the past 18 months. Any participant who answered they had worked on more than one contract type over the last 18 months were asked to then confirm what was their 'main' contract type. By 'main' we defined this as: *the contract under which you have worked the majority of your hours over the last 12-weeks. If you have multiple jobs, it is the one where you work the most.*

Appendix 3: Demographic and sector overview

Demographic profile of workers on Zero hours contracts

- From the quantitative survey, 1,176 workers reported to hold a zero hours contract. Of which, 1,110 workers on zero hours contracts reported this as their 'main' contract type (as self-identified in the questionnaire- see Figure 2.1 for further details).
- The data presented below and in the chart is based on the 1,110 workers whose main contract type is a zero hours contract. However, to illustrate where there is some overlap in the types of contracts selected, the base is all those who reported having this contract type (n=1,176).
- Workers on zero hours contracts are slightly more likely to be women (population made up of 51% women and 47% men).
- Half of those on zero hours contracts are aged between 16 and 25 years old (50%), with 29% of all those on zero hours contracts still being in education.
- 27% of workers on a zero hours contract have a health condition.
- Almost a third (30%) of workers on zero hours contracts are working in the hospitality sector.
- There is some degree of overlap in the contracts workers with zero hours contracts hold with 27% having more than one contract type.



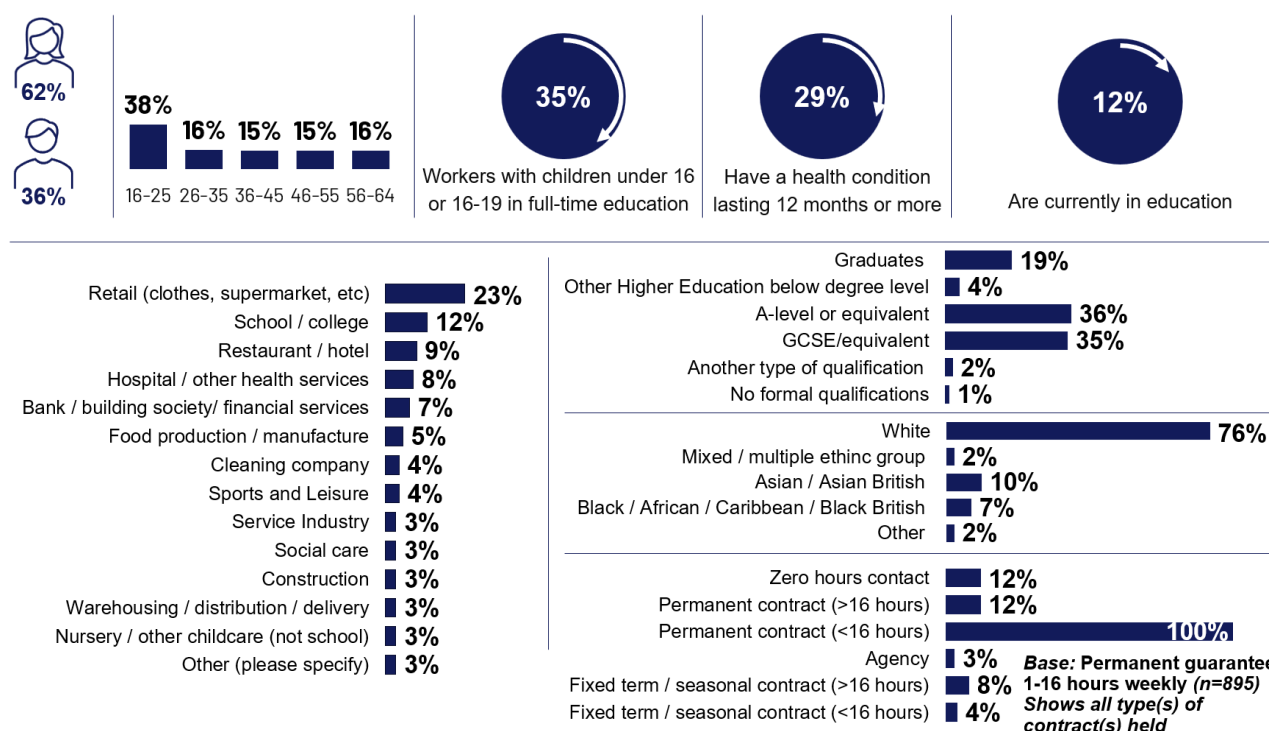
Base: Zero hours contracts (main contract type) (n=1,110)

This infographic presents demographics of the zero-hours contract workforce explored within this research, including age, sector, education, ethnicity, whether a worker has children or a health condition, and contract types. The sample is 51% women and 47% men. Half of workers on zero-hours contracts are aged 16-25 (50%), 11% are 26-35, 13% are 36-45, 14% are 46-55 and 12% are 56-64. Around 29% are currently in education, and 27% report having a health condition. Almost a third (30%) work in the hospitality sector, 10% work in schools or colleges and 8% work in hospital or

other health services. Most workers identify as White (74%), followed by Asian/British Asian (9%) and Black/African/Caribbean/Black British ethnic groups (7%). There is some overlap in contract types among workers in this group.

Demographic profile of workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly

- From the quantitative survey, 895 workers reported to hold a permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly. Of which, 850 workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly reported this as their 'main' contract type (as self-identified in the questionnaire – see Figure 2.1 for further details).
- The data presented below and in the chart is based on the 850 workers whose main contract type is permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly. However, to illustrate where there is some overlap in the types of contracts selected, the base is all those who reported having this contract type (n=895).
- Those working 1 to 16 hours on a permanent contract are significantly more likely to be women (62% are women, compared to 36% men).
- Nearly two fifths (38%) of insecure workers on a permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are aged between 16 and 25 years old.
- Over a third (35%) of workers on a permanent contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are workers with children under 16 or with a child aged 16 to 19 years old who are in full time education.
- 29% of all workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly have a health condition.
- Just under a quarter (23%) are working in the retail sector.

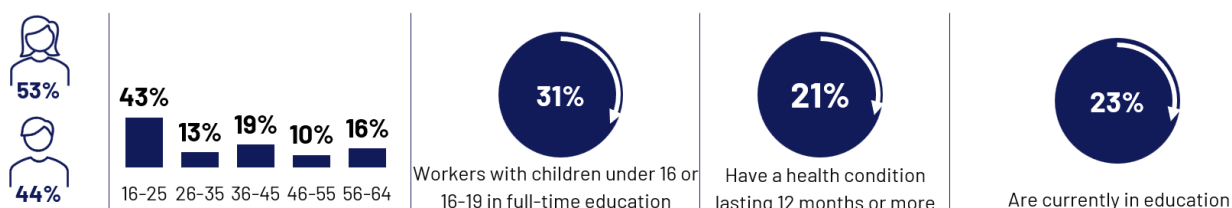


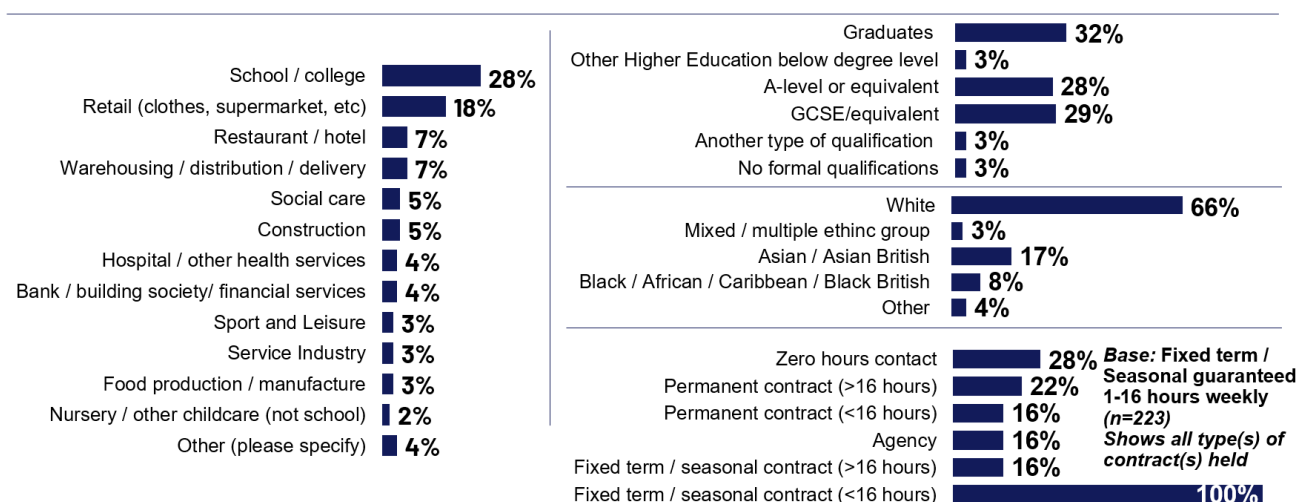
Base: Permanent guaranteed 1-16 hours weekly (main contract type) (n=850)

This infographic presents demographics of the workforce of workers on permanent contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly explored within this research, including age, sector, education, ethnicity, whether a worker has children or a health condition, and contract types. The sample is 62% women and 36% men. Nearly two-fifths (38%) are aged 16-25, 16% are 26-35, 15% are 36-45, 15% are 46-55 and 16% are 56-64. Around 35% have dependent children or 16–19-year-olds in full-time education, and 29% report having a health condition. Retail is the largest employment sector, accounting for 23% of workers. Around 36% have an A-level or equivalent level qualification, 35% have a GCSE or equivalent level qualification and 19% have a graduate level qualification. Around 76% identify as White, 10% as Asian/Asian British and 7% as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British. There is some overlap in contract types among workers in this group.

Demographic profile of workers on fixed-term contracts (guaranteed 1-16 hours weekly)

- From the quantitative survey, 223 workers reported to hold a fixed-term contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly. Of which, 186 workers with fixed-term contracts (guaranteed 1-16 hours weekly) reported this as their 'main' contract type (as self-identified in the questionnaire – see Figure 2.1 for further details).
- The data presented below and in the chart is based on the 186 workers whose main contract type is fixed-term contract (guaranteed 1-16 hours weekly). However, to illustrate where there is some overlap in the types of contracts selected, the base is all those who reported having this contract type (n=223).
- There is a higher proportion of women who are working temporary contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly (53% are women compared to 44% men).
- 43% of all workers working a temporary contract with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly are aged between 16 and 25 years old, with 23% of all workers with a temporary contract guaranteed 1-16 hours weekly still in education.
- Just under a third (31%) are workers with children under 16 or with a child aged 16 to 19 years old who is in full time education.
- Just over a fifth (21%) have a health condition.
- Over a quarter (28%) are working in a school or college. This is followed by 18% who are working in the retail sector.
- There is some degree of overlap in the contracts insecure workers hold with 34% of those working a temporary contract guaranteed 1-16 hours weekly having more than one contract type.



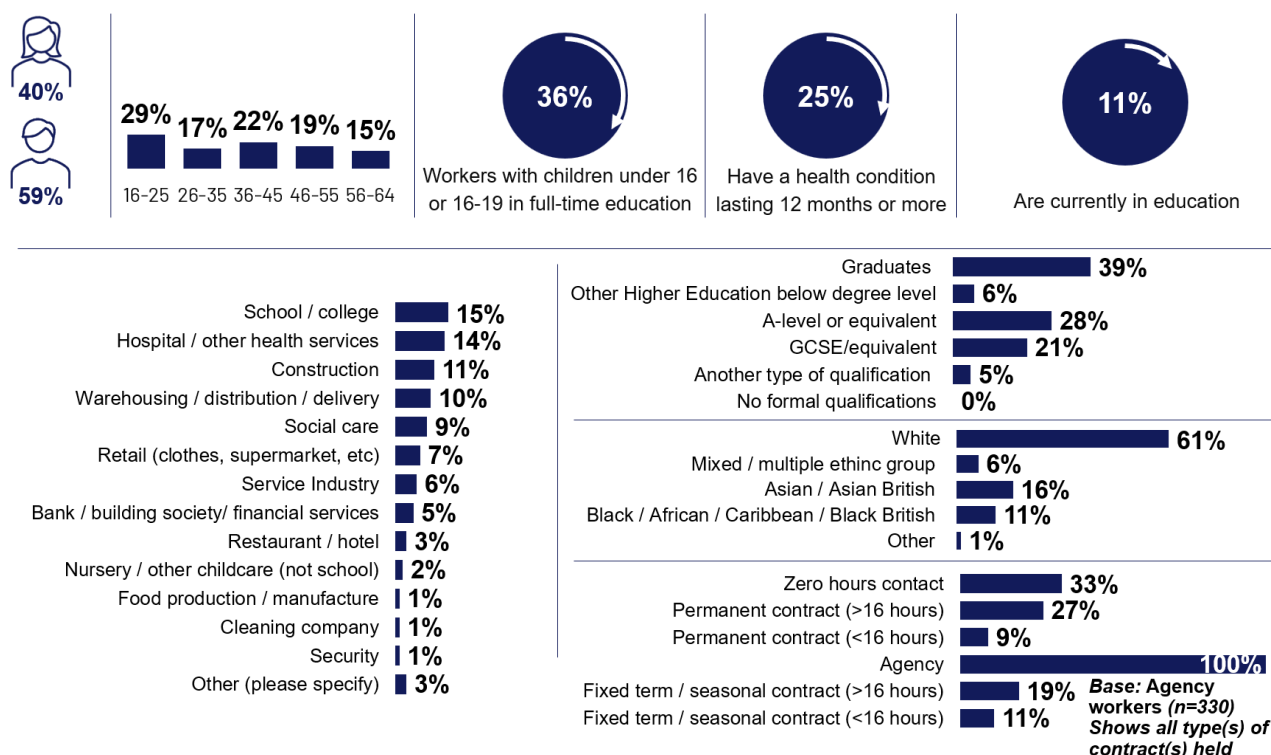


Base: Fixed term / Seasonal guaranteed 1-16 hours weekly (main contract type) (n=186)

This infographic presents demographics of the workforce of workers on fixed-term contracts with 1-16 hours guaranteed weekly explored within this research, including age, sector, education, ethnicity, whether a worker has children or a health condition, and contract types. The sample is 53% women and 44% men. Forty-three per cent of workers are aged 16-25, 13% are 26-35, 19% are 36-45, 10% are 46-55 and 16% are 56-64. Around 23% are currently in education, 31% have dependent children or 16–19-year-olds in full-time education, and 21% report having a health condition. Schools and colleges are the largest employment sector (28%), followed by retail (18%). Almost a third (32%) have a graduate level education, 29% GCSE/equivalent and 28% A-level/equivalent. Around 66% identify as White, 17% as Asian/Asian British and 8% as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British. There is some overlap in contract types, with 34% reporting more than one contract type.

Agency workers

- From the quantitative survey, 330 reported being agency workers. Of which, 269 agency workers reported this as their 'main' contract type (as self-identified in the questionnaire – see Figure 2.1 for further details).
- The data presented below is based on the 269 workers whose main contract type is agency work. However, to illustrate where there is some overlap in the types of contracts selected, the base is all those who reported having this contract type (n=330).
- Men make up a higher proportion of agency workers (59% men - 40% women).
- There is a more even spread of ages across agency workers, with 29% aged between 16 and 25 years old, 22% aged between 36 and 45 years old and 19% aged between 46 and 55 years old.
- Over a third (36%) are workers with children under 16 or with a child aged 16 to 19 years old who is in full time education.
- A quarter (25%) of all agency workers have a health condition.
- Agency workers are working across a more diverse range of sectors, with 15% working in a school or college, 14% in a hospital or other health service, 11% in construction, 10% in warehousing, distribution or delivery and 9% in social care.
- There is some degree of overlap in the contracts agency workers hold with 33% of agency workers reporting having a zero hours contract. Among this proportion, workers are most likely to be in the following industries: School or college (18%), Construction (15%), Warehousing (15%), Hospitality (13%), Social care (10%), and Hospital or other health services (6%). As mentioned above, for the purposes of this research workers were asked to select their 'main contract' type and this is the contract type they answered questions on throughout the questionnaire. We are unable to identify from the survey data if agency workers who select both agency work and zero hours contracts are referring to the same contract.



workforce of agency workers explored within this research, including age, sector, education, ethnicity, whether a worker has children or a health condition, and contract types. The sample is 59% men and 40% women. Around 29% aged 16-25, 22% aged 36-45, and 19% aged 46-55. Thirty-six per cent have dependent children or 16–19-year-olds in full-time education and 25% report having a health condition. Agency workers are employed across a range of sectors, including schools or colleges (15%), hospitals and health services (14%), construction (11%), warehousing and distribution (10%), and social care (9%). Around 39% have Graduate level education, 28% A-level/equivalent and 21% GCSE/equivalent. Around 61% identify as White, 16% Asian/Asian British and 11% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British. There is some overlap in contract types, with 33% of agency workers also reporting a zero-hours contract.