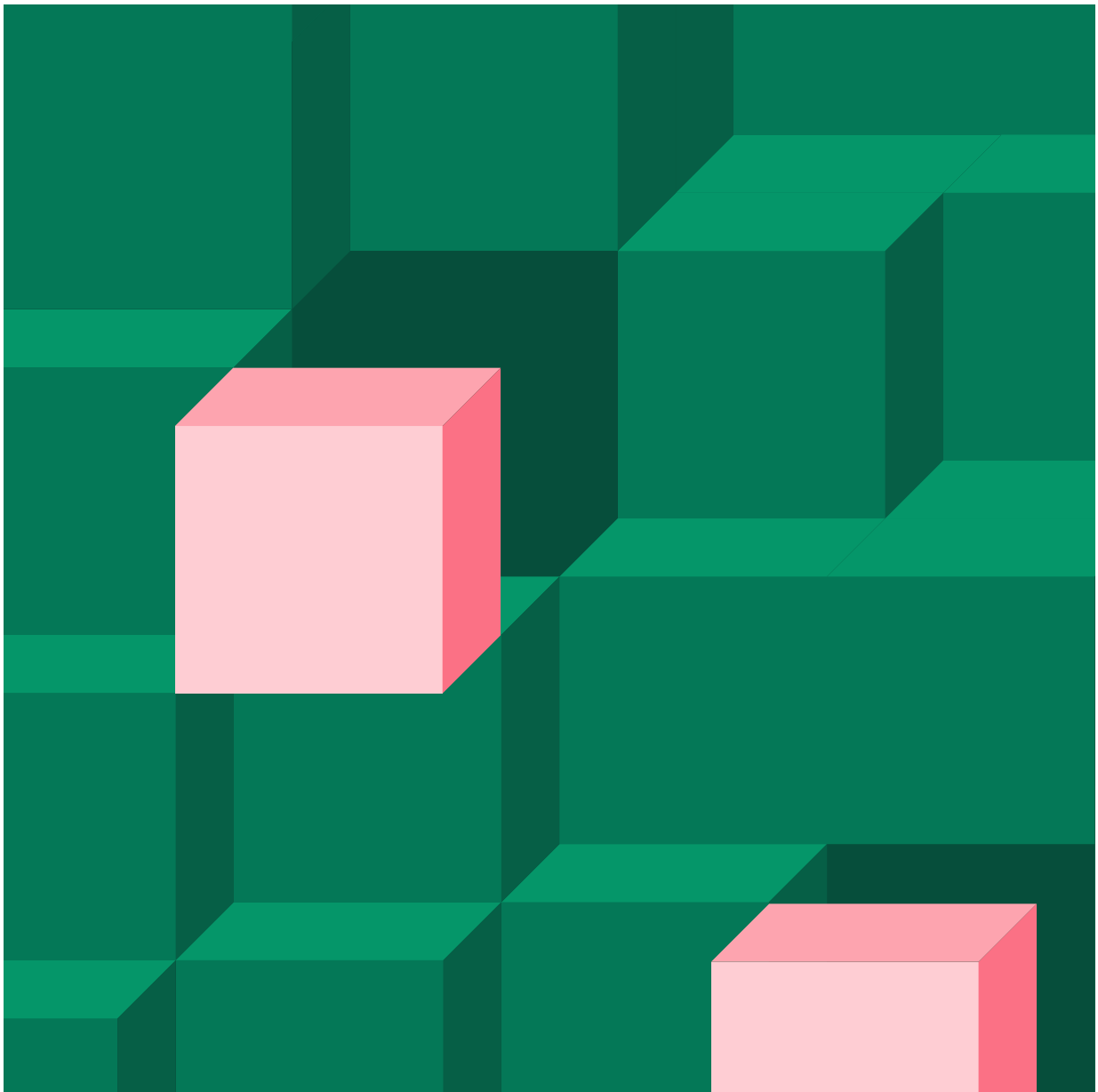


Sona.

# Flex Appeal

How care organisations can embrace flexible working and thrive



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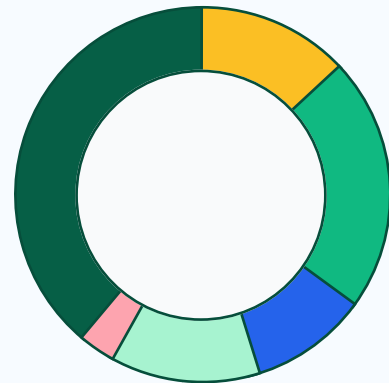
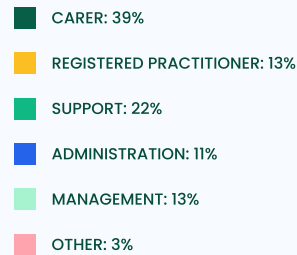
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## METHODOLOGY

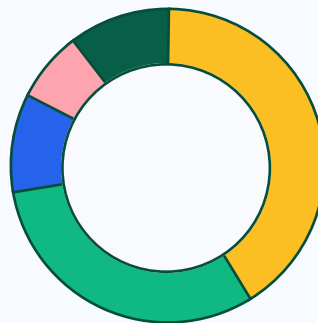
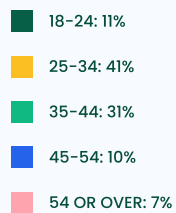
We surveyed 750 UK care sector employees between 31 August and 15 September 2022. All participants were pre-screened to confirm their employment in social care. The sample of 750 responded to all 13 questions via an online survey conducted by an independent third-party research company.

The findings in this report are based on their responses plus supporting third-party sources (cited throughout)

### JOB ROLE



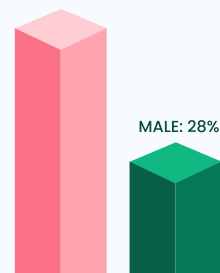
### AGE



### GENDER AT BIRTH

FEMALE: 72%

MALE: 28%



## INTRODUCTION: WHY CARE EMPLOYERS NEED FLEX APPEAL

The pandemic didn't just change how we work, it's changed our expectations of what work is and how it fits into our lives.

According to an Ernst and Young study of 16,000 employees across 16 countries, nine in ten want more choice over when and where they work, and more than half will consider quitting if they don't get it.

Offering flexibility - in its broadest sense - has become one of the highest impact measures organisations can take to improve employee morale and retention and attract the best talent.

Since staff recruitment and retention is one of - if not the - single biggest challenges the care sector faces, offering flexible working opportunities can be a huge competitive advantage. Our previous research reports have consistently highlighted the importance of flexibility to current and former care employees:

- 90% want more freedom to choose their working patterns
- Working too many hours is the second most common reason for staff leaving the care sector (behind pay)
- Greater flexibility is the second most influential reason people leave care to work in another industry

The benefits aren't limited to attracting and keeping talent, either. Giving employees more say over their schedules can result in them picking up more shifts overall. Numerous studies have shown a correlation between greater flexibility, lower burnout, and work-related stress.

That means fewer sick days, lower people costs and better continuity of care. For example, an analysis by Timewise found that if every employee took one day less sick leave each year, employers would recoup the cost of implementing flexible working within three years.

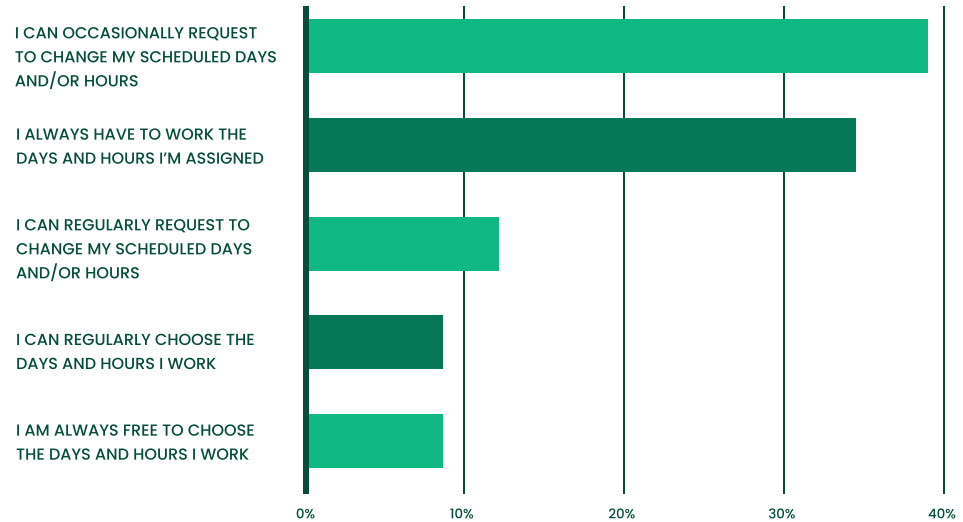
Of course, the nature of care work means there are practical limitations regarding flexibility. So in the following pages, we will explore employees' attitudes towards flexible working and what these mean for providers looking to increase their 'flex appeal'.

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- [https://www.ey.com/en\\_gl/news/2021/05/more-than-half-of-employees-globally-would-quit-their-jobs-if-not-provided-post-pandemic-flexibility-ey-survey-finds](https://www.ey.com/en_gl/news/2021/05/more-than-half-of-employees-globally-would-quit-their-jobs-if-not-provided-post-pandemic-flexibility-ey-survey-finds)
  - <https://www.getsona.com/rethinking-retention>
  - <https://www.getsona.com/download-the-big-exit-interview>
  - <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/flexible-work-increases-job-satisfaction-and-lowers-burnout-study-confirms/>
  - <https://timewise.co.uk/article/investing-in-flex-used-to-be-a-barrier-for-frontline-firms-not-any-more/>

## CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR FLEXIBILITY

### ■ Shifts and schedules

How much choice and control do you have over your working hours?



The majority of care sector employees currently have no, or limited, flex when it comes to their working hours.

44% of carers said they always work the days they are assigned, the highest of any job role (this figure drops to 30% for registered practitioners, for example).

Workers in residential care settings were more likely to have at least some flexibility compared to domiciliary and community-based care. 70% of those working in residential care had some level of say over their hours compared to 60% for those in domiciliary/community-based care.

This difference highlights the additional challenge of giving staff in domiciliary care roles more say over their working patterns given the need to deliver care at the right times for individual patients.

## ■ Other types of flexibility

I have the flexibility to choose:

MY BREAK TIMES	50%
MY WORKING LOCATION(S)	34%
MY WORK TASKS	25%
WHO I WORK WITH	13%
MY JOB ROLE	12%
NONE OF THE ABOVE	25%

Flexibility isn't limited to schedules. However, our survey found that around a quarter of respondents have minimal opportunities to mix up their working habits. This was especially true of staff in residential settings, with 40% saying they don't have a choice in any of the above categories.

Staff in domiciliary care were more likely to have more chances to work in different locations and roles, while those in residential were more likely to take on a wider variety of tasks from shift to shift.

### Flexible working requests and responses

Most employers are willing to offer staff more flexibility if they ask for it. Close to one in two staff (47%) said they had asked their employer for more freedom of choice in some capacity.

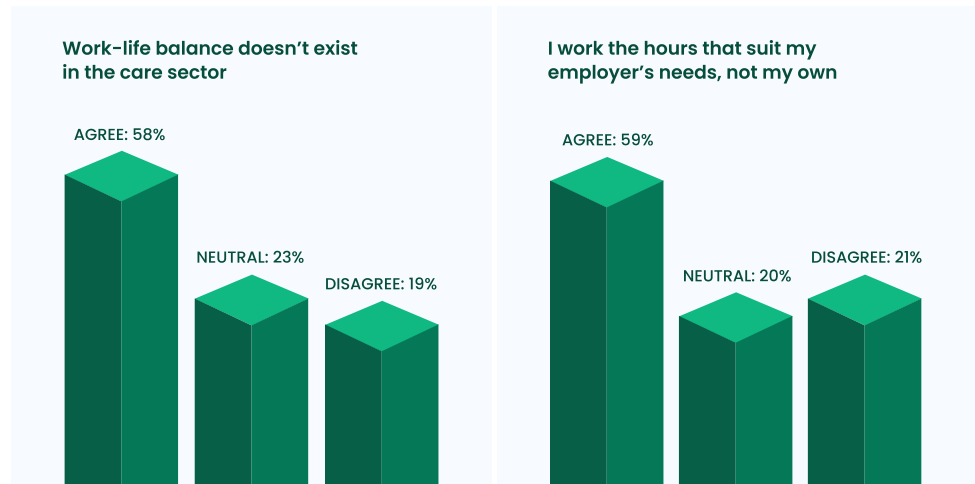
38% of those requests were successful, and a further 37% got some flexibility, even if it wasn't as much as they'd hoped.

Amongst the remaining 53% who haven't approached their employer, 43% said they are happy the way things are - the most common reason for not wanting or needing to ask.

However, 29% said they haven't asked because they know their manager would say know. This may be more of a perception issue than a real problem, as our data shows that only 13% of cases were refused or weren't followed up.

More than a third of respondents said they haven't asked because they either don't know what the process is or the current process is too long or painstaking.

■ How staff feel about their current situations



The majority of respondents felt that work-life balance is impossible to achieve in the care sector. This indicates a worrying level of disillusionment with current working conditions. One-third of all carers strongly agreed with both statements.

84% of those who agreed with the idea that “work-life balance doesn't exist” also said they work the hours that suit their employer's needs. This strong correlation reflects the strong desire expressed by staff in our previous research for greater autonomy in the scheduling process.

Unsurprisingly, 78% of this subset said they would be open to working more flexibly if their employer offered it. In the next section, we explore respondents' attitudes towards flexible working.

## EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES TOWARDS FLEXIBLE WORKING

I would be open to working more flexibly if my employer offered it – by role

	YES	MAYBE	TOTAL
REGISTERED PRACTITIONER	83%	11%	94%
ADMINISTRATIVE	78%	15%	93%
OTHER	76%	20%	96%
MANAGEMENT	74%	16%	90%
CARER	68%	20%	88%
SUPPORT	62%	15%	77%
OVERALL	<b>71%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>88%</b>

Flexible working opportunities are highly desirable across the care sector. Just one in ten employees said they are happy with their current work arrangements.

Employees working in the different types of care represented in our sample expressed similar enthusiasm for flexible working.

### ■ Preferred practices

Respondents showed particular interest in opportunities to work a four-day week as standard. The policy has been getting a lot of national attention in recent months. At the time of writing, employers are taking part in the UK's biggest trial of the four-day week, with findings due after its conclusion in November 2022.

Community Integrated Care, one of the UK's largest social care charities, has already completed its own successful trial and is set to adopt the practice more widely (see Spotlight on page X).

Unsurprisingly, term-time hours was the most popular flexible working practice amongst parents, with 49% expressing interest versus the average of 39%. Staff in residential care settings were more likely to be open to split shifts (27% vs 18%).

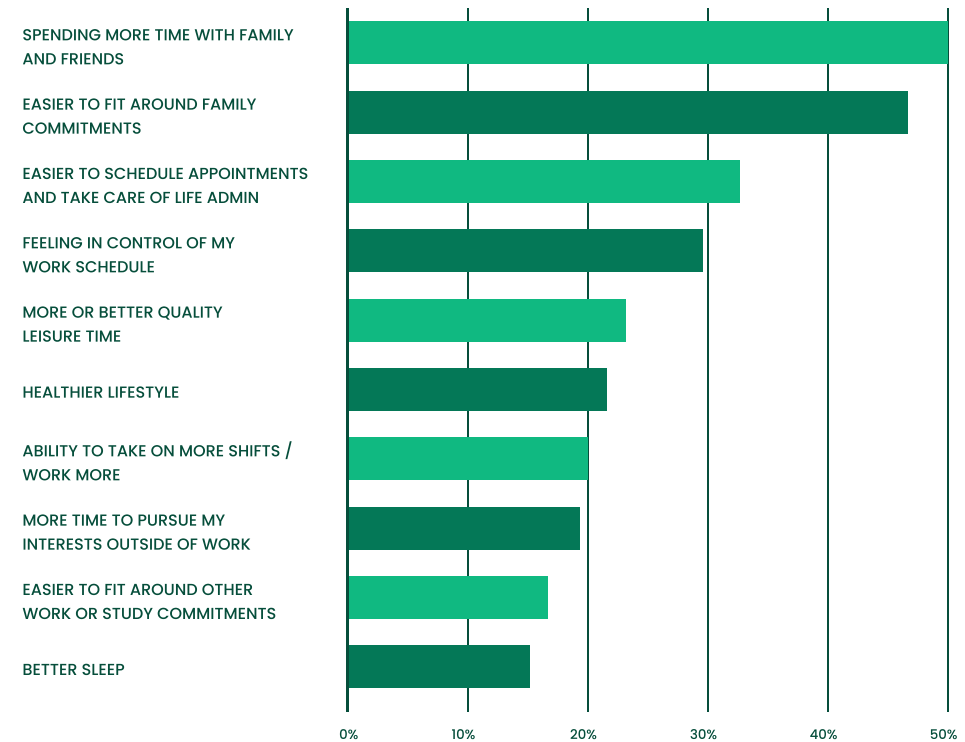
86% said they would welcome new technology that gives them more choice and control over their working hours and shift patterns.

**The following flexible ways of working would be of interest to me**

	OVERALL	DOMICILLIARY / COMMUNITY-BASED	RESIDENTAL	OTHER
FOUR DAY WORK WEEK AS STANDARD	53%	50%	47%	63%
TERM-TIME HOURS	39%	43%	31%	40%
FLEXI OR ANNUALISED HOURS	34%	29%	28%	47%
SPLIT SHIFTS	18%	16%	27%	14%
JOB SHARE	13%	12%	15%	15%

■ **What flexibility means to them**

**Top 10 perceived benefits of flexible working**



70% of respondents are married or cohabit with a partner, and two in three have children, which explains why family concerns dominate the list of perceived benefits from flexible working.



One in five would take advantage of being given greater freedom and autonomy to work more hours. This could be a considerable boost to providers in the context of the current capacity crunch many are facing due to ongoing recruitment challenges.

A third of the responses were related to health and wellbeing, including better sleep, the ability to live a healthier lifestyle, and higher quality leisure time.

## INCREASING YOUR ORGANISATION'S FLEX APPEAL

Implemented correctly, offering greater flexibility can be a win-win-win for patients and residents, your staff, and your organisation.

But care workforces and operating models are complex so working patterns and policies have to survive contact with reality and can't compromise service quality.

Here are four key recommendations for those currently considering new flexible working measures.

### ■ 01 Take a collaborative approach from day one

As our report findings show, flexibility means different things to different people. What they want to achieve with that freedom varies significantly, too.

You need to have the clearest possible picture of those needs and desires before evaluating any options. Ideally, that means looking at the qualitative and quantitative data.

Speak to colleagues from all levels of the organisation, whether that's in person through 1-1s and focus groups or through a feedback survey. Ask candidates about their preferences during the recruitment process.

Analyse your people data and your staff schedules. Are there already managers or teams doing things slightly differently that you can learn from? Where are your biggest crunches? What are your non-negotiables?

If you don't currently have the time to take on a large transformation project, an initial listening exercise will help you focus on a handful of key issues to address. You may also discover some quick wins.



## SPOTLIGHT

# RENAISSANCE CARE

Renaissance Care provides a range of support across its 16 homes in Scotland and employs 1,200 people.

Earlier this year the group announced a wide-ranging revamp of its pay, benefits and working practices following a series of interviews and focus groups with staff at all levels.

One of the biggest issues identified in that listening exercise was the negative impact of 12-hour shifts on work-life balance.

As a result, staff are now being offered flexible shift patterns according to their individual needs and can ask for their longest shifts to be cut down. Some staff will also have the option to move to a four-day week.

**“This more flexible approach means we are able to have conversations with each staff member to try and accommodate shift patterns and working rotas that meet the needs of the workforce as well as the home. As a manager, I want my team to be happy and feel supported – being able to offer this flexibility allows me to achieve this to a greater extent.”**

*Jozi Stables, Home Manager*

## ■ 02 Start small, then maintain momentum

Large scale change initiatives live or die by their roll out plans. In many cases, starting with a smaller-scale pilot can give you the best chance to achieve long-term success when adopting new ways of working – especially if it requires a big cultural shift.

Phased launches tend to get better results, especially in larger, multi-site operators. Starting with one smaller trial group allows you to test your plans and apply what you learn to the broader rollout.

Plus, a successful trial will provide you with positive data, stories and advocates to help you overcome any scepticism and inertia you encounter in other parts of the organisation.

Finally, once you know something is working, maintain the speed of the roll-out, or accelerate it if you can. If trial participants are buzzing about the changes, others are going to want in.

Maintaining the project's momentum can create a virtuous circle of positive feedback and adoption. Slowing down at this stage may give detractors an opportunity to dig in.

#### SPOTLIGHT

### COMMUNITY INTEGRATED CARE'S FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK

Community Integrated Care (CIC) is one of the UK's largest social care charities, with over 5,000 employees supporting 2,500 people with care needs.

Last year, CIC offered 300 staff in HR, finance and other support functions a four-day working week in an initial trial. They had the option to condense their hours and take either Monday or Friday as an extra day off each week while keeping the same rate of pay.

CIC has seen significant improvements in staff wellbeing and its ability to recruit, and the data highlighted the positive impact of the trial. Their employer net promoter score (NPS) increased by 21 points amongst those who opted into the four-day week.

Following this early success, CIC is looking to expand its flexible offer to more colleagues, including its frontline staff.

**"The feedback we're getting on the ground is incredible, with colleagues reporting a huge shift in their ability to switch off and re-energise, as well as being able to better balance their home and work lives."**

*Teresa Exelby, Chief People Officer*

#### ■ 03 Find ways to enable 'self-scheduling'

Self-scheduling means letting employees select the shifts they want to work rather than being allocated all their hours by the scheduling manager.

At the extreme, self-scheduling would be a free-for-all and utterly impractical for almost any frontline organisation. But introducing partial self-scheduling is extremely achievable.

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• <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/large-charity-plans-more-flexible-working-for-frontline-staff-after-four-day-week-success.html>

For example, an employee contracted for 36 hours a week could be scheduled for 24 hours and free to choose 12 more hours from the shifts available. Providers with multiple sites could also benefit from enabling staff to work shifts outside of their 'home' location.

However, if you're working from a paper or spreadsheet-based rota, this approach is likely to add an overwhelming amount of complexity and be too time-consuming.

Effective 'self-scheduling' is most viable when it's powered by smart technology to eliminate the associated admin burden. This is exactly what we're doing here at Sona - check out the spotlight section 'Flexible scheduling at Advinia Health Care'. And that brings us to our final recommendation...

#### SPOTLIGHT

### FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING AT ADVINIA HEALTH CARE

Sona customer Advinia Health Care is a top 20 UK care home operator, with 36 homes and over 3,500 staff across England and Scotland.

Advinia now offers its staff easier and broader access to shifts across times and locations through the Sona app. Staff can see all available shifts in real-time and choose the ones they want to work - almost half of available shifts are now being picked up this way.

Since adopting this new approach to scheduling their teams, home managers say that more employees are taking up additional shifts. At one home, the number of staff regularly picking up shifts they weren't directly assigned has increased by 58%.

For the home, this means lower agency usage, better continuity of care and less time spent on rota-related admin. But it is also beneficial for team morale and retention. Colleagues who are looking for extra work but have previously struggled to fit it around their other commitments such as study or childcare no longer have to compromise and are happier as a result.

**"It's great to be able to easily see what extra shifts are available, it's a much fairer way to pick up overtime as it's available to everyone"**

*Care Assistant, Advinia Parklands*

## ■ 04 Re-evaluate your technology needs

Introducing flexibility doesn't necessarily require any new software or systems. However, as we have already highlighted, the right technology can make flexible working practices easier to implement, administer and sustain:

- Modern HR systems come with more advanced analytics so you can closely monitor
- Smart scheduling software will help you stay on top of your rotas and maintain coverage whilst enabling all your flexible ways of working from split shifts, to cross-site working, and even self-scheduling
- A dedicated employee app can empower staff to view their schedules, claim or request overtime, receive important company information and communicate with managers and colleagues. Not having to be in the office or working at a location to manage these work tasks also promotes flexibility.
- Real-time time and attendance software can give managers continued confidence that all staff are working the right hours. Modern T&A systems also drastically reduce the time needed for approvals and exceptioning for even the most complex shift patterns.

If your team's capacity allows, audit your people systems before or alongside considering which flexible working policies to implement. This will help you plan and prioritise the IT resources you need to deliver your plan. You may also uncover new flexible working opportunities that can't be supported by your existing software.

## SONA: BUILT FOR THE FUTURE OF FRONTLINE WORK

Backed by Google, Sona is a modern workforce management company committed to helping social care providers become best-in-class employers.

Our employee-centric approach to building technology is helping care providers transform how they organise, engage and optimise their teams, including creating more opportunities for flexible working.

The results? Improved retention, lower people costs, and happier teams.

We've helped our customers, including Advinia Healthcare & Praxis Care:

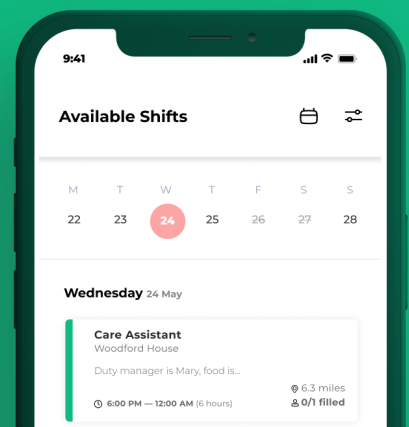
- Decrease staffing agency usage by up to 40% by optimising how their staff book overtime shifts.
- Save managers more than 5 hours every week each as they no longer have to manage time-consuming manual rotas and rota changes.
- Increase staff engagement as staff feel much more connected with the company
- Streamline payroll operations by making it much easier for managers and finance teams to reconcile hours across systems.

Proudly supporting some of the industry's most progressive employers:



PS If you enjoyed Flex Appeal, then please do check out the other reports we have referenced. Rethinking Retention 2022 and The Big Exit Interview 2022 are available through our dedicated retention resource hub:

[GETSONA.COM/RETENTION](https://getsona.com/retention)



May 25 Registered Nurse  
Wakefield House  
06:00 AM — 14:00 PM

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