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‘Good work’ and the Employment Rights Bill

Summary

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Summary

‘Good work’ is a central part of the government’s policy agenda, as indicated in its key employment-focused documents: the white paper Get Britain Working and the policy paper Next Steps to Make Work Pay. These documents set out the government’s plans to expand access to high-quality employment.

The term ‘good work’ has a complicated history and is often related to concepts such as decent work, fair work, job quality, and meaningful work. The 2017 Taylor review of modern working practices, which drew attention to a rise in non-standard, and often insecure, work, observed that this kind of work was often associated with lower quality working experiences. It called for the government to report on job quality using a consistent set of measurements that allowed trends to be tracked over time.

The Taylor review suggested that key metrics around ‘good work’ were wages, employment quality, education and training, working conditions, work-life balance, and participation and representation. The subsequent government response was formulated in these terms in 2018 as The Good Work Plan. Subsequently, various national and international organisations have developed metrics to measure ‘good work’ in workplaces.

While conceptual differences surrounding good work reflect stakeholders’ varied interests, they have led to the development of different measurement mechanisms. The absence of a unified understanding can slow progress on the issue of good work.

Why does ‘good work’ matter?

Policymakers are interested in ‘good work’ for two reasons. First, they want to engage with how work quality can affect employee motivation and productivity, improving working life for employees and making organisations more successful. Second, stakeholders are concerned with how good work can deliver social justice contributions by helping to reduce workforce inequalities and improve overall living standards and wellbeing.

In the UK, there has been a notable rise in insecure work in recent years, with different impacts across regions and population groups. Insecure work is typically associated with lower pay and less employment protection. Since the pandemic, many jobs have also been transformed and continue to change, in addition to being influenced by technology. This can have varying effects on job quality. For a summary of research and policy around work

quality, with particular implications for changes during the pandemic, see the 2022 Commons Library briefing paper Good work: Policy and research on the quality of work in the UK.

A national mapping of the UK's occupations for the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) around different job quality measures found that a significant part of the workforce lacked access to 'good work'. This was particularly the case for those in routine occupations and for younger workers.

Employment legislation and 'good work'

The Labour government introduced the Employment Rights Bill (ERB) within its first 100 days in office. This bill addressed multiple aspects of good work, three of which are highlighted in this briefing: flexible work, family-related leave, and trade union rights. These topics are discussed in relation to the proposed legislative changes outlined in the ERB and are compared with policy approaches in other countries.

Flexible working legislation in the UK has moved towards enhancing accessibility from the start of contracts and making organisations' decision-making processes more transparent and potentially fairer. The legislation relates to statutory requests, although research suggests that the majority of flexible working, including hybrid working, is organised informally in the UK.

Other countries have also followed a similar legislative model around workers' rights in their approach to flexible working. Cultural norms are also important to the ease with which employees can access flexible working. Finland, widely regarded as having the world's most flexible working patterns, has had legislation in place to support this since 1996.

The ERB is extending workers' rights around several aspects of family-related leave: Bereavement Leave, Ordinary (Unpaid) Parental Leave, and Paternity Leave. In relation to other countries, the UK offers a relatively long period of maternity leave, but at a lower rate of pay. While the bill extends paternity leave eligibility, stakeholders have suggested that the UK's relatively short paternity leave entitlement can increase pay gaps and inequalities. Unlike most countries, the UK currently does not assign payment for parental leave.

Changes proposed by the ERB around trade union rights include developing provisions around collective sectoral bargaining and industrial action legislation. The UK has been unusual in Europe in that collective bargaining is mainly organised at the enterprise level. The bill sets out to develop a collective sectoral approach around the work of teaching assistants and social care workers, who represent large, relatively low-paid workforces, with high turnover rates. An OECD analysis of its member countries' collective bargaining systems found that the countries with higher coverage had higher quality working environments.

Future challenges around good work

The briefing highlights some future challenges and concerns related to the concept of good work.

Inequalities around access to ‘good work’ have been documented on a regional level, highlighting the continued significance of the UK’s north-south divide. Population vulnerabilities to insecure work have been documented around age (with young people being much more likely to experience insecure work), gender, disability, and ethnicity. The Insecure Work Index points to industries where insecurity is higher: hospitality, services, and agriculture, where 1 in 3 employees are in insecure work, compared to 1 in 5 nationally.

Informal work can be overlooked in an analysis of ‘good work’, although it is estimated by the World Economic Forum that over half the global workforce is engaged in unregulated, often invisible, forms of work, and about 11% in the UK. Informal work can be hidden within traditional industries such as agriculture or cleaning, but it can also be a self-provisioning tactic to maximise income when people find it difficult to find enough work in the formal economy to survive. Informal work raises issues around job quality in relation to aspects like security and a lack of development opportunities.

Work exploitation takes on a range of forms, the most extreme of which is modern slavery, where job quality is minimised. The Global Slavery Index recently estimated that 122,000 people were working in conditions of slavery in the UK in 2021, often in publicly facing roles and alongside paid workers, such as in construction and nail bars.

Work is currently undergoing rapid change around its incorporation with technology, particularly around artificial intelligence and automation. With this, concerns have been raised that inequalities are developing in access to new technology, most notably around regions, status, and protected characteristics. New technology provides potential to augment job quality by supporting more routine parts of jobs and enhancing job satisfaction. Concerns have also been raised that it could displace jobs, be used to monitor work, and introduce new forms of bias into decision-making that may disadvantage some population groups more than others.

1 What is good work

Work is changing rapidly, influenced by globalisation, that is, the free flow of people, trade, and information across national borders, and the interconnections that stem from this. Work has also been impacted by technological development and new working practices, such as hybrid working. In parallel, stakeholders have focused on the idea of 'good work': desirable aspects of employment that apply universally across societies.

There are three reasons for promoting good work, broadly drawn from the perspectives of organisational psychology, social stratification, and economics:[1]

- Policy communities and employee representatives have been concerned with achieving well-designed work that promotes workers' wellbeing and fulfilment.[2]
- The debate about what makes work 'good' addresses issues of inequality in societies where good work is not universally accessible, but is available to certain groups more than others.[3] This perspective can be particularly important for decision-makers and social commentators.
- A business case rationale for good work is that it leads to more motivated and productive workforces.[4]

The government has often used the term 'good work' in its statements and policies around employment. In his closing remarks introducing the 2024 Employment Rights Bill (ERB) to the House of Commons, Jonathan Reynolds, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, emphasised the importance of 'good work':

> Quite simply, good work and good wages are what this Labour Government were sent to this place to deliver, and that is exactly what this Bill is about.[5]

1 Williams, M., Zhou, Y. and Zou, M., Mapping Good work: The quality of working life across the occupational structure, Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2020

2 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicole, D. et al., Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017; In 2015, the UK Government set up the What Works for Wellbeing Centre, one aspect of which has been exploring practical interventions around job quality.

3 Spencer, D. Making Light Work: an end to toil in the twenty-first century, 2022.

4 Warhurst, C., Bosworth, D., Hunt, W. and Sarkar, S. Does good work have a positive effect on productivity? Building the evidence base Literature review for the Carnegie UK Trust, 2021

5 HC Deb 21 October 2024 c138

The policy paper accompanying the Employment Rights Bill, entitled Next Steps to Make Work Pay, outlined the government's plans to address the challenges faced by low-paid and insecure workers, and those who lack employment protection. It highlighted the importance of equality and voice in work. The government has argued that strengthening workers' rights is important for improving employment experiences and increasing economic productivity.[6]

The Get Britain Working white paper also stated the government's aim that everyone should have the opportunity to access 'good work', which is seen as a sustainable way of entering work, and essential for improving living standards and overall wellbeing.[7] The government committed to developing policies to support this ambition, including reforms to Job Centre Plus and Local Growth Plans, that is, councils' regional economic strategies.[8]

The government's new Industrial Strategy, published in June 2025, prioritised 8 sectors for economic growth. A commitment to good quality jobs was reiterated throughout the policy paper.[9]

At the same time, the growth of atypical employment in the UK, such as zero-hours contracts and gig work, has intensified concerns about declining job quality and workers' rights.[10]

1.1 Terminology

Specific definitions of 'good work' vary and key distinctions are highlighted in the table below. This variation often reflects the different groups' interest in discussing desirable features of employment. For example, some groups might be more interested in individuals' pay and working conditions, and others might be more interested in broader labour market trends. Job quality and meaningful work are also used to discuss the components of work that are valued.

Different definitions, and corresponding different ways of measuring features of work, can complicate understanding and stakeholders' ability to effect change.

6 Hansard, Employment Rights Bill, Vol. 755, 21 October 2024
7 Department for Work and Pensions, Get Britain Working White Paper, November 2024
8 Department for Work and Pensions, Get Britain Working White Paper, November 2024; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Planning overhaul to speed up and simplify local plans, 27 February 2025
9 UK Government, The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, CP 1337, 23 June 2025
10 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicole, D. et al., Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017;
Warhurst, C. and Knox, A., "Manifesto for a new quality of working life", Human Relations, Vol 75 No 2, 2022, pp304-321

Definitions of work quality terminology

Definition	Coverage	Used by
Decent work	County/regional categorisation of jobs, workers, and labour markets, including workers' rights	Policy organisations, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal, the International Labour Organization (ILO)
Job quality	Job characteristics that meet workers' needs, such as earnings	Academic literature, Eurofound, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), European Union (EU), European Trade Union Institute for Research (ETUI)
Quality of work and employment	Used to cover both 'decent work' and 'job quality'	Academic literature
Working conditions	Physical environment of work, often similar in practice to job quality	Eurofound, ILO
Good work	Work that is conducive to workers' needs, for example, which promotes wellbeing. Applied at the societal level	UK Government, Taylor review, policy organisations, such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW), some academic literature), formerly EU
Fair employment	Developed by the Employment Conditions Employment Network (EMCONET) to complement the ILO's decent work framework	WHO
Meaningful work	Work that is purposeful and worthwhile for individuals; aspirational aspects of work	Academic literature

Source: adapted from F. Green, Decent Work and the Quality of Work and Employment in Handbook of Labor, Human Relations and Population Economics, K.F.Zimmermann (eds), 2021

The Independent Labour Organization and its influence

Discussions about work quality have roots in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) public policy from the late 1990s regarding 'decent work'.[11] The ILO is a United Nations agency dedicated to promoting social justice, in particular around labour and human rights. Its 2030 agenda set out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and it is responsible for reporting on labour statistics around the 14 decent work indicators that cover 5 of the 17 SDGs. Goal 8 specifically looks at 'decent work and economic growth'.

The ILO established aspirational standards of work across its 187 member states and proposed that decent work was a fundamental right that should be available to all workers. The move to formalise these standards was prompted by changes in labour markets brought about by globalization, that had seen a rise in precarious or more insecure forms of employment.[12]

In its role as a United Nations agency, the ILO introduced its Decent Work Agenda in 2008, intended to guide the work of its communities. This set out five elements as the foundation of a positive working experience:

- safe working conditions
- reasonable working hours
- work-life balance
- appropriate compensation
- access to necessary healthcare[13]

The ILO also developed a Decent Work Index. This provided indicators of decent work that could be applied to different countries, and which were subsequently further developed by other agencies.

The importance of work quality has been recognised internationally. Shortly after the ILO started to focus on decent work policy, the European Union (EU) committed to promoting 'better jobs' as part of its economic growth strategy, as did the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).[14] This focused on improving the quality of pre-existing jobs and incorporating the elements of good work into new job creation.

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11 ILO, Report of the Director-General: decent work, paper presented at the 87th International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1999; ILO, ILO declaration on social justice for a fair globalization, ILO, Geneva, 2008

12 Brill, L., What is decent work? A review of the literature in F.Christie, M.Antoniadou, K.Albertson and M.Crowder (eds.), Decent Work, Bingley, UK, Emerald, 2021, pp11-26

13 The last of these drew on a US framework, where employment is linked to healthcare.

14

Academic discussion on terminology

Academic evidence offers value to these discussions in distinguishing between the various concepts associated with 'good work'. It has been theorised in that certain minimum standards in the workplace must be met to foster job satisfaction. For instance, an international review of 38 articles on decent work published over the course of 14 years concluded that researchers could achieve greater precision by providing more context on how they were using indicators.[15]

One influential academic study, Unequal Britain at Work provided a systematic analysis of trends in job quality inequalities.[16] This research used data from the UK's Skills and Employment Survey conducted from 1986 to 2012. It examined various aspects of job quality, including wages, skills, autonomy, training, work intensity, participation, and security, revealing how perceptions of good work are impacted by a range of demographic inequalities. These include differences around socioeconomic status, gender, type of employment contract, and type of employer.

Different disciplines emphasise different aspects of what constitutes good work. For example, economists typically concentrate on pay, sociologists examine skills and autonomy, while psychologists often address job satisfaction.[17]

1.2 Measuring good work

There is a lack of consensus on how to measure good work.[18] However, several organisations have developed indices that aim to capture its various aspects. The most commonly used indices are shown in table 2, which shows some of the consistency, as well as key differences, between different measurement systems.

The key components of these indices include:

- Material security: access to a decent and reliable living wage

15 OECD Employment Outlook: 2003 Towards more and better jobs, Paris, OECD, 2003; OECD OECD Guidelines on measuring the quality of the working environment, Paris, OECD, 2017

16 Felstead, A., Gallie, D. and Green, F., Unequal Britain at Work, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015

17 Warhurst, C. and Knox, A., "Manifesto for a new quality of working life", Human Relations, Vol 75 No 2, 2022, pp304-321

18 As above

- Control over day-to-day tasks, also referred to as individual proactivity or job-crafting
- Ability to vary working time: this encompasses autonomy in how jobs are performed and access to flexible working arrangements
- Intrinsic aspects of work: these relate to the purpose of the job and the satisfaction derived from it
- Relationships and voice: this highlights the importance of workplace connections and employees' ability to express their needs
- Development opportunities: access to training and career advancement

Key dimensions of good work as defined by main stakeholders

Measurement	ILO	OECD	Eurofound	CarnegieUK-RSA	CIPD	TUC	Good Work Index (GWO)
Material security/decent wage	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Autonomy		X		X			X
Working time flexibility/work-life balance	X	X	X	X	X		X
Intrinsic aspects/job design				X	X		X
Relationships and voice		X	X	X	X	X	X
Development and training		X	X	X		X	X
Working conditions/ safety/ wellbeing	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Access to quality jobs	X						X
Dignity	X					X	
Equality opportunities around progression and treatment	X	X	X	X		X	
Work pressure/ intensity			X				X

The ways that organisations or countries use measurements can be influenced by the practicalities of the data they have available. Varying

focuses can complicate efforts to track trends and compare good work across labour markets and countries.

The Taylor review

In 2016, then-Prime Minister Theresa May commissioned Matthew Taylor, the former head of the Number 10 Policy Unit, to conduct a review of employment law in relation to modern business practices. Taylor's team gathered evidence on contemporary working practices by holding public hearings across the UK.

The report, Good Work: The Taylor review of modern working practices, was published in 2017.[19] As well as material aspects of job fairness, such as pay and conditions, it considered employee development, fulfilment, and work quality. The Taylor review recommended that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) should report on job quality using robust metrics that would allow for comparisons over time.

Defining good work in the Taylor Review

The Taylor Review defined 'good work' in terms of six metrics, using the QuInnE model from an international project that looked at the interaction of job quality and innovation. [20] These metrics were adapted from the Institute for Employment Research (IER):

- Wages: measured in relation to the national minimum wage and average wage relative to qualifications, acknowledging variations based on individual circumstances and career stages.
- Employment quality: including job security, opportunities for progression, predictability of working hours, and pressure to work long hours or unpaid overtime.
- Education and training: including learning opportunities, the availability and quality of training, and the transferability of skills developed.
- Working conditions: including task discretion and autonomy, semi-autonomous teamwork, job variety, work intensity, health and safety, and social support in the workplace are included, with attention to how these contribute to overall wellbeing.
- Work-life balance: including scheduling of unsociable hours, work duration, and flexibility.

19 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicole, D. et al., Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017

20 QuInnE stands for 'Quality of jobs and Innovation generated Employment outcomes'.

- Consultative participation and collective representation: involvement in organisational decisions and the presence of trade unions. This metric aimed to highlight the link between having a voice at work, feelings of collegiality, and their effect on productivity.

While the review emphasised the importance of all six aspects of good work, it acknowledged that employees could prioritise different factors based on their circumstances. For instance, parents of young children might value flexibility and be willing to compromise on training opportunities if it gives them greater control over their working patterns.

Review findings and recommendations

The review concluded that certain forms of atypical work made people more vulnerable to declines in work quality. These forms included part-time work, self-employment, agency work, temporary work, zero-hours contracts, multi-job working, and gig economy work. The review concluded that decent, fair, and dignified work should be prioritised, and exploitative work tackled. Legislative reform was proposed in various areas to support these principles, including granting agency workers the right to request a direct contract after 12 months, and recognising sick pay as an employment right for all workers.

The Taylor Review said that good work was essential on the grounds of:

- equity, health, and wellbeing
- enhancing citizenship
- improving productivity
- responding to technological and labour market changes.

Response to the Taylor Review

The government accepted the premise of the Taylor Review that good work underpins productivity and acknowledged the challenges regarding job quality in UK employment. In 2018, it published the Good Work Plan, which accepted 51 of the review's 53 recommendations. Secondary legislation addressed several points in the Good Work Plan, and the Queen's Speech of 2019[21] included an Employment Bill for the 2019–2024 Parliament. Although no such bill was ultimately introduced in that Parliament, a series of private members' bills[22] received government support, leading to legal changes that implemented some, but not all, of the review's recommendations.

21 Prime Minister's Office, The Queen's Speech 2019: Background briefing notes, 19 December 2019

22 Victoria Crosbie's Employment (Allocation of Tips) Bill 2022-23; Dan Jarvis's Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Bill 2022-23; Yasmin Qureshi's Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill 2023-23; Scott Bento's Workers' Predictable Terms and Conditions Bill 2022-23

Matt Warman MP was also tasked to conduct a Future of Work review, through the aligned All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which issued a call for evidence.[23] However, the results of this were not published before the 2024 general election.

Following the Taylor review, UK government policy has become more aligned with the terminology of 'good work' as a useful shorthand for the complexity surrounding work quality.

The CIPD's Good Work Index

The Chartered Institute for Professional Development (CIPD), a member organisation for HR professionals, conducts annual surveys of its members to produce its Good Work Index.[24] This consists of seven metrics,[25] which have also informed the Carnegie Trust's work (see below):

- pay and benefits
- employment contracts
- work-life balance (WLB)
- job design/work nature
- work relationships
- voice
- health and wellbeing

These indicators were developed by academics following an independent literature review for the CIPD in 2017.[26] This review concluded that there was no single robust dataset focused on work quality, with the European Working Conditions Survey identified as the most reliable source of information.

Their Good Work Index allows the CIPD to produce updated insights on good work each year, based on the experiences of approximately 5,000 workers in the UK across various industries. This approach helps to identify emerging issues to be identified. For example, in the 2024 Good Work Index, it was reported that workplace conflict was an issue of concern, affecting a quarter

23 All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Future of Work, AMG and APPG news for 2024, 8 Feb 2024

24 Young, J., CIPD Good Work Index 2024: Summary report, London, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2024

25 Wright, S., Warhurst, C., Lyonette, C. and Sarkar, S. Understanding and measuring job quality: Part 2, Indicators of job quality, research report for the CIPD, 2018

26 Warhurst, C., Wright, S. and Lyonette, C., Understanding and measuring job quality: Part 1 – thematic literature review, London, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2017

of all respondents. This highlights an area where interventions and support can be effectively targeted.[27]

The IFOW's Good Work Monitor

The Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW), a UK research charity, has created a Good Work Monitor, along with a Future of Work Commission, and a Good Work Charter to help stakeholders implement the principles of good work.

The Good Work Monitor assigns a score to three key aspects of work quality, categorised into the areas of:

- access and participation
- status and autonomy
- pay and conditions

This approach has found that 'good work' in the UK is unevenly distributed, with higher-quality work concentrated around London, while 'poorer quality work' is found in a strip across northern England, including Lancashire, South Yorkshire, and Lincolnshire. This area is commonly referred to as the 'red wall,' and noted for its shift in traditional voting patterns from Labour to Conservative in the 2019 general election.[28]

The IFOW's Good Work Time Series tracks trends in access to good work across England, Scotland, and Wales. The 2024 data release highlighted the widening gaps in experiences of good work and noted declines in job quality in the East Midlands and north-east England. [29]

The Pissarides Review, a review into the future of work and wellbeing funded by the Nuffield Foundation, and a collaboration between IFOW, Imperial College London, and Warwick Business School, also put 'good work' centre stage. It broke down the key elements of good work as: participation, support, learning, autonomy, dignity, equality, and wellbeing. It also flagged responsible innovation and the proactive harnessing of new technologies as important in fostering 'good work', in particular around the governance of artificial intelligence governance.[30]

27 Young, J., CIPD Good Work Index 2024: Summary report, London, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2024

28 Wainwright, D., General election 2019: How Labour's 'red wall' turned blue', 13 December 2019

29 Thomas, A., Good Work Time Series 2024, IFOW, 16 April 2024

30 IFOW, The Pissarides Review into the Future of Work and Wellbeing, 2025

The Carnegie UK–RSA's Job Quality Measures

One of the Taylor Review's recommendations was that the government adopt a standard measure of job quality to track progress over time. This was progressed through a partnership between Carnegie UK, a wellbeing charity and think tank, and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). Together, they formed a working group on measuring job quality, chaired by Matthew Taylor.

The working group consulted with stakeholders, analysed existing data on job quality and reported its findings in 2018. It proposed a measurement framework for job quality that included 18 metrics organised within seven dimensions.[31]

These dimensions aligned with the CIPD's definitions of job quality and expanded upon the six dimensions from the Taylor review by including wellbeing. The seven dimensions included:

- employment terms, including job security
- pay and benefits
- job design/work nature, which encompasses skill utilisation, autonomy, sense of purpose, and opportunities for progression
- social support/cohesion, from both peers and managers
- health, safety, and wellbeing
- work-life balance
- voice and representation

The report emphasised the importance of obtaining this data from robust national sources in order for job quality measurements to be regarded as credible and useful. It anticipated that 12 new measures would need to be created in the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Labour Force Survey (LFS) to enhance the evidence base around job quality.

The working group's report suggested that BEIS should work with the ONS to deliver this new dataset. Additionally, the report suggested that the government should consider developing a minimum job quality standard based on these metrics.

Following this, in 2022 the ONS released a report that aimed to expand its work quality indicators.[32] This report captured six of seven dimensions

31 Carnegie UK-RSA, Measuring Good Work: The final report of the Measuring Job Quality Working Group, 2018

32 Baeck, A. and Uzzell, K., Job quality in the UK – analysis of job quality indicators: 2021, ONS, 16 December 2022

suggested by the Carnegie–RSA working group (it did not include 'social support and cohesion'). However, it was unable to capture minimum guaranteed hours, pay satisfaction, mental health, skill use, control, sense of purpose, peer support, relationship with line manager, employee information, or over-employment.

The OECD's job quality framework

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a jobs strategy and a job quality framework that highlights three key aspects: [33]

- earnings quality
- labour market security
- working environment

Within this framework, the OECD identifies six dimensions and 17 job characteristics. The report emphasises the importance of job quality for individual wellbeing, as well as for labour force participation and productivity.

According to its assessments, Denmark, Finland, and Germany rank highest in job quality, while Estonia, Greece, Hungary, and Poland rank lower.

ETUI's country ranking on job quality

The European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) has used the European Working Conditions Survey and the European Labour Force Survey to make international comparisons around job quality. It has developed a metric that ranks counties based on this information.

While such metrics can provide a simple way to gauge international performance in terms of good work, they have faced criticism for weighting the dimensions of work quality equally, which can affect the significance of the resulting scores.[34]

33 Cazes, S.A., Hijzen, A. and Saint-Martin, A. "Measuring and assessing job quality: The OECD job quality framework", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No.174, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2015

34 Williams, M., Zhou, Y. and Zou, M., Mapping Good work: The quality of working life across the occupational structure, Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2020

Mapping the Good Work Index

A collaboration between three universities – Queen Mary's, Surrey, and Reading – has conducted research that maps jobs' features to produce a Good Work Index (GWI).[35]

This GWI was developed from nine indicators of good work, which broadly aligned with the Carnegie–RSA analysis. However, the GWI excludes health and wellbeing, which the researchers saw as an outcome of good work rather than a job feature.

The components of the GWI reflect job design and its potential for development, focusing less on work 'fairness' than some other indicators. The GWI components are:

- wages
- job security
- learning
- skill use
- task variety
- task discretion
- job demands
- time control/flexibility
- participation

These components are weighted to create a single index that the research team used to compare job quality and satisfaction across occupations.

Their GWI used the UK's Skills and Employment Survey (SES), which provides seven waves of data between 1986 and 2017 and offers the most comprehensive range of job quality indicators available in the UK's national surveys.

The rationale for focusing on occupations as a starting point for assessing job quality is that they serve as a reasonable proxy for socioeconomic status and subsequent life chances (see section 2.2 for more insights from the GWI project).

35 Williams, M., Zhou, Y. and Zou, M., Mapping Good work: The quality of working life across the occupational structure, Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2020

Trade unions

In the 1980s, Swedish trade unions, particularly the Swedish Metalworkers' Union, known as Metall, played a significant role in developing the concept of 'good work'. [36]

During its 1985 congress, Metall established nine principles for good work:

- job security
- fair share of production earnings
- company co-determination and co-operative work organisation
- use of skills in work
- training
- socially responsible working hours
- workplace equality
- safe working environment

These aspects quickly gained traction within the broader Swedish trade union movement, which focused on enhancing productivity at the national level.

In 2017, the UK's Trades Union Congress (TUC) introduced its approach to good work through the Great Jobs Agenda.[37] This framework provided members with a set of questions to evaluate how their organisations measured up in terms of good work. The TUC identified six components of good work:

- voice
- fair pay
- regular hours
- learning and progression
- fair treatment
- healthy workplaces

The issue of work quality has consistently been a top priority on the TUC's agenda. At the TUC Decent Work conference in 2024, General Secretary Paul

[36] Johansson, J. and Abrahamsson, L. "The good work: A Swedish trade union vision in the shadow of lean production, Applied Ergonomics, Vol 40 No 4, 2009, pp775-780

[37] TUC, The Great Jobs Agenda, June 2017

Nowak emphasised that high work quality is "fundamental to our future as a nation". [38]

Devolved administrations

Scotland

In 2015, Scotland established the Fair Work Convention, an independent advisory body to the Scottish Government. This was developed around the ambition that:

> "By 2025, people in Scotland will have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and for society".[39]

In Scotland, the concept of 'fair work' emphasises social partnership. The Fair Work Convention identified 5 dimensions:

- effective voice
- fair opportunities at work
- security of income
- fulfilment at work
- respect in workplaces

These are seen as providing a fair balance between employers' and workers' rights.[40]

Wales

In Wales, the government set up its own Fair Work Commission in 2018 to explore how fair employment practices could be promoted. The commission reported its findings in 2019, outlining recommendations in Fair Work Wales. In this report, 'fair work' was defined as having six dimensions:

- fair reward
- employee voice and representation
- security and flexibility
- opportunities around access, growth, and progression

38 TUC, Paul Nowak and Treasury minister Darren Jobes MP set to address TUC's Decent Work conference in London today, 5 December 2024.
39 Fair Work Convention, Fair Work Framework 2016, 2016
40 Fair Work Convention, Fair Work Framework 2016, 2016

- a safe, healthy, and inclusive work environment
- legally protected working rights

The Welsh Government has also incorporated procurement as part of its good work strategy. The 2022 Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill, takes this on through "promoting fair work and socially responsible public procurement".[41]

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the 2020 New Decade New Approach agreement committed to creating 'good' jobs and protecting workers' rights. The approach identified key elements of 'good jobs', including:

- voice and autonomy
- decent income
- job security
- satisfying work
- decent working conditions

English cities

Some cities with devolved powers, such as Manchester and London, have established voluntary fair work charters. These charters outline essential aspects of good work, as fair pay, and promote good practices in the workplace.

Cross-national approaches

The European Union has conducted the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) since 1990 through its agency, Eurofound. This survey focuses on gathering data about individual workers' experiences. The EWCS provides representative samples in all EU member states, allowing for cross-country comparisons and analysis of trends over time.

The key elements of job quality collected by the EWCS include:

- physical environment, including health risks
- skills and discretion, including training opportunities
- quality of working time, including working arrangements and atypical work

41 Senedd Cymru, Fair work and better public services? The Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill, 28 November 2022

- career prospects
- work intensity

Different countries use varying terminology when discussing good work. For instance, in Australia, the concept of good work is often framed around the notion of 'fair work' and the establishment of minimum employment standards. This approach aligns with Australia's Fair Work Act of 2009, which set out 10 National Employment Standards and a national minimum wage.[42]

Additional measurement definitions of good work

The Taylor Review aimed to quantify certain aspects of good work but did not focus on measuring more intrinsic job characteristics, such as job satisfaction and opportunities to utilise skills. Academics have since extended this analysis to include factors like dignity and fairness in the workplace.[43]

A 2006 review of scientific evidence for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) highlighted the combination of economic, psychosocial, and personal identity benefits that work can provide. It also established a link between employment quality and issues related to health and mortality.[44]

The DWP review referenced the model of good work used by the Work Foundation think tank, which included elements such as fair pay, equality, security, engaging tasks, positive workplace relationships, autonomy, and employee voice.[45] Conversely, it defined 'bad work' as encompassing limited control, repetitive tasks, excessive pressure, isolation, and inadequate remuneration.

42 Cooper, R. and Ellem, B., "Fair Work and the re-regulation of collective bargaining", Australian Journal of Labour Law, Vol 22 No 3, 2009, pp284-305

43 Pettinger, L. What's Wrong with Work? Bristol, Policy Press, 2019

44 Waddell, G. and Burton, A.K., Is work good for your health and well-being?, report for the DWP, London, 2006.

45 Coats D., An agenda for work: The Work Foundation's challenge to policy makers, The Work Foundation, London, 2005

2 Why is good work important?

Theories of good work say that fulfilling workers' needs produces a more motivated workforce. Some also argue for good work as a way to improve employment security and to reduce disparities between groups.

Arguments for good work can be considered through the case for social justice as well as the business case, in that it positively impacts organisations through improved workers' wellbeing.

2.1 Motivated workforces

The idea that good work leads to a motivated workforce is described in the 'psychology of working theory', developed by US academic psychologists in 2016. [46] This states that decent work (using the terminology more often seen the academic literature, but which can proxy for 'good work') is important to fulfil workers' basic needs and builds on previous psychological theories of motivation developed by Frederick Herzberg and Abraham Maslow in the 20th century.

'Hygiene' and 'motivators' in the workplace

Ideas in the psychology of working theory are similar to Herzberg's widely replicated two-factor theory of motivation.[47] This says that certain basic factors, called 'hygiene factors', must be met for people to avoid job dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors include things like pay, job security, and working conditions.

While Herzberg theorised that these factors do not directly motivate people, if they are missing, job satisfaction will fall. Herzberg distinguished hygiene factors from what he termed 'motivators'. These motivators relate to the intrinsic aspects of a job and include recognition, opportunities for personal growth, and having a voice: qualities that are linked to job satisfaction.

Good work includes both hygiene and motivational factors. For instance, fair pay is a hygiene factor, while opportunities for training and development are motivational factors. Motivational theory highlights the importance of

46 Duffy, R.D., Blustein, D.L., Deimer, M.A. and Autin, K.L., "The Psychology of Working Theory", Journal of Counselling Psychology, Vol 63, 2016, pp127-148

47 Herzberg, F., Work and the nature of man, New York: World Publishing, 1966

finding a balance between these areas to cultivate a committed workforce and achieve productivity gains.

Work and the hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has also been influential in explaining motivation.[48] This approach groups human needs in a five-layered pyramid, where the most essential needs at the bottom of the pyramid, such as physiological safety, need to be met before the higher needs of personal fulfilment can be (described by Maslow as 'self-actualisation'). In work terms, these essential needs can be interpreted as having a comfortable and safe workplace and being paid enough to survive.

As the pyramid builds, other aspects of good work can be mapped onto it: safety needs (such as employment protection), love and belonging (such as workplace relationships), and esteem (such as autonomy opportunities in work). Self-actualisation sits at the pinnacle of the pyramid, that is, the job satisfaction or meaningful work aspects that employees can achieve when their more basic working needs have been met.

Using changes to job quality to improve motivation

Organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) argue that understanding the effect of job quality on work motivation is important given its link to productivity.[49] Indeed, harnessing motivation is the basis of high-performance work systems.[50]

Since the evidence base consistently indicates that job quality varies across the labour market, raising job quality could provide a policy lever to improve motivation and prompt movements into paid work. For example, since the covid-19 pandemic, the UK has been experiencing high economic inactivity.[51] The ONS suggested that at least part of this has been caused by early retirement following the strains of the pandemic, as older workers reassess their priorities and are reluctant to return to unsatisfying work.[52]

48 Maslow, A.H., "A theory of human motivation", Psychological Review, Vol 50 No 4, 1943, pp370-96; Maslow, A.H., Motivation and personality, New York: Harper and Row, 1954

49 Alanizan, S., "How does employee satisfaction and motivation affect productivity?" International Journal of Business and Management, Vol 18 No 2, 2023, p55; Shahzadi, I., Javed, A., Prizada, S.S., Nasreen, S. and Khanam, F., "Impact of employee motivation on employee performance", European Journal of Business and Management, Vol 6 No 23, 2014, pp159-166

50 Boxall, P. and Purcell, J. Strategy and Human Resource Management, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022

51 Commons Library research briefing, UK labour market statistics, 10 June 2025

52 ONS, Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment since the start of the coronavirus pandemic: wave 2, 2022

Research has shown a link between job quality and positive mental health outcomes, indicating that those in low-quality jobs experience a greater decline in mental health compared to the unemployed.[53]

2.2 Social inequalities in work

There is a substantial amount of literature examining the detrimental effects that poor-quality work can have on employees' health. This includes the Marmot reviews from 2010 and 2020, which established a connection between occupational positioning and health, highlighting a social gradient in health in that both life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy were consistently lower in more deprived areas.[54]

The research conducted by Williams and his team on the Good Work Index, mapping job quality across different occupations, has shown which jobs are most likely to adversely affect health. This can indicate where intervention might be most beneficial, for example, in tackling the intensive work practices of routine occupations.[55]

Recent changes in work expectations

Precarious and atypical work have grown in the UK in recent decades; this was documented in the Taylor Review in terms of rises in work in the gig economy, agency work, and zero-hours contracts.[56] The longer-term societal and individual implications of long-term insecurity remain unclear.

The philosophy of the Taylor review was that 'good work' enhanced wellbeing and therefore productivity.

> Quality work is strongly linked to better health outcomes for individuals. Good work not only enables people to support themselves and their families financially but with the right kind of support, from employers and others, work has a positive impact on health and wellbeing.[57]

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53 Butterworth, P., Leach, L.S., Strazdins, L., Olesen, S.C., Rodgers, B. and Broom, D.H. The psychosocial quality of work determines whether employment has benefits for mental health: results from a longitudinal national household panel survey, Occupational Health and Environmental Medicine, 68, 11, pp.806-812

54 Marmot, M., Fair society, healthy lives : the Marmot Review : strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010, 2010;
Marmot, M., Allen, J., Boyce, T., Goldblatt, P and Morrison, J. Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on, 2020

55 Williams, M., Zhou, Y. and Zou, M., Mapping Good work: The quality of working life across the occupational structure, Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2020

56 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicole, D. et al., Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017

57 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicole, D. et al., Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017, p.97

As seen above, the review has triggered policy discussion about measuring and tackling job quality across the UK's labour market, conscious of inequalities that can develop around atypical work.

Moving towards work quality

A healthy workforce complements the government's priority of productivity and growth as key economic issues for this parliamentary term.[58]

The academic evidence base has pointed to what happens when the quality of work is not prioritised. For example, precarious work has been linked to adverse mental health effects and decreased motivation.[59]

The evidence base indicates that access to 'good work' is influenced by differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and age. For example, the Good Work Index (developed by researchers at Queen Mary University, the University of Surrey, and the University of Reading: see section 1.2) revealed significant disparities in job quality between managerial/ professional occupations and routine occupations. Additionally, it found that younger workers experienced lower job quality compared to those in more senior roles, who were often older.[60]

Analysis of this Good Work Index has also revealed significant variations in job quality in more junior roles. The research team emphasised opportunities for improving job quality within workplaces. By tracking overall job quality over time, they found improvements in job quality across various occupations. However, these were counterbalanced by a trend towards more routine, controlled, and intensive work for most employees. A significant proportion of the workforce still lacked access to 'good work'.[61]

The Good Work Index researchers also offer explanations of why certain jobs may stand out in terms of job quality. For instance, product and fashion designers are rated as having the highest job quality, even though they are classified as intermediate-level occupations with average hourly wage expectations. The authors suggested that 'artisan' occupations like product and fashion designers exceeded expectations through a combination of their relatively high skill use, task discretion, and job security, which was not typical of their occupational positioning.

58 Gov.uk, The King's Speech, July 2024

59 Allan, B.A., Autin, K.L., and Wilkins-Yel, K.G., "Precarious work in the 21st century: a psychological perspective", Journal of Vocational Behaviour, Vol 126, 2021, p103491; Kalleberg, A., Precarious Lives, Cambridge, Policy, 2018

60 Williams, M., Zhou, Y. and Zou, M., Mapping Good work: The quality of working life across the occupational structure, Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2020

61 As above

3 Recent changes in the labour market

Certain changes in the labour market in recent years have brought 'good work' into focus. These have included the growth of atypical work, such as zero hours contracts and work in the gig economic, economic shock, and more recently, the covid-19 pandemic and its lasting impacts. These have challenged ideas about work quality and its importance, and informed subsequent government legislative priorities.

3.1 Atypical work

In recent years, 'atypical' or non-standard employment has increased significantly in the UK.[62] This trend is often linked to job insecurity and includes a rise in agency work, zero-hours contracts, and phenomena such as 'bogus' self-employment.[63]

Bogus self-employment refers to situations where workers are required by the organisations that pay them to register as self-employed, but they lack essential aspects of true self-employment. For instance, they may not have control over their working hours or the order in which they complete tasks. This practice has become increasingly common in the gig economy, for example, among delivery drivers. Workers on these contracts are at risk of losing benefits associated with traditional employment, such as holiday pay.[64]

While atypical work has also increased across Europe, the rise has not been uniform. For example, 10% of Hungarian workers are on non-standard employment contracts, and 40% of Dutch workers.[65] Atypical work is frequently associated with low pay, limited opportunities for advancement, and inadequate employment protections.[66]

62 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicole, D. et al., Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017

63 Kalleberg, A., Precarious Lives, Cambridge, Policy, 2018

64 New Economics Foundation, Beyond the gig economy: empowering the self-employed workforce, 2019.

65 Warhurst, C. and Knox, A., "Manifesto for a new quality of working life", Human Relations, Vol 75 No 2, 2022, pp304-321

66 Standing, G., The Precariat, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2011

Australian research has found strong evidence that atypical work can harm workers' physical and mental health,[67] as well as that of their families, particularly regarding issues like child poverty and addiction.[68]

In the autumn of 2024, the incoming Labour government published its Employment Rights Bill, which directly addressed key aspects of atypical work, including giving employees the right to reasonable notice of their shift patterns, and to be offered a minimum number of working hours in their contacts.

3.2 The pandemic's impact on work

The covid-19 pandemic fundamentally changed how jobs were organised during the national lockdowns, but it has also had lasting effects.[69] While technology had been gradually enabling different work arrangements, including remote and distributed working, the pandemic significantly accelerated the uptake of remote working. During lockdowns, organisations were compelled to shift entirely to remote working, relying on online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom to maintain business stability.[70]

Before the pandemic, in 2019, only 12% of the UK's workforce reported working from home at least occasionally during the week. However, during the first lockdown in early 2020, this figure surged to 49%.[71] By early 2023 it had decreased to 40%. Since this later data was collected after government restrictions had ended, the 40% might be seen as a reasonable estimate of the proportion of jobs suited for some degree of hybrid working.

In the time since the pandemic but before the 2024 flexible work legislation, many employers have adopted informal hybrid working practices. This shift has largely not required making contractual changes to existing working

67 de Witte, H., Pienaar, J. and De Cuyper, N., "Review of 30 years of longitudinal studies on the association between job security and health and well-being: Is there causal evidence?" Australian Psychologist, Vol 51 No 1, 2016, pp18-31

68 Quinlan, M. and Bohle, P., Job quality: The impact of work organization on health in Knox, A. and Warhurst, C. (eds.) Job quality in Australia, Sydney, Federation

69 Parry, J., Reimagining the organization of work post-pandemic, in B.McDonough and J. Parry (eds.) *Sociology, Work and Organisations: A global context*, London, Routledge

70 Parry, J., Young, Z., Bevan, S., Veliziotis, M., Baruch, Y., Beigi, M., Bajorek, Z., Richards, C. and Tochia, C. Work after lockdown: no going back. What we have learned from working from home through the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022

71 ONS, Characteristics of homeworkers, Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023, Feb 2023

arrangements as organisations adapted to managing hybrid working setups.[72]

Improvements in some aspects of job quality over and since the pandemic

Research from Cardiff University found that average levels of job quality (based on anonymous surveys) improved over the period between the beginning and end of the pandemic.[73] Most non-financial criteria of jobs that they measured improved, except continued learning (which was unchanged) and task discretion. The research also identified differences in working time autonomy and work intensity between men and women, with women more likely to report improvements in these areas.

The researchers found that jobs previously rated as lower quality before the pandemic saw the most significant improvements in the later measurement.[74] One explanation, suggested by the authors, for these improvements in job quality was the rise in remote working. Those who were able to work remotely reported better job quality, and remote working became more available in jobs where it had not been previously, a finding corroborated by data in the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey.

The authors also linked improvements in job quality over this period to the increased emphasis that employers placed on employee wellbeing during the pandemic.[75] Additionally, some jobs rated as lower quality were eliminated after the end of the furlough period, which has changed the overall composition of jobs in the labour market since the pandemic began. This change is likely to continue evolving.[76]

Job quality for 'key workers'

Despite improvements identified in the Cardiff study, workers in roles that continued to operate face-to-face, often referred to as 'key workers', experienced heightened levels of risk during the pandemic. For instance, occupations such as factory work and health and social care faced an increased risk of death during the lockdowns in 2020.[77]

72 Parry, J., Bradbury, B., and Veliziotis, Organisational case studies on flexible work, Acas, 2024

73 Davies, R. and Felstead, A., "Is job quality better or worse? Insights from quiz data collected before and after the pandemic", Industrial Relations Journal, Vol 54, 2023, pp203-222

74 Davies, R. and Felstead, A., "Is job quality better or worse? Insights from quiz data collected before and after the pandemic", Industrial Relations Journal, Vol 54, 2023, pp203-222

75 As above

76 As above

77 ONS, COVID-19 related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered between 9 March and 28 December 2020, Jan 2021.

Focus on job retention over quality

Academic commentators, such as Professor Francis Green at UCL, have observed that the two major crises of the 2008 recession and the 2020 pandemic have led to progress on work quality being deprioritised behind maintaining job numbers in an adverse climate.[78] During these challenging times, good work became less sustainable, having adverse effects in ways that were patterned by age, geographical area, and ethnicity.[79] For example, older and younger age groups were particularly affected, being more likely to lose their jobs or become furloughed, while ethnic minority groups saw a higher unemployment rate and reduced income.[80] The longer-term scarring effect of young people's pandemic labour market experiences, is a topic of ongoing discussion, with early analysis pointing to marked increases in mental health problems.[81]

78 Green, F., "Decent Work and the Quality of Work and Employment" in K.F.Zimmermann (eds.) Handbook of Labor, Human Relations and Population Economics, Springer, Cham, 2021

79 Dobbins, T., Good Work: Policy and research on the quality of work in the UK, Research Briefing Paper, House of Commons Library, 2022;
IFOW, The Good Work Time Series, 1 February 2022

80 Commons Library Research Briefing, Coronavirus: impact on the labour market, 9 August 2022

81 Sehmi, R. and Slaughter, H. Double Trouble: exploring the labour market and mental health impact of Covid-19 on young people, Resolution Foundation, 2021

4 Topics related to good work included in the Employment Rights Bill

The Employment Rights Bill was introduced to Parliament on 10 October 2024, completed its Commons stages in March 2025 and was at report stage in the House of Lords in July 2025.

The bill would make reforms to a wide range of employment law areas. This includes some areas that are often seen as key elements of 'good work', such as flexible and hybrid working, family-related leave, and employee voice.

For more information on the bill, see the Commons Library's briefing papers:

- Employment Rights Bill 2024-25 (on the bill's provisions as introduced)
- Employment Rights Bill 2024-25: Progress of the bill (on the bill's passage through Parliament)

In July 2025, the government launched its roadmap for Implementing the Employment Rights Bill.

4.1 Flexible working

One of the key measures of 'good work' is flexibility. This refers to the ability for a worker to choose where and when they complete their standard working hours.

Flexible working covers a wide range of practices, including part-time working, hybrid and remote working, compressed hours, job shares, and flexible time arrangements. Employees may seek flexible working arrangements for various reasons, such as managing health or caregiving responsibilities, or transitioning out of parental leave or into retirement.

Research shows that this flexibility benefits employees by enhancing their work-life balance, and it enables people with disabilities or caring responsibilities to participate in jobs that may be difficult to organise under rigid working patterns.[82] When organisations assess flexible working

[82] Fahy, M., Dowling-Hetherington, L., Phillips, S., Moloney, B., Duffy, C., Paul, G., Fealy, G., Kroll, T. and Lafferty, A. " 'If my boss wasn't so accommodating, I don't know what I would do': Workplace

requests, they may need to balance effective business operation with accommodating these requests.

In January 2025, the House of Lords launched a special inquiry into home-based working in the UK, to include both remote and hybrid models. In 2024, the ONS reported that 28% of the UK's workforces were regularly working in a hybrid pattern,[83] a pattern that has stabilised since the pandemic. This Lords inquiry into these forms of flexible working will report on its national call for evidence in November 2025.

Clause 9 of the bill

The working time flexibility aspect of 'good work' is reflected in clause 9 of the Employment Rights Bill 2024-25 (clause 7 as introduced). This clause aims to increase access to flexible work by requiring employers to use a more objective reasonableness test when evaluating requests. The purpose of this part of the legislation is to encourage employers to give more consideration to requests for flexible working. Supporters of these reforms hope that a more systematic and transparent process of review can foster better communication between applicants and employers.[84]

The bill's impact assessment anticipated that enabling more flexible work would improve work quality and enhance business competitiveness.[85] This assessment aligns with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) position that flexible working benefits not only employees but also employers, as well as broader economic advantages.[86]

Previous legislation on flexible work

In the UK, the legislative framework surrounding flexible work has gradually expanded over the past two decades. In 2002, the Employment Act granted parents of young and disabled children the right to request flexible working conditions. In 2014 this right was extended to include all workers with more than 26 weeks of continuous service.

In April 2024, the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 improved access to flexible working by reducing the restrictions on requests. For example, applicants were able to make two statutory requests per year, where previously one had been permitted. Additionally, secondary

supports for carers and the role of line managers and co-workers in mediating informal flexibility", Human Resource Management Journal, 2024, p1-17; Taylor, H., Florisson, R., Wilkes, M. and Holland, P., The changing workplace: enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working, The Work Foundation, 2022; Parry, J., Young, Z., Bevan, S., Veliziotis, M., Baruch, Y., Beigi, M., Bajorek, Z., Richards, C. and Tochia, C. *Work after lockdown: no going back. What we have learned from working from home through the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2022

83 ONS, Who are the hybrid workers? 11 November 2024

84 Parry, J. and Veliziotis, Employment Rights Bill: how will it affect flexible working?, Acas, 13 February 2025

85 DBT, Impact Assessment: Making flexible working the default, 21 October 2024

86 ILO, Working Time and Work-Life Balance around the World, Geneva, 2022

legislation established the right to request flexible working from the first day of employment.[87] Together these changes expanded workers' access to flexible working, that is, their ability to vary their working arrangements by time or location, in discussion with their employer.

Arranging flexible work

Flexible working in organisations is organised in different ways, the majority of which are not through statutory requests.[88] This includes arrangements established through internal organisational processes, as well as everyday, more informal flexibility. Research conducted for Acas (the UK's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) has shown that this range of forms is an intentional employment practice, providing an essential way to address employees' diverse needs to vary their working patterns, that may not always be regular or predictable.[89] Although this kind of informal flexibility is not covered by the 2024 Employment Rights Bill, it can still be supported through the Acas Code of Practice and by organisations sharing good practice.

Statutory requests allow employees to change their contract to accommodate flexible working, which may be more secure than informal arrangements that employers could change if circumstances change. Statutory requests are not monitored nationally, but they can be accessed via freedom of information requests to public bodies. While statutory requests have not been the primary means of accessing flexible working, the push for returning to offices by some organisations since the pandemic may increase pressures to formalise hybrid arrangements in the future, particularly for employees who would otherwise be unable to work on-site every day.[90]

Prevalence of flexible work

Timewise, a social enterprise company, has been collecting data on employer flexibility for nine years, which it has used to develop its Flexible Jobs Index. Its 2023 report found that 31% of jobs were advertised as flexible. This indicating that a slowing down of flexible working advertisements since their more rapid increases from 10% in 2015 and 17% in 2021. Between 2022 and 2023, they increased more gradually from 30% to 31% (before the new legislation came into place).[91]

87 Commons Library briefing, Flexible Working, 9 September 2024
88 Parry, J., Bradbury, B., and Veliziotis, Organisational case studies on flexible work, Acas, 2024
89 As above
90 Parry, J. and Veliziotis, Employment Rights Bill: how will it affect flexible working?, Acas, 13 February 2025
91 Timewise, Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2023, 2023

There are notable differences in flexibility across industries; for instance, 45% of jobs in social services are advertised as flexible, compared with 10% in construction and facilities.[92]

Case study research on hybrid working

2015 study in China

In 2015, before the covid-19 pandemic and the widespread adoption of remote working, the economist Nick Bloom at the University of Stanford conducted a randomised controlled experiment comparing the effects of hybrid working on call centre workers in China over nine months.[93] The first group of workers used a hybrid model, spending four days a week working from home and one day in the office. The second group worked entirely from the office. All participants followed the same schedule, used the same resources, and reported back to the same leaders.

The results of the experiment showed that the hybrid group outperformed the office-based group by 13%. This difference in performance was attributed to the hybrid workers being logged onto their work systems for longer periods and taking more calls per minute. Their quiet and uninterrupted home working environment also provided them with easier access to necessary facilities.[94]

While research on call centres might not be applicable to all sectors of the workforce, the Stanford research offers a substantial and robust dataset from which to draw insights.

Resistance to 'return to office' mandates

When reviewing international evidence, Bloom's team discovered that levels of hybrid working have stabilised since the pandemic.[95] The 2024 wave of the Stanford team's national US survey revealed growing a resistance to returning to office-based work over the past two years. In the 2024 survey, 44% of respondents stated that they would comply with office return mandates, down from 53%.[96]

The researchers concluded that employees who were open to being office-based had already adjusted their working patterns. This left a more committed group of hybrid workers who were more likely to leave office-

92 Timewise, Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2023, 2023

93 Bloom, N., Laing, J., Roberts, J. and Ying, Z.J., "Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment", Quarterly Journal of Economics, Vol 130 No 1, 2015, pp165-218

94 As above

95 Aksoy, C.G., Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N., Davis, S., Dolls, M. and Zarate, P., "Working from home around the world", Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Vol 53 No 2, 2022, pp281-330

96 Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N., Buckman, S. and Davis, S., SWAA December 2024 Updates, WFH research, 2024

based jobs. Additionally, they noted that the workers more resistant to office mandates tended to be more senior and higher-performing employees.[97]

Flexible working legislation in other countries

Australia

Flexible working arrangements in Australia are supported by the Fair Work Act 2009 and the Fair Work Regulations 2009.

The National Employment Standards set out in the act define workers' rights to request flexible working arrangements after they have been with an employer for 12 months. This was further expanded by the 'Secure Jobs, Better Pay' Act of 2022, which extended flexible working rights to pregnant employees and those experiencing domestic violence.

Additionally, the Act increased employers' obligations when handling flexible working requests, including the obligation to respond to a request within 21 days, and the requirement to comply with 'reasonable business grounds' in refusing a request. It empowered the Fair Work Commission to address disputes related to these arrangements.

Denmark

In 2022, the Danish Working Environment Agency established guidelines for remote working that enhance occupational health support. These guidelines set the expectation that employers provide appropriate workstation equipment and furniture for employees who regularly work from home. They also cap the working week at 37 hours, with some sectoral variations, such as in retail and hospitality around operating hours.

The Danish Employment Contracts Act provides employees with the right to request flexible working arrangements. Flexible working is a cultural norm, and employers must offer 'valid justification' in refusing a request.

Additionally, the Social Appeals Board issued a statement outlining special principles regarding employers' liability for injuries sustained while working remotely.

Finland

Finland has the most widespread flexible working in the world and ranks low among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries on metrics of long working hours culture.[98] The Working Hours Act, enacted in 1996, allowed employees to adjust their working time by three hours around their core hours (that is, they could start and finish three hours

97 Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N., and Davis, S.J., "The Evolution of Work from Home", Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol 37 No 4, 2023, pp23-50

98 Savage, M., "Why Finland leads the world in flexible work", BBC Worklife, 8 August 2019

earlier or later). In 2020, this legislation was updated to permit staff to work from different locations for up to half of their working time.

The popularity of flexible working in Finland can be partly attributed to its industrial context, as the country has a reputation as a tech hub, where jobs tend to facilitate autonomous remote working. Additionally, Finland's largely rural landscape, combined with its dispersed population, makes daily commuting more complicated than in more urbanised societies.[99]

Canada

In Canada, employees in federally regulated workplaces have a statutory right to request flexible working arrangements under the Labor Code. To qualify for this request, employees must have been with an organisation for over six months. They can ask for flexibility regarding their working hours, schedule, and location.

Since September 2024, federal departments in Canada have been required to offer hybrid working options to their staff. However, employees must be in the office at least three days a week, a stipulation that has drawn opposition from unions.[100]

Portugal

In Portugal, remote working legislation was enacted shortly after the covid-19 pandemic, leading the World Economic Forum to label the country a "pioneer" in flexible working.[101]

Parents of children up to eight years old automatically have the right to work from home. The legislation also prohibits employers from contacting staff outside of their contracted working hours, requires organisations to cover remote working expenses, such as electricity, and forbids monitoring of remote workers.

4.2 Family-related leave

Family-related leave enables parents to take time off work to fulfil family commitments. This is often captured in metrics of good work that consider equal opportunities. The OECD considers employment-protected parental leave as vital to promote gender equality and support parents with lower incomes.[102] It classifies parental leave systems among its member countries,

99 Savage, M., "Why Finland leads the world in flexible work", BBC Worklife, 8 August 2019

100 Kavanagh, A., "Canada may lead the US on workplace flexibility, but there's a catch", BetaKit, 23 August 2024

101 Torkingson, S. The UK's new flexible working law and why WFH is here to stay for the global workforce, World Economic Forum, 2023

102 OECD, The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An uphill battle, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2017

dividing them into four main categories: maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, and home care leave.[103]

The Employment Rights Bill extends existing rights to bereavement leave, ordinary (unpaid) parental leave, and paternity leave, which are detailed in clauses 15 to 18 (11 to 14 as introduced).

The bill would make parental and paternity leave a day-one entitlement (currently, eligibility starts at one year and 26 weeks, respectively) and expand access to bereavement leave. Under the new proposal, bereavement leave will not be limited to parents of children under 18 but will extend to anyone with a specified relationship with the employee.

Maternity leave

Maternity leave is provided for women who are employed at the time of childbirth or adoption. In 2023, the OECD average for paid maternity leave was 18.6 weeks. The UK offers a relatively long period of paid maternity leave, lasting 39 weeks. The Employment Rights Bill will remove the qualifying period for statutory maternity pay, and secondary legislation will make it unlawful, except in certain circumstances, for pregnant women or those returning from maternity leave to be dismissed within six months of returning to the workplace. The bill provides the same parental rights for same-sex couples as for heterosexual couples.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has recommended that maternity leave should be available for a minimum of 14 weeks. Most OECD countries offer public income support during maternity leave. Some countries, such as Australia and Sweden, have integrated payment regulations into a non-gendered parental leave scheme.

The rate of payment during maternity leave varies by country. For example, in Ireland and Canada (excluding Quebec), there is no paid leave at a high earnings level. In the UK, less than half of the maternity leave period is compensated at a higher earnings level (over £187.18 a week after the first 6 weeks), while most other countries provide payments that align with a higher earnings level for the duration of maternity leave.[104]

Paternity leave

Paternity leave entitles partners to time off from work for a specified period following childbirth or adoption, although this period is generally shorter than maternity leave. In the UK, this includes anyone who is the partner of the mother or birth parent, including same-sex parents, as well as the

[103] OECD, OECD Family Database, 2024

[104] Dobrotić, I., Blum, S., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M., 20th international Review of Leave policies and related research, 2024

secondary adopter in an adopting couple. The Employment Rights Bill extends entitlement to paternity leave from 26 weeks' service, making it available from the first day of employment.

The EU Work-Life Balance Directive establishes a minimum of 10 working days for paternity leave. In some countries, such as Iceland, paternity leave is included within a broader parental rights scheme rather than being a separate entitlement.

Paternity leave is usually paid, and many countries provide a high earnings level throughout this period. In contrast, countries like Luxembourg do not have standalone paternity leave; instead, fathers are expected to use 10 days of leave for 'extraordinary circumstances.' Additionally, in a few countries, including Denmark and Italy, fathers must take at least some of their paternity leave.[105]

The UK provides two weeks of paid paternity leave, whereas France provides five weeks, Spain provides 16 weeks, and Australia provides two weeks.

Campaigning charities like Pregnant then Screwed have pointed out that the UK's paternity leave provisions are less favourable compared to those in other European countries.[106] This discrepancy contributes to ongoing gender inequalities and pay gaps, as the responsibility for childcare often falls on women.[107] Research indicates that fathers' use of parental leave is a strong predictor of their future involvement in childcare.[108]

Parental leave

In the UK, parental leave can refer to ordinary (or unpaid) parental leave – which can be taken at any point up to a child's 18th birthday, as well as shared parental leave, which is where maternity leave can be reallocated between parents. Leave entitlements are generally assigned individually to each parent, while eligibility for public benefits is based on the family unit.

Different systems exist regarding how periods of parental leave are reserved for each parent in other countries. Under the Work-Life Balance Directive, EU member states are required to provide a minimum of four months of paid parental leave to parents, two months of which are non-transferrable.

105 Dobrotić, I., Blum, S., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M., 20th international Review of Leave policies and related research, 2024

106 Oral evidence presented the Public Bill Committee of the Employment Rights Bill, Pregnant then Screwed, 26 November 2024

107 Oral evidence presented the Public Bill Committee of the Employment Rights Bill, Pregnant then Screwed, 26 November 2024

108 Adema, W., C. Clarke and Frey, V., "Paid Parental Leave: Lessons from OECD Countries and Selected U.S. States", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 172, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015

Parental le entitlements vary significantly between countries. Some countries, such as Canada, Denmark and the UK, offer shorter leave periods of less than 15 months, while others, like France, Germany, and Spain, provide longer durations. Most countries offer at least some financial support during parental leave; however, there is no payment for parental leave in Israel, Spain, and the UK.[109]

In July 2025, the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department of Business and Trade co-launched a review of parental leave and pay in the UK, as part of their supporting work for the Next Steps to Make Work Pay. Running for 18 months, this will cover maternity, paternity, and shared parental leave and pay systems.

Home care leave

Home care leave offers employment-protected leave for an extended period following parental leave. This kind of family leave is only available in a few OECD countries (not available in the UK) and is typically unpaid.[110] The Employment Rights Bill did not contain proposals around home care leave.

Bereavement leave

Countries are increasingly recognising the need to provide support during exceptional periods of family need, such as during bereavement (often relating to children). For instance, in Iceland, parents can take up to six months of paid bereavement leave for the death of a child, and three months for stillbirth, with two months available for miscarriage. Employees are also protected from dismissal for taking this leave.[111]

In Canada, policies regarding child bereavement leave vary by province. However, a specific provision allows employees in federally regulated industries to take up to 156 weeks of unpaid leave if their child has died as a result of a probable crime or if the child has disappeared.

In France, parents are entitled to two weeks of child bereavement leave if their child was under 25 and not a parent at the time of death.

In the UK, bereavement leave for the death of a child under 18, stillbirth, or loss of pregnancy after 24 weeks is currently set at two weeks, during which time employees are entitled to statutory parental bereavement pay. [112] The Employment Rights Bill contains a provision, under clause 18 (introduced as

[109] Dobrotić, I., Blum, S., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M., 20th international Review of Leave policies and related research, 2024

[110] OECD, OECD Family Database, 2024

[111] Dobrotić, I., Blum, S., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M., 20th international Review of Leave policies and related research, 2024

[112] Acas, Time off work for bereavement: leave and pay when someone dies, 3 January 2025.

clause 14), to extend bereavement leave entitlement to anyone with whom employees have a specified relationship.

In January 2025 the Women and Equalities Select Committee published the report on its inquiry into miscarriage and bereavement leave.[113] This recommended introducing a minimum legal standard of paid bereavement leave around pregnancy loss before 24 weeks that applied to both women and partners, and suggested amendments to the Employment Rights Bill. The government responded that at the Commons report stage of the bill, the principle of bereavement leave in relation to pregnancy loss had been accepted, and that the issue would be subject to further discussion as the bill progressed through parliament.[114] In July 2025, it was confirmed that the government intended to amend the bill during its Lords stages to extend bereavement leave to parents experiencing pregnancy losses before 24 weeks.[115]

4.3 Trade union rights

Many tools or indices developed to measure good work include the element of 'voice and representation' in the workplace.

In the Employment Rights Bill 2024-25, trade union rights are addressed through provisions on collective sectoral bargaining (part 3) and trade union law and industrial action (part 4). In broad terms, Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay committed to "empowering workers to organise collectively through trade unions" and proposed using Fair Pay Agreements, following a consultation period. [116] Fair Pay Agreements are a collective bargaining tool to be used by employer and worker representatives to negotiate sector-wide minimum pay and terms of employment.

During the Commons committee stage of the bill, Conservative MPs opposed some of the proposed trade union reforms on the grounds that they might lead to increased industrial action.[117]

Sectoral bargaining in the bill

Collective bargaining in the UK typically occurs at the enterprise level, that is, each negotiation occurs within a single workplace. This is internationally unusual, and a sectoral collective approach is more common in other

113 Women and Equalities Committee, 2nd Report – Equality at work: miscarriage and bereavement leave, 15 January 2025
114 Women and Equalities Committee, 1st Special report – Equality at work: miscarriage and bereavement leave: government response, 24 March 2025
115 Nevett, J. and Emery, A., Bereavement leave to be extended to miscarriages before 24 weeks, 7 July 2025
116 Labour, Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay: delivering a New Deal for working people, 2024, p12
117 Commons Library briefing Employment Rights Bill 2024-25: Progress of the Bill, 5 March 2005

countries like Germany and Norway, with agreements aiming to represent specific sectors or industries.

The Employment Rights Bill proposes a sectoral bargaining approach for teaching assistants and care workers. It aims to strengthen collective bargaining for these groups through Fair Pay Agreements for adult social care and reinstating the school support staff negotiating body. Justin Madders, Under-Secretary of State for the Department for Business and Trade, explained that this focus is intended to improve working conditions and reduce turnover:

> About 5% of the entire working population are employed in adult social care, and with a 25% turnover rate and a rampant abuse of zero-hours contracts and the minimum wage laws, we felt that sector needed the most attention first. We must make a concerted effort to drive up working conditions because those who work in that area have been undervalued and underappreciated for too long, and that has to change. We must focus on getting it right in adult social care, and we will see where that takes us.[118]

In the same debate, the Opposition (Conservative) Member Gareth Bacon responded:

> The Government's impact assessment for the adult social care sector confirmed that collective bargaining will be very costly for business.[119]

The bill also includes measures to repeal the Minimum Service Level Framework governing strike activity and to provide new rights regarding union access to workplaces, including access requests that can be logged from a named list of purposes.

Trade union rights in other countries

In recent decades, the proportion of workers covered by collective workplace agreements has declined by an average of 25% in OECD countries, with significant variation among them.[120] For instance, France and Italy have high coverage rates of 98% to 100%, while the United States and Japan have coverage rates of under 20%. Countries with collective bargaining agreements negotiated by sector or nationally tend to have more stable and higher coverage.[121]

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has assessed Commonwealth countries as performing below the global average in terms

[118] HC Deb 31 October 2023, v755 c922

[119] HC Deb 31 October 2023, v755 c923

[120] OECD, Negotiating our way up: collective bargaining in a changing world of work, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019; OECD/AIAS ICTWSS database, How do collective bargaining systems and workers' voice arrangements compare across OECD and EU countries?, 2023

[121] OECD/AIAS ICTWSS database, How do collective bargaining systems and workers' voice arrangements compare across OECD and EU countries?, 2023

of trade union rights.[122] The ITUC reports that 87% of Commonwealth nations do not provide workers with the right to establish or join a trade union, compared with 74% of countries worldwide.[123]

An analysis by the OECD of collective bargaining systems in its member countries found that nations with high and well-organised collective agreement coverage, involving social partners, tend to offer higher-quality working environments.[124]

Types of collective bargaining

There are notable differences among OECD countries regarding the organisation of collective bargaining. Two-thirds of these countries conduct collective bargaining primarily at the firm or organisational level.[125] Mostly, continental European countries, such as Germany and Spain, have sustained sectoral agreements. In Scandinavian countries, sectoral agreements are used as a broad framework while still allowing for firm-level bargaining. A third, less common pattern, seen in Portugal and Italy, involves mainly high-level agreements with limited firm-level bargaining.[126]

Organisation of workers' rights

An academic international review of employment quality has highlighted distinctions in how countries organise workers' rights.[127]

It categorised the Nordic countries as 'inclusive regimes' that aim to uphold and extend workers' rights while maintaining high employment rates. In contrast, Mediterranean countries were classified as 'dualist regimes' which prioritise the rights of a core workforce, often neglecting those on the periphery.

A third category, encompassing more Anglo-Saxon countries, like the UK and Germany, was identified as 'market employment regimes,' where there is minimal employment regulation, and the labour market is driven by market adjustments to boost employment rates and reward productive employees.

Limits on trade unions

In the UK, the ITUC report pointed out incidents of anti-trade union surveillance occurring in Amazon warehouses.[128] In their 2024 global rights

122 ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation), The World's Worst Countries for Workers: How Commonwealth countries performed in the 2021 ITUC Global Rights Index, 2021

123 As above

124 OECD, Negotiating our way up: collective bargaining in a changing world of work, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019

125 As above

126 As above

127 Gallie, D., "Production regimes and the quality of employment in Europe", Annual Review of Sociology, Vol 33 No 1, 2007, pp85-104

128 ITUC, The World's Worst Countries for Workers: How Commonwealth countries performed in the 2021 ITUC Global Rights Index, 2021

assessment, the ITUC categorised the UK among countries experiencing a "systematic violation of rights", alongside countries like Israel and Hungary, and notably below the majority of European countries.[129]

In particular, it drew attention to "an excessively broad definition of essential services to restrict or ban strikes" and the passing of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill in July 2023, which the ITUC warned threatened British workers' right to strike.[130]

Country case studies

In Australia, the 2009 Fair Work Act provides employees with protections regarding certain workplace rights, including the right to engage in industrial activities, such as joining a trade union and participating in its activities. However, Australia has relatively low coverage for collective bargaining, ranking as the fourth lowest among OECD countries.[131] An academic review of Australia's collective bargaining during the pandemic described it as "decentralising and disaggregating".[132]

Collective bargaining is regulated by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, under the 2010 Competition and Consumer Act. This ensures fair management of issues around trade, business, and consumer protection. Additionally, a unique form of collective bargaining called 'enterprise bargaining' occurs at the organisational level. Academic analysis of data from Australia's Workplace Agreements Database and the Australian Bureau of Statistics has highlighted a decline in the quantity and coverage of collective agreements in recent years.[133]

In Japan, a decentralised approach to collective bargaining is primarily conducted at the enterprise level. An annual coordination system for wage bargaining, known as 'Shunto', is implemented by major trade unions, offering flexibility and efficiency in negotiations.[134]

In contrast, France negotiates wages mostly at the sectoral level. Following the 2007 financial crisis, France introduced labour market reforms aimed at strengthening firm-level bargaining and providing greater flexibility in response to future economic shocks. These reforms included the 2016 Labour Law, which outlined regulations for working hours, leave, and rest periods. Subsequently, the 2017 labour market reform allowed organisations

129 ITUC, The World's Worst Countries for Workers: How Commonwealth countries performed in the 2021 ITUC Global Rights Index, 2021
130 ITUC, 2024 ITUC Global Rights Index: The world's worst countries for workers, 2024.
131 Stanford, J., Macdonald, F., and Raynes, L., Collective Bargaining and Wage Growth in Australia, The Australia Institute, 2022
132 Gavin, M., "Unions and collective bargaining in Australia", Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol 64 No 3, 362-379, 2022, p375
133 Gavin, M., "Unions and collective bargaining in Australia", Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol 64 No 3, 362-379, 2022
134 OECD, Negotiating our way up: collective bargaining in a changing world of work, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019

with fewer than 20 employees to hold votes on company-level agreements when there was no union delegate, provided at least two-thirds of employees supported it. However, sectoral agreements in France generally limit firm-level bargaining on most topics.[135]

[135] OECD, Negotiating our way up: collective bargaining in a changing world of work, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019

5 Challenges and opportunities in a changing world of work

As occupations and employment continue to evolve, there will be opportunities to incorporate learnings and priorities about good work into emerging job types, such as green jobs, work that makes use of artificial intelligence, and jobs that are organised in a hybrid way.

For example, organisations can learn from employees who have adapted to hybrid working and integrate best practices into the design of new hybrid roles. This can ensure that important aspects of work quality are prioritised in job design, such as guaranteeing that hybrid workers have suitable opportunities for training and development and do not become overworked by extended hours.

5.1 Areas of concern

Inequalities around good work

Inequalities are evident in people's access to good work. These include disparities related to region, socioeconomic status, age, being a care-leaver, and speaking English as a second language (ESL).

Regional inequalities notably impact access to good-quality jobs,[136] particularly illustrated by the north–south divide in the UK. Age is another critical factor influencing employment opportunities. The Work Foundation's Insecure Work Index, based on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Labour Force Survey data, reveals that young people are 2.5 times more likely to experience 'severely' insecure work compared to those over the age of 25.[137] The income insecurity of young people has also been affected by age-related aspects of the Minimum Wage, which had previously increased at age 21.

Additionally, women, disabled people, and people from minority ethnic groups are more likely to be employed in insecure work in the UK.[138] The Trades Union Congress (TUC) estimated that 3.9 million people were in

136 Green, A. Spatial inequalities in access to good work, Work Foundation, 2020

137 Florisson, R. The UK Insecure Work Index: two decades of insecurity, Work Foundation, 22 May 2022

138 Florisson, R. The UK Insecure Work Index: two decades of insecurity, Work Foundation, 22 May 2022

insecure work in 2023, including in zero-hours contracts, agency work, and seasonal work.[139]

The Taylor Review highlighted that insecure work raises substantial concerns about work quality, particularly where it offers limited financial security, making it challenging for people to pay bills and plan for their futures.[140] The Insecure Work Index indicates that certain industries are more likely to offer insecure jobs, including hospitality, services, and agriculture, where one in three workers face insecurity, compared with one in five across the UK's broader labour force.[141]

Informal or hidden work

The term 'good work' typically refers to paid employment in the formal economy, that is, the regulated economy in which taxation is applied. However, this definition excludes a great deal of work that people do. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that over half of the global workforce is engaged in informal jobs, which are unregulated and largely unrecorded, yet which hold market value. [142]

In the UK, the informal economy accounts for approximately 10.8% of the workforce.[143] and includes a diverse range of jobs, ranging from agricultural workers to cleaning. Some informal work may be concealed because it is illegal or stigmatised (such as drug dealing and sex work). People may start informal work when they cannot secure sufficient formal paid work to meet their needs.

From the perspective of 'good work', informal jobs can expose workers to significant job insecurity. For instance, during the covid-19 pandemic, the global network Women in Informal Employment estimated that informal workers lost nearly 80% of their income.[144] While the Employment Rights Bill does not directly address informal work, the two can be connected, for example, in the case of underemployment, where workers are unable to secure the hours they want or where their skills are under-utilised.[145] Consequently, tackling work quality for the under-employed, particularly where they work in non-standard work contracts, could lead to broader positive impacts on working experiences.

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139 TUC, Insecure work in 2023, 14 August 2023.

140 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicole, D. et al., Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017

141 Florisson, R. The UK Insecure Work Index: two decades of insecurity, Work Foundation, 22 May 2022

142 Torkington, S., What is the informal economy and how many people work in it? World Economic Forum, 4 June 2024

143 World Economics, United Kingdom's Informal Economy Size, 2025

144 Verbruggen, Y., Ogando, A. C. and Valdivia, M., Informal economy workers tell of COVID-19 crucial issues, WEIGO, 14 July, 2021

145 The Underemployment Project, Employment Rights Bill 2024: opportunities for addressing underemployment?, 25 November 2024

Work exploitation and modern slavery

In the most extreme instances of labour exploitation, which amount to modern slavery, wages are withheld from workers. 17,000 cases of modern slavery were reported to the Home Office in 2022, although this is likely an underestimate as not all cases of modern slavery will be reported.[146]

Walkfree, the international human rights group that produces the Global Slavery Index, estimates the actual number in the UK to be 122,000.[147] Industries where forced labour has been reported include nail bars, domestic services, and construction; it often mimics or appears alongside work in the formal economy. [148]

Technology and work

In the UK, as globally, one of the biggest anticipated changes for work will be around technology, including artificial intelligence and automation.[149] The Pissarides review estimated that over the last two years, 80% of UK firms have adopted artificial intelligence (AI), robotic, or automated equipment,[150] actions that have been accompanied by developing inequalities between regions, occupational grades and population groups. It is anticipated that jobs will continue to be radically transformed by technology, with the World Economic Forum estimating that 39% of current skillsets will be displaced over the next 5 years.[151]

Technological development has tangible implications for work quality. While AI can enhance jobs, such as supporting diagnoses in healthcare, it also has the potential to displace jobs (job security), amplify workplace monitoring (work control), and to increase workforce inequalities, for example, through recruitment algorithm bias.[152]

Technology is not equally accessible to employees; the 2025 wave of the Skills and Employment Survey found that of the 20% of the workforce using AI-related software, the majority were in higher-skilled, better-paid jobs.[153] Organisations and their representatives can play a key role in harnessing technology responsibly and providing appropriate training to extend workforce access.

146 Home Office Modern Slavery: national referral mechanism and duty to notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2022, 2023
147 Walkfree, Modern slavery in the UK, 2023
148 Walkfree, Modern slavery in the UK, 2023
149 World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025, Geneva, 2025
150 IFOW, The Pissarides Review into the Future of Work and Wellbeing, 2025
151 World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025, Geneva, 2025
152 Commons Library briefing CBP-9817, Artificial intelligence and employment law, 11 August 2023
153 Henseke, G., Davies, R., Felstead, A., Gallie, D., Green, F. and Zhou, Y. What drives AI and robot adoption? Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2024, Cardiff, Wales Institute of Social Economic Research and Data, Cardiff University, 2025

The Artificial Intelligence (Regulation) [HL] Bill 2024-25 – a private member’s bill, currently in parliament, is part of ongoing discussion around the relative merits of taking a more proactive and enforceable stance around risk or favouring market-driven innovation. A legislative approach can be one tactic for ensuring that job quality is prioritised in the way that AI is harnessed in organisations.

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