

UK Working Lives

The CIPD Job Quality Index



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

UK Working Lives is an annual representative survey of UK workers first published in 2018. Reports and other resources are available at **cipd.co.uk/workinglives**

Executive summary

UK Working Lives

Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction: measuring good work	3
Work-life balance and flexible working	4
Pay and benefits	6
Contracts	7
Job design and the nature of work	8
Relationships at work	9
Voice and representation	10
Health and well-being	11
Conclusion	12
Notes	14

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Dr Daniel Wheatley at the University of Birmingham and Jonny Gifford at the CIPD.

1 Foreword

Access to and opportunity for good work and jobs is a vital part of a healthy society and economy, whatever people's background, skills and experience. This principle has been called out amongst the UN sustainability development goals for the world by 2030, and has been increasingly positioned within national and regional business and political manifestos over the last few years.

Today we are seeing almost record levels of employment in many countries, and the UK in particular has been praised for its 'jobs miracle', growing employment levels as it recovers from the global recession and with the uncertainty surrounding Brexit. But a simple view of employment or unemployment levels is not an adequate gauge of the health of a country's labour market, or the well-being of its workforce. Yes, these are crucial statistics, but beyond the number of people in work, we must also understand the quality of the jobs they do and find ways to improve this.

In this, our second *UK Working Lives* survey, we have again gone out to a large, representative sample of workers in all kinds of occupations and sectors, and asked them to consider the work and jobs they do against the various criteria of good work. We have also researched comparable data from other countries to be able to understand how the UK compares. Some of these comparisons have to cause some concern. For example, for work-life balance, our ranking puts the UK 24th out of 25 comparator economies.

Flexible working arrangements and practices are an obvious area to focus on to support better well-being and work-life balance, and in helping support more gender-balanced and diverse workforces. The CIPD is co-chairing the Government's Flexible Working Task Force, with the aim of understanding and promoting the broader take-up of flexible work in all its forms. This edition of the *UK Working Lives* survey focuses in depth on the area of work-life balance and flexible working. The findings are telling: flexible working arrangements are delivering for some workers but not for others. We see a lack of equality in access to flexible working and clear gender differences in their usage. These insights can help us address some of the cultural, behavioural and practical barriers to wider uptake.

Our survey also provides evidence on six other dimensions of good work: pay and benefits; contracts and the terms of employment; job design and the nature of work; relationships at work; voice and representation; and health and well-being. Each of these dimensions is a crucial area for investment. We shed light on what 'good' looks like in these areas, the current state of play in the UK, and drivers and outcomes.

The *UK Working Lives* survey is central to the CIPD's purpose, to champion better work and working lives by improving practices in people and organisation development for the benefit of individuals, the economy and society. We also see it as a major benchmark in the area of good work or job quality. Since launching in 2018, it has contributed to government thinking, informing recommendations¹ on its response to the 2017 *Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*.

We hope that practitioners, policy-makers and academics will continue to make use of the *UK Working Lives* survey, both as a source of evidence on the broader condition of the UK labour market and, more importantly, for its insight into how we can improve and protect job quality in every organisation. As well as giving life to economies, work takes up a big part of our lives, and it can, and should, be a force for good for all.



Peter Cheese
Chief Executive
CIPD

2 Introduction: measuring good work

The CIPD's purpose is to *champion better work and working lives* by improving practices in people and organisation development for the benefit of individuals, the economy and society. We believe that good work is fundamental to individual well-being, supports a fair society, and creates motivated workers, productive organisations and a strong economy. The CIPD describes good work as follows:

Good work is fairly rewarded.

Good work gives people the means to securely make a living.

Good work gives opportunities to develop skills and a career and ideally gives a sense of fulfilment.

Good work provides a supportive environment with constructive relationships.

Good work allows for work-life balance.

Good work is physically and mentally healthy.

Good work gives employees the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives.

Good work should be accessible to all.

As recognised in the government-commissioned *Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*,² measuring job quality is a hugely important task. There is a wealth of rich, qualitative research that increases our understanding of working life and a wide range of measurements relating to job quality, but improving job quality systematically requires a cohesive and reasonably comprehensive suite of measures that shed light on and track the health of the jobs market.

The *UK Working Lives* (UKWL) survey identifies and measures seven dimensions of job quality or good work, summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Dimensions of good work

Dimension	Areas included
1 Pay and benefits	Pay as a percentile and in relation to the Living Wage, employer pension contributions and other employee benefits.
2 Contracts	The terms of employment. Contract type, underemployment and job security.
3 Job design and the nature of work	Workload or work intensity, how empowered people are in their jobs, how well resourced they are to carry out their work, job complexity and how well this matches the person's skills and qualifications, how meaningful people find their work, and development opportunities provided.
4 Work-life balance	Overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and HR provision for flexible working.
5 Relationships at work	Social support and cohesion. The quality of relationships at work, psychological safety and the quality of people management.
6 Voice and representation	Channels for feeding views to senior management, cultural norms on voice and satisfaction with the opportunities for voice.
7 Health and well-being	Positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health. Often considered as an outcome of job quality.

Source: adapted from Warhurst et al (2017) and Wright et al (2018).³

The survey provides a key indicator of contemporary work, giving insight and reference points for those involved in research, policy and practice relating to good work. It presents a regular, comprehensive and broadly representative view of workers across job types,



occupations and sectors, complementing other surveys of workers that are less regular (for example, the UK Skills and Employment Survey) or contain less detail on job quality and good work (for example, the Labour Force Survey).

Below we summarise key findings from the 2019 UKWL survey on these seven dimensions, focusing in particular on work-life balance and flexible working.

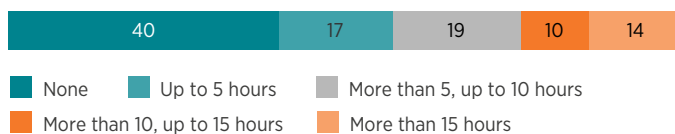
3 Work-life balance and flexible working

In this year's survey, we include an expanded focus on work-life balance and flexible working arrangements. As well as questions on hours worked, commuting time, work-life balance and flexible work arrangements, we also cover patterns of flexible working and the demand for and the drivers and impacts of flexible work arrangements.

UK workers tend to have a poor work-life balance

Achieving work-life balance is undoubtedly a central focus of many workers, and has become increasingly acknowledged as a core dimension of job quality. It is also an area in which UK workers fare particularly badly, by international standards. Based on a measure of how often job demands interfere with family life, we rank the UK 24th out of 25 comparator economies.⁴

Considering working hours, we find that three in five employees work longer hours than they would like to, taking into account their need to make a living. Overwork is most common among managerial and professional workers. It is also more common among those who work from home, showing that flexible working may not always solve tensions between work and personal life and may even contribute to the blurring of the boundaries between them.

Figure 1: Hours overworked per week (%)

Base: all workers (n=5,136)

Commuting time can also add a significant additional burden on the time of many workers, equating to additional work-related time of 3 hours 45 minutes on average per week. Commuting time is longest for workers in London (on average 78 minutes a day).

Flexible working is a common solution...

Working flexibly helps many of us to manage tensions between our work and personal lives. More than half of UK employees (54%) worked flexibly in some way in the last year (n=4,417; this figure excludes the self-employed, who can work flexibly in any case). Formal flexible work arrangements are relatively common, especially flexi-time, reduced hours and working from home. Informal flexibility is also common, with two-thirds of employees finding it easy to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters. The main drivers for flexible work arrangements are caring responsibilities (especially for women) and increasing leisure time (especially for men). Our research shows that they are successful in delivering on this, contributing substantially to people's quality of life. Equally, we find that the 'cost' of working flexibly to one's career is relatively uncommon; indeed, many workers see a benefit in their careers.

...but there is a clear unmet demand

Employees clearly like having options to work flexibly. We see this not only in the uptake of flexible working but also in the evidence of unmet demand.

Our survey finds that, excluding the self-employed, one in five employees (21%; n=4,150) has no flexible working arrangements available to them in their current job. Yet the unmet demand goes far wider than this: overall, two-thirds of UK employees (68%) would like to work flexibly in at least one form that is not currently available to them.

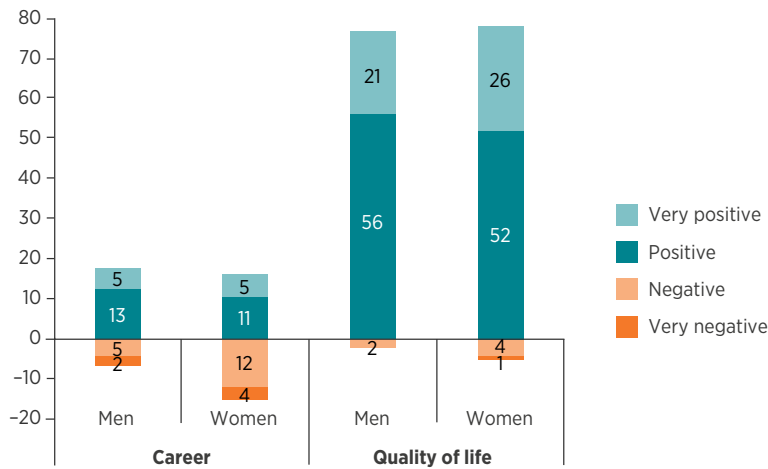
For those who do not have the options, the most desirable arrangements are flexi-time (70% of those who cannot use this arrangement would like to do so), compressed hours (58%) and working from home (49%).

...and it works better for some than others

We also see a lack of equality in access to flexible working arrangements. Overall, women – especially those aged 35–44 – as well as workers who have a disability are more likely to use flexible work arrangements, especially those such as job-sharing that involve a reduction of hours. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to work from home. Flexible work arrangements are also more common among those in higher-grade jobs, and, related to this, those who have greater work autonomy (that is, the ability to decide how they work and what work they do).

We also see differences in the outcomes of flexible working arrangements. For example, reducing hours is more likely to hit one's career, while homeworkers are more likely to overwork. Related to this, we see that women's careers are more likely to suffer from flexible working than men's. Having said this, the benefits to quality of life are far more common than any cost to career progression.

Figure 2: Impacts of flexible working, by gender (%)



Base: employees using flexible working arrangement (n=2,285)

Flexible working that works for all

Positive impacts on job quality can certainly be realised by enhancing access to flexible working arrangements, as well as more informal flexible working practices. Ensuring that there is greater equality in access across different job types and among different workers is one part of the solution.

Equally, workplace cultures need to be supportive of the range of types of flexible working. Men should be equally supported to reduce their hours as women, and ideally these types of arrangement should not prove more detrimental to one’s career. Developing inclusive and supportive organisational cultures in this respect may involve changing some deep-rooted attitudes. Yet qualitative research has found that attitudes to male workers reducing their hours can be very negative.⁵ We need to challenge such limiting traditional stereotypes about the gender division of labour if flexible working is to genuinely further gender equality in the workplace.

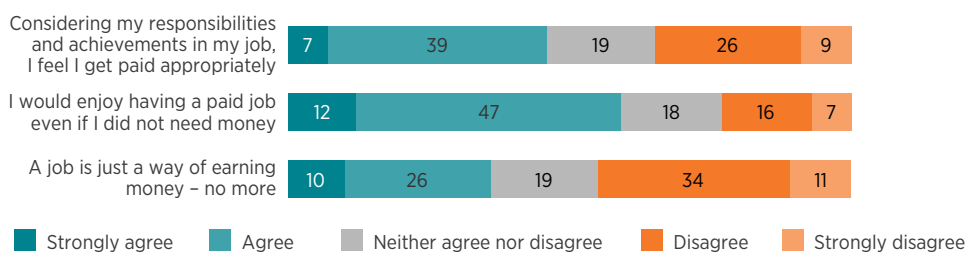
4 Pay and benefits

Objective and subjective measures of pay

Absolute levels of pay are important to our working lives, especially at lower income levels, but it is subjective views (perceptions of relative incomes and appropriateness of pay) that tell us more about the happiness of workers.

Just under half of workers consider themselves to be paid appropriately, considering their responsibilities and achievements, and over a third do not. Those who are happier with their pay are also happier with their job overall.

Figure 3: Subjective measures of pay and work centrality (%)



Base: all workers (n=5,136)

The Real Living Wage is a clear threshold in pay satisfaction. Only a third of those earning less are satisfied with their pay, whereas this jumps to nearly half for those earning between the Real Living Wage and double this rate. Satisfaction with pay is predictably higher among higher-level occupations, and lower in the public sector.

An international measure

According to an OECD measure, the UK is slightly below average in ‘earnings quality’, a measure that accounts for both the level of earnings and their distribution across the workforce. The UK sits 15th out of our 25 comparator countries, alongside the United States and New Zealand.

Pensions and other benefits

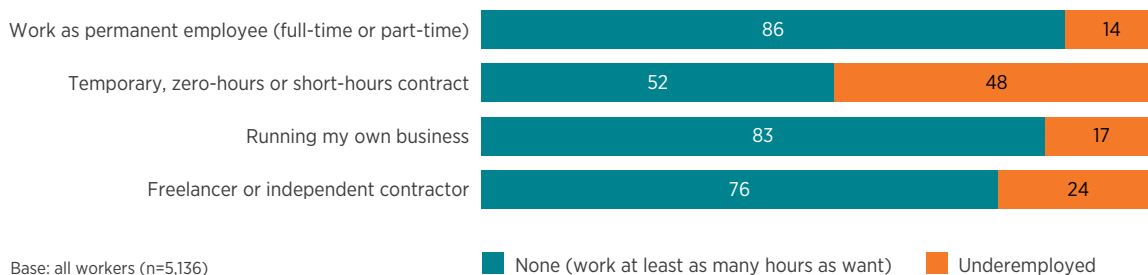
Around seven in ten employees say they are saving for a pension. Most employees receive a contribution from their employer of 6% or less, and thus less than the Pensions Quality Mark, which stipulates contributions of at least 12% with at least 6% from the employer.⁶ A range of non-pension benefits are available to employees, with the most common being social, enhanced leave and food benefits.

5 Contracts

More than three-quarters of UK workers have a permanent employment contract, whether full- or part-time. Other contingent or ‘non-standard’ contracts are relatively uncommon: these include temporary (2.5%) and zero-hours contracts (2.4%) and work in the gig economy (3.5%).

However, workers in these contingent forms of employment are an important minority. They are more likely to have precarious jobs and, in particular, to face underemployment.

Figure 4: Underemployment, by contract type (%)



Workers on non-standard contracts and those reporting underemployment are also more likely to have more than one job. This suggests that financial necessity may be a key driver for holding multiple jobs.

International comparisons

UK workers fare better than average in contractual stability, based on international measures of part-time and temporary employment. The UK sits 8th out of 25 comparator countries, alongside the United States and Slovenia. Estonia, Hungary and Norway come top, and France and Spain come bottom.



6 Job design and the nature of work

Workload and people's ability to cope with it

Workload is a serious problem in the UK. A third of workers feel they have too much work, one in five workers say they cannot complete their tasks in their allocated hours, and one in twenty feel completely overloaded by their jobs.

However, the great majority of workers report having adequate work resources (other than time). Another factor that affects people's ability to cope with pressure is work autonomy, that is, how much they can control what work they do and how and when they do it. Most people have at least some autonomy over their work – for example, 45% have 'a lot' of control over how they do their work, with a further 32% having 'some' control.

Meaningful work

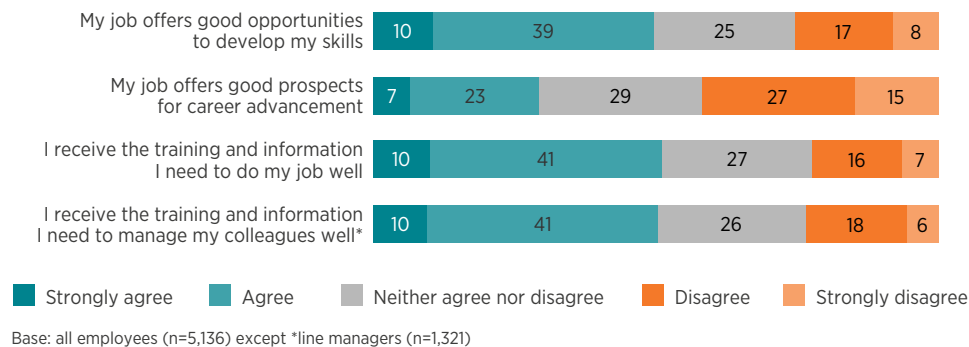
Around three-quarters of workers feel their jobs are meaningful in that they make a useful contribution to their organisations; just 9% of workers, or one in ten, do not. However, when we look at a higher order of meaningfulness, we see a less positive picture: almost one in four workers feels that their work does not offer a useful contribution to society.

Skills

Most workers consider themselves to have the correct qualifications for their job (64%) and half feel they have the right skills (51%). This means that almost half of workers report a skills mismatch. Here, overqualification (reported by 32%) and overskilling (37%) are greater concerns than lacking qualifications or skills.

Around half of workers consider their job to offer good opportunities to develop their skills, but only three in ten workers see this translate to good prospects for career advancement. Younger workers tend to have more opportunities to develop, reinforcing the CIPD’s view that UK skills policy needs to do more beyond apprenticeships to help all workers, at all stages of their working lives, to develop.⁷

Figure 5: Personal and career development (%)



International comparisons

UK workers fare better than average by international standards, according to combined measures of the extent of professional roles, work autonomy and development opportunities. The UK sits 7th out of 25 comparator countries, alongside Sweden and Belgium. Switzerland, the United States and Norway are ranked top.

7 Relationships at work

Positive work relationships in general

Relationships at work strongly affect our working lives, but conflict at work is all too common. It has negative consequences not just for the worker but for their employer too, for example, by increasing turnover intention.

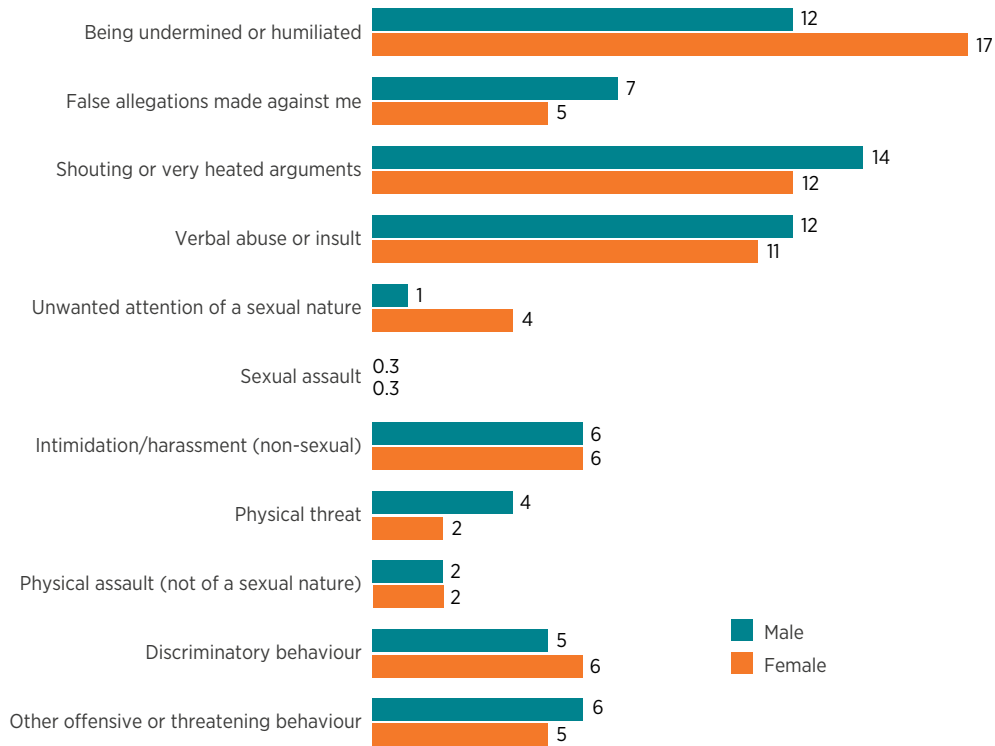
Employees generally report a supportive working environment, and relationships at work are generally positive, especially for those with whom we work more closely (line manager, team members).

Conflict and unfair treatment

However, incidence of blame from management (19% of workers) and being excluded for being different (22%) is not uncommon. Three in ten workers report at least one form of bullying or harassment in the workplace in the last 12 months. For one in seven workers, a case remains unresolved.

Forms of conflict at work differ in particular by gender. Women record more cases of being undermined or humiliated and unwanted sexual attention or harassment, and men report more physical threats and false allegations. We also note differences according to race and sexual orientation or gender identity, with BAME and LGBT+ workers more likely to face discrimination or being undermined or humiliated.

Figure 6: Experiences of workplace conflict and unfair treatment in the last 12 months (%)



Base: all workers (n=5,136)

The consequences of conflict are clear to see. More than one in four workers reporting workplace conflict in the last 12 months say they are likely to quit their job in the next year (almost double than for workers who experienced no conflict).

International comparisons on relationships at work

The quality of work relationships in the UK is average by international standards, according to a measure of relations between management and employees. The UK sits 12th out of 25 comparator countries, alongside the United States and Hungary.

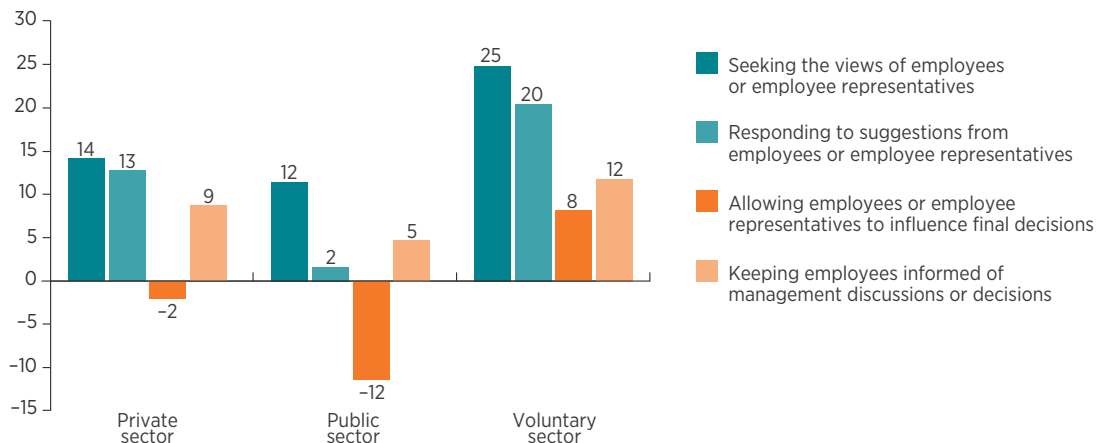
8 Voice and representation

Although workers tend to have a range of channels for voice, there is a concern about the willingness of managers to genuinely consult them on decisions and even to keep them informed about organisational developments. For example, three in ten workers say their managers are poor at responding to suggestions, and only four in ten say that they are good.

Direct methods of voice are the most common, including one-to-one meetings, team meetings and employee surveys. There are considerable differences between sectors in the channels available to workers, with employee surveys and trade union representation less common in the private sector.

Employees who have union or non-union representation, on average, are positive about their representatives, although about one in four employees feel their representative’s performance is poor.

Figure 7: Managerial openness to employee voice, by sector (% net positive)



Net positive rating = % very good or good - % very poor or poor
 Base: all employees, including freelancers with only one client, excluding other self-employed (n=4,189)

International comparisons

Internationally, levels of trade union density in the UK are slightly above average, according to an international measure for 25 comparator countries. The UK comes 10th out of 25, alongside Austria, Slovenia and Chile.

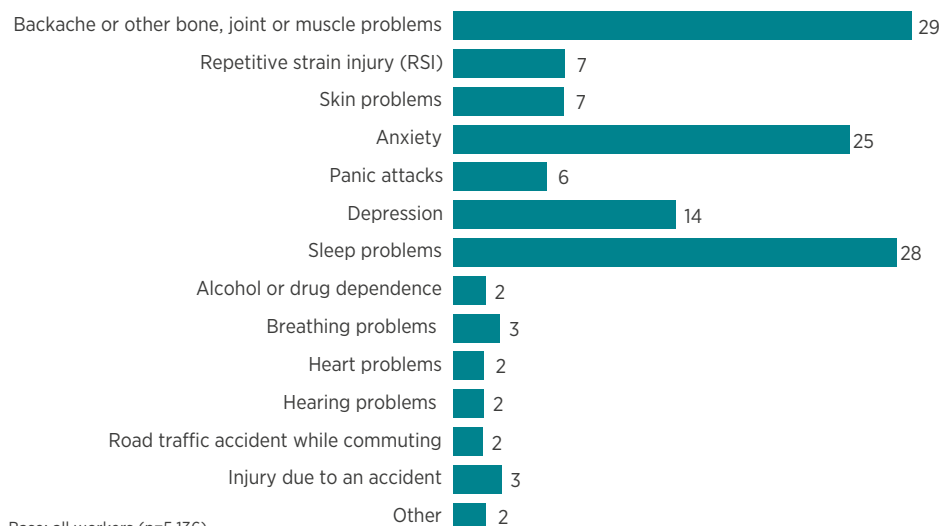
9 Health and well-being

UK workers tend to believe that their jobs have a positive impact on their physical and mental health; mental health benefits are especially pronounced. Workers also tend to report positive feelings about their job, such as enthusiasm.

However, work acts as a considerable stressor for a worrying proportion of us, and notable proportions report boredom in their job. Intense and stressful working conditions – including feeling exhausted, miserable or under excessive pressure – are reported by up to one in four workers.

Two in five workers report having experienced some form of work-related health condition in the last 12 months. The most common health problems resulting from work are musculoskeletal, anxiety and sleep problems.

Figure 8: Health conditions due to work in the last year (%)



Base: all workers (n=5,136)

International comparisons

Internationally, UK workers have slightly worse health and well-being at work than average, according to measures of job strain and stress. The UK sits 16th in a list of 25 comparator countries, alongside Hungary and Austria. Israel, Switzerland and New Zealand rank top.

10 Conclusion

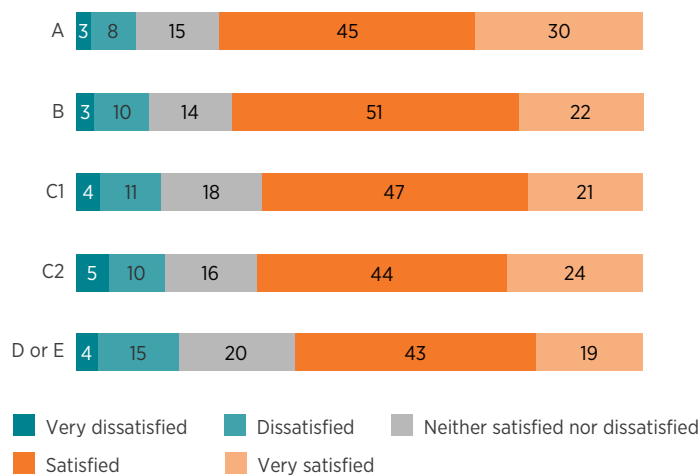
Differences in job quality across groups

Our research looks at various ways in which job quality differs between groups. We see especially pronounced trends across occupational groups, an area the CIPD will investigate further over the forthcoming year. Our current analysis looks at trends across the NRS social grade groups:

- A** – Higher managerial, administrative and professional
- B** – Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional
- C1** – Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional
- C2** – Skilled manual workers
- D** – Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
- E** – State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only.⁸

Higher-grade occupations are defined above all by more skilled and complex work and better paid jobs. But we also find clear trends in other aspects of job quality. In particular, those in higher-grade jobs tend to have more control over what work they do and how and when they do it, more meaningful and motivating work, and more opportunities to develop their skills and careers. We see these differences reflected to a degree in general levels of job satisfaction.

Figure 9: Job satisfaction, by occupational group (%)



Base: all employees (n=5,136)

However, those in higher-grade jobs also tend to commute more and, despite making greater use of flexible working, find it harder to switch off from work and are more likely to feel overloaded and not have enough time to do their work. The net effect of this can be summed up in the fact that, compared with those in lower-grade occupations, their jobs are more likely to lead to stress and negatively affect both their mental and physical health.



Achieving work-life balance is a central focus of many workers, not only those in higher-grade occupations. An adequate range of well-supported flexible working arrangements is also an important ingredient for gender and age equality in the workplace. But as it stands, flexible working delivers more for some workers than others.

Meanwhile, although working in the public sector generally appears to be associated with better job quality, public sector workers fare worse in some respects, including lower quality of relationships and greater incidence of conflict at work. We also find key differences between traditional and other forms of work, with workers in temporary, zero-hours and short-hours employment subject to lower-quality jobs in a number of dimensions.

In some cases, the differences we see in job quality are a natural reflection of different occupations: it is not realistic to expect all jobs to be equal in all ways. Moreover, if we look at broad categories of occupations – such as the NRS social grades – we see that they all contain some characteristics of good work and characteristics of poor-quality work. It seems most of us make some trade-offs; it is the balance between the good and bad characteristics that is central to how we experience our working lives.

Opportunities for improvement

The different dimensions of good work relate in differing ways to key outcomes, but in broad terms we see consistent positive relationships with how satisfied workers are with their jobs, how enthusiastic they feel in their day-to-day work, how much effort they put in and how likely they are to stay with their current employer.

These broad associations between good-quality work and productive organisations need to be unpacked and analysed in more detail, yet it is clear that within them there lies a huge opportunity to improve job quality. Some improvements will bring immediate mutual gains for workers and employers alike – for example, certain flexible working arrangements may be ‘no brainers’ for organisations to implement. Other improvements will undoubtedly have cost implications in the short run, but may deliver longer-term returns for employers through more productive and committed workers. But all improvements must be encouraged where possible.

Good work is an achievable goal, but requires buy-in from both policy-makers and employers. To support policy-makers and employers as they foster good work, research needs to continue to identify ways to improve job design and conditions of work sustainably. This requires a more detailed understanding of the nature and quality of jobs across sectors, occupations and at different levels of the organisation. Tools such as the *UK Working Lives* survey provide a method to do this, both through further analysis of rich datasets and by employers themselves gathering data on their workforces.

11 Notes

- 1 Irvine, G., White, D. and Diffley, M. (2018) *Measuring good work: the final report of the Measuring Job Quality Working Group*. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust.
- 2 Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicol, D. and Broadbent, P. (2017) *Good work: the Taylor review of modern working practices*. London: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- 3 Warhurst, C., Wright, S. and Lyonette, C. (2017) *Understanding and measuring job quality: part 1 – thematic literature review*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Wright, S., Warhurst, C., Lyonette, C. and Sarkar, S. (2018) *Understanding and measuring job quality: part 2 – indicators of job quality*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- 4 Our international ranking of work quality compares the UK’s position with a group of 25 comparator economies, including the US, France, Germany and Japan. We match international data points to the seven dimensions of quality work used in the UKWL survey. See the [main survey report](#) and [accompanying Appendix](#) for more discussion of the international comparisons.
- 5 Kelland, J. (2017) *‘Fatherhood forfeits’ and ‘motherhood penalties’: an exploration of UK management selection decision-making on parent applicants*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- 6 The [Pensions Quality Mark](#) is set by the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association.
- 7 Brinkley, I. and Crowley, E. (2017) *From ‘inadequate’ to ‘outstanding’: making the UK’s skills system world class*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- 8 Our sample excludes pensioners and the unemployed, so we group grades D and E together.

CIPD

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ United Kingdom
T +44 (0)20 8612 6200 **F** +44 (0)20 8612 6201
E cipd@cipd.co.uk **W** cipd.co.uk

Incorporated by Royal Charter
Registered as a charity in England and Wales (1079797)
Scotland (SC045154) and Ireland (20100827)

Issued: June 2019 Reference: 7878 © CIPD 2019

