

Good jobs

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Good jobs

Susannah Constable
David Coats
Stephen Bevan
Michelle Mahdon

The Work Foundation
21 Palmer St
London
SW1H 0AD

In a speech to celebrate the centenary of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2004, Gordon Brown, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, argued that the UK should aim for both ‘full and fulfilling employment’. Implicit in this aspiration is the notion that just ‘having a job’ – regardless of its quality - is not sufficient. The objective must be to ensure that for as many people as possible, work in the UK is a source of well-being, personal growth, fulfilment, autonomy and meaning – in other words, that the jobs available in today’s labour market should offer ‘Good Work’. A significant weight of evidence supports the argument that job quality, employee health, and an employee’s ability to perform productively at work, are closely linked. This evidence comes from a range of academic and professional disciplines. We have good epidemiological data to support the Good Jobs principle, we also have data from occupational health specialists, labour economists, educationalists and, Health and Safety specialists and HR/IR specialists. Even more encouragingly, there appears to be a broad consensus among these experts about the characteristics which define ‘Good Jobs’. When we refer to ‘job quality’ in this report, this term should be defined as the extent to which the factors outlined below are in place a job role.

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Section 1 - Introduction

In a speech to celebrate the centenary of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2004, Gordon Brown, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, argued that the UK should aim for both “full and fulfilling employment”¹. Implicit in this aspiration is the notion that just ‘having a job’ – regardless of its quality - is not sufficient. The objective must be to ensure that for as many people as possible, work in the UK is a source of well-being, personal growth, fulfilment, autonomy and meaning – in other words, that the jobs available in today’s labour market should offer ‘Good Work’. A significant weight of evidence supports the argument that job quality, employee health, and an employee’s ability to perform productively at work, are closely linked. This evidence comes from a range of academic and professional disciplines. We have good epidemiological data² to support the Good Jobs principle, we also have data from occupational health specialists,³ labour economists⁴, educationalists⁵ and, Health and Safety specialists and HR/IR specialists⁶. Even more encouragingly, there appears to be a broad consensus among these experts about the characteristics which define ‘Good Jobs’. When we refer to ‘job quality’ in this report, this term should be defined as the extent to which the factors outlined below are in place a job role.

The important factors can be summarised as follows:

- Employment security
- Whether the work is characterised by monotony and repetition
- Whether employees have autonomy, control and task discretion
- The extent to which there is an appropriate balance between the efforts that workers make and the rewards that they receive
- Whether workplace procedures are seen to be fair
- The strength of workplace relationships – or social capital

Despite consensus over the important factors that constitute Good Jobs, and the evidence underpinning it, however, it is clear that a large number of jobs in the UK fail to conform to the core criteria of a Good Job.⁷ Indeed, it seems that many organisations have either not been convinced by the case for Good Jobs and have difficulty turning its principles into practice, or do not feel the need to offer anything but ‘bad jobs’.⁸

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation Centenary Lecture, given by Gordon Brown as Chancellor of the Exchequer, 8th July 2004

² M. Marmot, *Status Syndrome: How your social standing directly affects your health and life expectancy*, (2004)

³ G. Waddell, A.K. Burton, *Is work good for you health and well-being?*, Department of Work and Pensions, (2006)

⁴ A. Brown, A. Charlwood, C. Forde, D. Spencer D, *Changing Job Quality in Great Britain: 1998-2004*, Department of Trade and Industry, (2006); G. Lowe, *21st Century Job Quality: Achieving What Canadians Want*, Research Report W 37, Canadian Policy Research Network, (2007)

⁵ K. Berberich, H. Gardner, *Good Work in Business*, (2000)

⁶ A. Clark, ‘Your money or your life: Changing job quality in OECD countries’, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol.2, No.3: 377–400, (2005)

⁷ EuroFound, *European Working Conditions Survey*,(2005)

Why should the Government focus on this agenda?

For Government, as for other employers, there are considerable benefits to be gained from making more jobs, Good Jobs, in the UK. They include higher labour productivity, a healthier working age population, higher workforce stability and more engaged and committed employees. Improving the performance of the UK economy is a political priority for the Government, particularly because the UK workforce has been shown consistently to lag behind France, Germany and the USA in terms of productivity per hour worked. One factor that often goes unrecognised by many organisations is the impact of sickness absence and presenteeism on organisational performance. In 2006 it was estimated that around 175 million working days were lost due to sickness absence in the UK.⁹ The cost of presenteeism is more difficult to quantify, but according to research by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, presenteeism, i.e. underperformance at work due to illness, caused by poor mental health, can lead to a loss of working time nearly 1.5 times greater than that due to sickness absence.¹⁰ Dealing with the underlying causes of workplace ill health and sickness, and underperformance in the workplace, are therefore vital to maximising the productivity of the UK economy.

For the Treasury, the Good Jobs agenda is vital because improving employee productivity at work will aid the desire for sustainable growth. For the Department of Health, promoting health and well-being at work can help to reduce the burden on the NHS. The most recent HSE data show that 2.1 million people are suffering from an illness they believed was caused or made worse by their current or past work¹¹. Encouraging employers to take measures to prevent ill health in the workplace is therefore vital. For BERR, meanwhile, promoting health and well-being at work is an important way of ensuring that UK businesses are engaging their employees, promoting employee autonomy, making the best possible use of tacit knowledge and consequently fostering innovation. BERR commissioned a review of Employee Engagement in September 2008, which is keen to explore ways to support business to improve performance and overcome the barriers to better employee engagement.¹² For the DWP, ensuring that people on the margins of the labour market get the opportunity to engage in good quality jobs, for example, is vital in supporting rehabilitation from a long-term incapacity, reducing sickness absence and developing new skills and competences in employees that will enhance their long-term employability. There is strong evidence from a study of low income families with children, of a link between the quality of work offered to an individual by a first job when they come off benefits and the likelihood that the individual will sustain employment (Table 1).

⁸ E. Keep, *Creating a Knowledge Driven Economy – Definitions, Challenges and Opportunities*, ESRC Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (2000); See also, E. Keep, K. Mayhew, *Was Ratner Right? Product markets and competitive strategies and their links with skills and knowledge*, Employment Policy Institute (1998)

⁹ CBI/AXA Turnover Survey 2007 as recorded from AXA website on 02/02/09 at <http://www.axapphealthcare.co.uk>

¹⁰ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/economics/research/injuryill0506.pdf>

¹¹ Health and Safety Executive: *Key Data for 2007/8*, as recorded from their website on 21/11/08 at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/index.htm>.

¹² www.berr.co.uk/whatwedo/employment/employee-engagement/index.html

Table 1: What gets people back to work and keeps them there?¹³

Re-entry Factors	Sustainability Factors
Financial gain	Financial gain
Better standard of living	Better standard of living
Psychological and emotional benefits	Psychological and emotional benefits
Strong motivation to work and escape benefits	Strong motivation to work and escape benefits
Childcare arrangements	Childcare arrangements
Support from family and friends	Support from family and friends
	Nature of the job and work activities
	Relationship with employer
	Relationship with colleagues

Social capital, an individual's relationships with their employer, colleagues and family, seems to be particularly important, as does the quality of the workplace environment. The 'nature of the job' embraces the idea that work is sustainable when it is 'interesting', 'stimulating', 'challenging' or just 'varied'. The quality of the relationship with the employer includes features such as whether the employee believes they are respected or treated as an individual. Pay appears as a critical factor for both re-entry to the labour market and sustainability, supporting the idea that effort and reward should be in balance.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), meanwhile, is already engaged with the Good Jobs agenda, and it is vital that it continues to lead the way, acting as an example to other Government departments. It has already gathered a compelling evidence base that demonstrates that poor job quality can compound a range of workplace risks, such as those surrounding a 'safety culture'¹⁴ the likelihood of work-related stress occurring, and on the negative impact that inflexible or onerous job demands can have on the risk of developing, and recovering from, a range of work-related musculoskeletal conditions.¹⁵ The HSE has also been prominent in arguing that preventative measures – including positive adjustments to job quality – can make a significant difference to work-related health and performance outcomes. It is vital that the HSE continues to light the way for other Government departments, with the end goal being the establishment of a more joined up approach across Government, which echoes the broad remit of this agenda.

¹³ J. Graham et. al., *The role of work in low income families with children- a longitudinal qualitative study*, Department of Work and Pensions, (2005)

¹⁴ Human Engineering, *A Review of Safety Climate and Safety Culture Literature for the Development of a Safety Culture Inspection Toolkit*, Health and Safety Executive Research Report 367, (2005).

¹⁵ A. Breen, J. Langworthy, J. Bagust, *Early Pain Management for Musculoskeletal Disorders*, Health and Safety Executive Research Report 399, (2005)

Contrary to the views of some pessimistic commentators¹⁶, rising unemployment and the onset of recession are two good reasons why the Government should pay even greater attention to the quality of employment. A reasonable hypothesis is to suggest that employees are less likely to exhibit behaviours normally associated with bad job quality when there is less job security - they are less likely to be sick from work, for fear of losing their job, and they are less likely to leave a bad job because of less external labour market pull factors, such as a supply of better quality jobs to draw them away. If this is right, then it is Government's responsibility to remind employers that job quality matters, because symptoms of bad job quality, such as motivation and retention problems, which might otherwise have alerted employers to the underlying difficulties, may not be as visible.

What should Government do?

There are two major challenges for policy-makers, researchers and practitioners. The first is to make a more compelling and accessible case for Good Jobs to businesses, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are often hard to reach and offer less training than their larger counterparts, and also to organisations in sectors where low skill demand is widespread and which are therefore less likely to be offering Good Jobs. The second challenge is to provide these employers with practical support to improve job quality in a way that cuts with the grain of business expectations. The role for policy makers is not to accumulate more evidence about the benefits of Good Jobs to individuals, firms and the wider economy – this evidence is already plentiful.¹⁷ Rather, it is to gather evidence that will persuade, support or incentivise employers to translate their tacit understanding of these ideas and benefits into tangible changes to work organisation and job design at workplace level. If policy-makers are to devise instruments, toolkits or support mechanisms which promote the growth of Good Jobs then it is important to understand both the barriers to adoption in some firms and factors which have led to Good Jobs being embraced by others. More specifically, it is important to build up a picture of the kinds of external support by Government which would be likely to have most sustainable impact. These are the issues that this project was designed to address.

1.2. Project rationale and Objectives

The rationale for this project sprang from a gap in the evidence base about how far employers were interested, willing to, and were already, investing their time and resources working with staff to transform work into Good Jobs in their organisations. The purpose of this study was therefore to explore, on a small scale, the extent to which employers were interested in the Good Jobs agenda and, depending on that level of interest, to test the feasibility of working with willing companies to identify and implement the steps required to create Good Jobs. As the project developed, and it became apparent that some organisations involved in the study were already engaged with the Good Jobs agenda, these objectives evolved. In particular, the issue of external intervention by Government agencies and other bodies became more important and we therefore sought to identify on a much broader scale than originally planned whether organisations identified job quality as something they

¹⁶ See for example Stern, Stefan, 'We will all lose out in a foolish race to the bottom', *Financial Times*, 7/10/08

¹⁷ See for e.g. G. Waddell, A.K. Burton, *Is work good for you health and well-being?*, Department of Work and Pensions, (2006); Gallie, Duncan (ed.), *Employment regimes and the Quality of Work*, OUP (2007); M. Marmot, *Status Syndrome: How your social standing directly affects your health and life expectancy*, (2004)

needed support from outside to tackle, and if so what shape this would take? The aim was to identify appropriate approaches to assist organisations to make more rapid progress with the Good Jobs agenda.

1.3 This report

The remainder of this report sets out the findings from our work in the following sections:

1. Section 2 – Method
2. Section 3 – An overview of key findings from our literature review
3. Section 4 – Employer definitions and attitudes to Good Jobs – findings from the workshops and quantitative survey
4. Section 5 – Employer experiences of implementing Good Jobs – findings from the workshops and quantitative survey
5. Section 6 – Moving the agenda forward - lessons learned from the workshops and quantitative survey

Section 2 - Method

The project comprised a range of different methodologies, designed to explore different aspects of the Good Jobs agenda. As the project progressed, each new stage was designed to build upon the findings of the previous stages.

Stage 1 - Literature review

We conducted a detailed literature review of other studies focusing on Good Jobs, in order to establish what was already known. The review focused on the role employment regimes play in job quality across countries.

Stage 2 - Stakeholder interviews

Following the literature review we conducted a series of interviews with a range of experts in the field to gain a more in-depth insight into the policy issues concerning job quality in the UK. We used the information gathered from the stakeholder interviews to inform the design our third phase of work, a series of two-hour workshops around the country.

Stage 3 - Workshop programme

We held a series of six workshops across England to capture employers' attitudes to the Good Jobs agenda, particularly the attitudes of senior managers. Participants were recruited using a series of local intermediary business organisations, who advertised the workshops on behalf of The Work Foundation¹⁸. Employers were selected based on the size of their organisations both from organisations with under 250 employees (SMEs) and from organisations with between 500 and 1000 employees. Three workshops were held for SMEs alone. One workshop was focused on larger organisations and two workshops brought together employers from both large and small organisations. There was no categorisation according to sector. Details are set out below.

Table 2: Details of Workshop Participants

Location	Number of attendees	Size of organisations (no. of employees)
Ipswich	25	Under 250 employees
Cambridge	19	500-1000
Manchester	11	Under 250 and 500-1000
London	10	Under 250 and 500-1000
Stoke-on-Trent	8	Under 250
Newcastle	4	Under 250

The workshops consisted of a presentation by The Work Foundation, which explored the motivation and retention problems being faced by organisations, followed by a discussion of bad job quality as an important cause of motivation and retention problems. Participants were predominantly HR directors or managers, business owners or senior managers. The key purpose of the presentation was to provide participants with material to start a debate from which we could elicit their perceptions of what comprises a Good Job. Seventy-seven individuals attended the

¹⁸ In addition to using our own lists, a variety of regional organisations including local Chambers of Commerce and Regional Development Agencies helped us to recruit for the workshop programme

six workshops held around the country. A variety of sectors was represented including: education; manufacturing; law; IT; health; logistics and business services.

Stage 4 - Survey

To supplement the qualitative work, we undertook a survey of 600 employers to assess the approach to Good Jobs of individuals involved in the business strategy or HR strategy of their organisations. The survey sample was drawn at random from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) held by the Office of National Statistics and the interviews were carried out on the telephone. The response rate was 82%.

The 20-minute questionnaire covered a variety of areas about the policies and practices of the organisation. Importantly, participants were asked to describe what a Good Job was in their own words. This open question was designed to gauge how employers described a Good Job without detailed contextualisation.

Gate keeping questions were used to screen the respondents to ensure that they held strategic position within their organisation before they were allowed to take part in the survey. We needed to make sure that the responses gathered were those of employers with a level of responsibility for personnel or business decisions so that their views were consistent with that experience and they were able to answer as employers rather than employees.

- 57% of respondents said that they had either a sole or major input into business strategy
- 48% of respondents said that they had either a sole or major input into HR strategy
- 36% of respondents had both a sole or major input into business strategy and a sole or major input into HR strategy
- 69% of respondents had at least a major or sole input into business strategy and/or HR strategy
- All respondents reported having at least a minor input into either business strategy or HR strategy.

Other than defining what a Good Job was, measures in the questionnaire included:

- the size of the organisation
- levels of staff turnover
- the personnel practices that organisations had in place
- turnover and profit margins (to assess whether attitudes to job quality were shaped by organisational performance)
- whether the provision of Good Jobs played any role in business strategy;
- the obstacles to improving job quality
- whether sickness absence was a particular problem
- the role of external agencies in providing advice and support to employers

Weighting

IFF Research, which conducted the survey, targeted a nationally proportionally sample based on size and sector and as such we did not correct for any sample bias with weightings. Both public and private sector organisations were targeted. Organisational size ranged from fewer than 100 employees to more than 500.

Sample breakdown

- 80% were from the private sector
- 20% from the public sector

- 0-99 employees- 54%
- 100-499 employees- 34%
- 500+ employees- 12%

Stage 5 - Case study interventions in organisations

The final element of the study sought to test the feasibility of working with employers to identify and implement the steps required to create more Good Jobs in two organisations. Building on the workshop programme, which also acted as a recruitment pool for this final stage, we identified organisations that presented a set of problems all of which, in different ways, were related to the quality of employment. Two organisations were engaged to participate in pilot interventions conducted by a team of consultants from The Work Foundation. The interventions in each organisation were designed to gauge the issues being faced by the organisation and then work with them to try and make a tangible improvement. The results from this phase of the study will be published in a separate appendix.

Section 3 – Key Findings from the Literature Review

This section summarises the findings from The Work Foundation’s review of the relevant literature on the Good Jobs agenda. A copy of the full literature review can be found on The Work Foundation’s website at www.theworkfoundation.com.

Broadening the focus of health and safety

The first key finding from the literature review is that the field of health and safety, as conventionally conceived, has become much broader in recent years. In part this is a consequence of the rapid change in the organisation of work and the structure of organisations, but is also a result of the changing nature of the UK economy. When the UK economy was dominated by manufacturing, policy and organisational focus was preoccupied with accident rates, the use of hazardous production technologies, dangerous and unguarded machines, exposure to hazardous substances, or exposure to other physical risks – those associated with musculo-skeletal disorders, for example. However, as the UK economy has shifted to being much more service oriented, with a large rise particularly in knowledge intensive service sectors and the percentage of jobs in manufacturing declining, concern has broadened to encompass mental health, as well as physical health, as well as well-being more generally.¹⁹

The response to these structural changes can be found in new forms of guidance like the HSE’s Stress Management Standards²⁰, which embrace such issues as work organisation, job design, management quality, role clarity and workloads. It is the progressive broadening of the focus of health and safety on the wider impacts of workplace health that establishes the connection to the quality of work and ultimately to the notion of Good Work and Good Jobs. In Government there is increasing realisation that job quality, in the sense of providing Good Jobs, has an impact on the health of an organisation, measured in terms of overall performance and productivity, as well as on the health of individual employees. Other recent policy developments that reinforce the increasing importance of the Good Jobs agenda include the development of the Government’s joint DWP/DH/ HSE Health, Work and Well-being Strategy, Dame Carol Black’s review of the health of the working age population, *Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*²¹, and the recent Government response to this paper, *Improving health and work: changing lives*, which widely embraces the well-being agenda at work.²² Even so, the debate in the UK lags behind the sophisticated discussions taking place in some of the EU15 member states, particularly the Nordic countries, where workplace development programmes have been in place since the 1970s and where the social partners see job quality as an important element in the delivery of strong organisational performance.²³

Another important issue is the disparity of perspectives that have traditionally been held by various stakeholders. Reviewing the British debates on job quality since the 1970s reveals that the social partners involved, trade unions and employers, have been resistant to joint action on the Good Jobs agenda. Unions have viewed questions of work organisation and job design as distractions from core collective

¹⁹ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation in the UK and Europe: A Literature review for the HSE*, (2008)

²⁰ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>

²¹ <http://www.workingforhealth.gov.uk/documents/working-for-a-healthier-tomorrow-tagged.pdf>

²² <http://www.workingforhealth.gov.uk/documents/improving-health-and-work-changing-lives.pdf>

²³ Gallie, Duncan (ed.), *Employment regimes and the Quality of Work*, OUP (2007)

bargaining activities, and employers have resisted any challenge to their prerogatives. The analysis contained in the literature review offers good reasons for employers, unions and Government to refocus their attention on work organisation and job quality²⁴.

Framing the discussion

The principal focus of the policy discussion in the recent past has been on how to improve organisational performance. Yet, changes in the organisation of work to improve performance have tended to lack clarity of definition. There is the potential for organisations to operate more competitively, managed along 'flatter' less hierarchical lines and producing higher quality goods and services. These approaches also encourage the development of more skilled personnel, able to enjoy more rewarding and autonomous work in an environment conducive to learning.²⁵ Furthermore, organisations operating in international markets must adopt this approach or run the risk of being overrun by international competition. In advanced industrial economies, there is a broad consensus that 'high performance' models of organisation are becoming increasingly important for organisations wishing to respond to the threat of global competition, as well as contribute to the growth of a high skills, high value-added, knowledge-driven economy.²⁶ A key question, though, is whether a direct link can be shown between the application of high performance management methods, productivity or other measures of performance, organisational health and individual health or job quality outcomes. While the analysis in the review of existing literature identifies some persuasive associations, causation remains unproven.

Theoretically there are very good reasons to invest in human capital, ensure that skills are fully utilised, guarantee that jobs are well designed and ensure that all managers are competent in managing people. However, the theory is not reflected in them being widely applied in practice. Evidence from the UK suggests that the diffusion of such practices has not accelerated over the last six years²⁷ – and some commentators have suggested that the application of these strategies can be self-defeating in a lightly liberated labour market where institutions representing employees are weak.²⁸

The Policy Context

The second section of the literature review examines the policy context. Despite the limited take up of high performance working methods in practice, for many policymakers, the promise of Good Work remains very enticing. At the European level, the issue of job quality has been re-established as a central component of the EU social policy and employment agenda. The German presidency of the EU, for example, forged an agreement in 2007 that included a statement of the principles of Good Work.²⁹ This built on the concept of 'more and better jobs' first adopted at the Lisbon Summit and was intended to reshape the European Employment Guidelines, which are currently under review.³⁰

²⁴ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)

²⁵ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)

²⁶ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)

²⁷ DTI/ESRC Workplace Employment Relations Survey 1998 and 2004

²⁸ J. Godard, 'A critical assessment of the high performance paradigm', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 42(2), pp. 349-378, (2004)

²⁹ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)

³⁰ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)

In the UK, the DTI, and now its successor, BERR, have sponsored a range of schemes for the dissemination of best practice. These include a former Partnership Fund, aimed at unions and business, which facilitated innovative employee/employer engagement, business support through Business Link and a Union Modernisation Fund, which has provided funds since 2005 to build the capacity of unions to respond to the changing world of work. Similarly, the DWP has tried to improve performance through the Worker Safety Adviser Challenge Fund. Unfortunately, the resources available have been modest and the schemes, which could only really work across departmental boundaries, were the exclusive preserve of individual Government departments. Recent developments have been more positive (with the DWP taking the lead) but there needs to be effective co-operation between BERR, DWP, DH, DIUS, HSE and HM Treasury if real progress is to be made.

Many of the individual initiatives, including the HSE Management Standards, liP Healthy Business Assessment, the ACAS model workplace and Workplace Health Connect, represent advances in generating interest in quality of working life issues in the UK. But these schemes do not, in themselves, offer an overarching and coherent narrative around the quality and organisation of work. The policy instruments currently being used look rather weak in the face of the well-resourced programmes applied in many other of the EU15 countries.³¹ Moreover, while employers have made some progress in their own right (see for example the Engineering Employers' Federation *Work Organisation Assessment*)³² these initiatives are too small scale and patchy to achieve widespread change in either work organisation and job design or an improvement in management standards.

Headline Data on Job Quality

There is now a huge amount of high quality data available, which enables comparison between the UK's job quality performance and the record elsewhere in the EU. The European Foundation's *Working Conditions Survey* is a hugely valuable source.³³ At national level the UK has the *Employer Skills Survey* and the *Workplace Employment Relations Survey*.³⁴ Using these sources the literature review made a preliminary assessment of the UK's performance on the following dimensions:

- job satisfaction
- autonomy and job influence
- the intensification of work effort
- employment security
- participation
- work-life balance

The data from the above sources suggests that the Nordic countries and the Netherlands have led improvements in job quality and work organisation in Europe,

³¹ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)

³² See for e.g.

<http://www.eef.org.uk/UK/whatwedo/information/services/birmingham/workstress.htm>

³³ <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/>

³⁴ The *Employer Skills Survey* is commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council, see for e.g. <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/LSC/2006/research/commissioned/nat-nationalemployersskillssurvey2005keyfindings-re-june2006.pdf> ; BERR commissions the *Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, See for e.g. <http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/employment/research-evaluation/wers-2004/index.html>

while the UK's performance has lagged somewhat. In particular the UK seems to have a job content problem – with a worse than average record on the presence of monotonous tasks, the freedom to solve problems without supervision and the low complexity of tasks. Moreover, there was an intensification of work effort for most of the 1990s, autonomy in UK workplaces was on a downward trajectory and a significant minority of employees continued to work very long hours. While this is by no means the worst of all possible worlds it is far from the best. And the fact that other countries do better suggests that there is scope for public policy intervention.

Some analysts have attributed these differences in outcomes to the differences between the employment regimes in the different countries³⁵. The focus here is on the nature and quality of workplace relationships and the extent to which the quality of working life is seen as both an industrial and a political priority. Important factors include the balance of power between capital and labour, including the scope for employee participation and the strength of trade unions, the commitment to creating quality employment for all, and the extent to which a focus on the quality of working life at enterprise level translates into a national political conversation about the quality of work – often as part of a wider politics of the quality of life.

The importance of workplace reform programmes

A particularly important feature of those countries with higher job quality is the well established nature of their publicly funded programmes of workplace reform. Many of those programmes have attempted to marry a concern about the quality of working life to wider concerns about organisational performance, productivity and innovation – see for example the work of the Swedish Work-Life institute (recently closed down by the centre-right government) and the Workplace Development Programme in Finland.³⁶ Most countries in Western Europe are making some use of these interventions, but the policy design is diverse, with very different approaches and objectives – some programmes are focused on sustainability (Denmark), while others are focused on productivity and performance (Finland); some emphasise the importance of information sharing and the development of best practice to improve competitiveness (Norway) and some stress the importance of developing higher performance in SMEs (Poland).³⁷ Moreover, the design of the programmes reflects other institutional features including the strength of the trade unions, the maturity of social partnership arrangements and the scope for employee participation. A common feature, however, is that most of these programmes offer a guaranteed channel for employees to voice their perspective – a feature that is not always present in the UK programmes.

The status and legitimacy of these programmes does not derive from the mere fact that they are supported by the Government. It is the commitment of the social partners and other institutional actors that makes the difference.

The review of the literature has revealed some common approaches and some general themes that are now being pursued with greater vigour across the EU. The UK may not be in the vanguard, but nor is it a laggard struggling to keep up the pace. This is a solid mid-table performance with considerable room for improvement. One of the exceptions to this rule is the UK's much better than average performance compared to the EU15 in terms of the adverse impact of work on employee health.

³⁵ D. Gallie (ed.), *Employment Regimes and the Quality of Work*, (2007)

³⁶ R. Lekhi and R. Blaug, *Job Quality and Work Organisation, Section 5: Programmatic Approaches to Good Work*, (2008)

³⁷ R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)

The 2005 European working Conditions Survey for e.g. shows that whilst 37% of employees in Spain, 23% in the Netherlands and 49% in Sweden felt that their health or safety was at risk because of work, in the UK the percentage was only 19%.³⁸ However, overall, it still holds that the UK needs better stakeholder engagement, better co-ordination between policymakers and a clear determination to develop programmes that improve the quality of working life.

³⁸ http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/ewcs2005/4ewcs_07_02.htm

Section 4 - Key messages from the stakeholder interviews

We interviewed 10 stakeholders occupying prominent positions in the Governmental, academic, employee representative and health professions. The discussion covered areas including how they define a Good Job, drivers of the quality of work offered by organisations, the factors that impact on the quality of jobs offered, and the roles that Government and business should have in promoting this agenda.

Defining Good Jobs

Job satisfaction was not viewed as being a useful measure of job quality or a Good Job, as 'satisfaction' reflects the ability of individuals to get used to anything up to a point. Measuring job satisfaction was therefore seen to be a poor measure of organisational commitment to Good Jobs.

The HSE's Stress Management Standards (SMS) were seen as a good measure of management, and it was suggested that if the SMS approach were adopted and followed through, delivering the improvements suggested by employees, then the employer would have created a good quality workplace. It was also felt that the term 'Good Work' needed to be defined more fully.

Organisational characteristics and workplace trends that impact on quality of jobs

Size was suggested as an important factor that predicted an organisation's attitude to Good Jobs, although the stakeholders' views of how these factors influenced attitudes varied. One interviewee speculated that small team size, more face-to-face contact with colleagues and clients and a stronger sense that an employee's work has an immediate and important impact could all be related, and might therefore indicate that smaller organisations would provide better jobs than larger organisations as a result of their size. Another expert, however, pointed to organisations of between 50 and 250 as being a group that had the most problems professionalising their management, and were often in need of introducing HR processes which they lacked, indicating that they would be less likely to provide Good Jobs than larger organisations.

Sector was another indicator, which was generally deemed to be less important than size. Several stakeholders pointed to the drastically different types of jobs offered in various sectors. One stakeholder felt that a possible solution was to provide industry-specific engagement with firms through Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and trade bodies in low wage sectors. This was based on the belief that external support for SMEs, which uses examples from their own sector, is more likely to work than wider initiatives which target SMEs indiscriminately. However, it was not felt that changes in attitudes to Good Jobs were specific to certain sectors in the UK.

Several stakeholders pointed to evidence of growing work intensification in UK workplaces, with work demands increasing for many workers. One important consideration therefore was the need to better understand which HR or management practices are improving in these circumstances, and which bring about further intensification of work. One stakeholder who referred to this, though, felt it was necessary to stress that this did not mean that HR necessarily held the key to Good Jobs. Innovation was also considered a problem for some organisations, especially as many SME representatives responding to the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS), for example, claim to have either no competitors or only local competitors. This means that external pressure to innovate in HR, or using wider working practices, is sometimes non-existent, making bad work 'optimal' for some.

Skill supply was another common issue that arose during the interviews. Several pointed to the paradox of a rising level of skills in the working age population and a decline in task discretion.

Working hours were also considered influential. It was generally felt that it was not efficient to have individuals working long hours. One stakeholder's experience suggested that employers often hadn't analysed their workflow or tried to work with customers to avoid bottlenecks. Hours banks and flexible hours were felt to be good options for white collar workers, and it was also suggested that some effective limit on working hours might encourage employers to manage working time more intelligently. Other factors mentioned as influencing the quality of jobs offered by employers included the quality of service demanded by customers, the quality of managers in firms, which was mentioned several times, and big skills gaps in the fields of work organisation and job design. Employment relations were also felt by one stakeholder to be an important factor, although the general trend was that employment relations were improving.

Role of employers

Emphasising the importance of framing discussions about Good Jobs in terms of business performance in order to get employers 'hooked' was emphasised by several stakeholders. Ways in which this could be framed included 'becoming an employer of choice' or addressing motivation and retention problems, or competing for talent in a tight labour market. The role of employers was viewed as vital. Suggestions for their role included that they should engage employees more effectively in business improvement discussions and should focus on issues like job redesign. 'Organisational citizenship' was a term used to describe the role that employers should cultivate for their employees, although it seems unlikely that this would be a term that would actively appeal to employees themselves.

Role of Government

The role of Government was also seen as vital. One stakeholder described how it should be a facilitator and enabler. Another felt that it should support the spread of best practice, and should promote discussions about productivity. Another role suggested was filling the information gap for employers, as many were not sure where to go for support and information about Good Jobs. It was suggested that the Government could also investigate more fully the extent of bad jobs in the UK. One individual described that the agenda need to be framed 'hard edged and practical' language, and that there was a danger otherwise that it would be viewed as 'soft and fluffy'. It was also suggested that Government could reduce the cost of compliance for organisations, and reduce insurance premiums for those with a good safety record. Incentivising good organisations was a theme that emerged in several interviews. It was also suggested that the Government has a responsibility to promote a conversation about "what works."³⁹

³⁹ The stakeholder interviews were carried out before the publication of Dame Carol Black's *Working for a Healthier Tomorrow* in March 2008 and therefore the suggestions put forward by the interviewees should be viewed in this context.

Section 5 – Attitudes to Good Jobs

The design of our workshop programme involved an initial presentation of some of the key motivation and retention problems faced by organisations, placing these problems in the context of a changing labour market. The presentation proposed that poor job quality can affect individuals' ability to perform their jobs effectively and make 'key employees' want to leave their organisation for better opportunities elsewhere. Participants were subsequently asked to comment on this causal link, more specifically whether they believed it was valid or not. In general, participants agreed that the diagnosis made sense and that poor quality jobs were an underlying cause of motivation and retention problems. In one workshop, though, some participants described the diagnosis as a 'plausible oversimplification'. The key purpose of the presentation was to provide participants with material to start a debate from which we could elicit their perceptions of what comprises a Good Job.

In this section we outline employer definitions of a Good Job, drawing from the workshop discussions and the quantitative survey results. Throughout we highlight similarities and differences in definitions and perceptions between the public and private sector employers.

Defining a Good Job

Turning to perceptions of Good Jobs, our data from both the workshops and the survey shows that a large number of individuals had a good sense of what a Good Job was to them. While their definitions varied widely, across the workshops and the survey, many of the same themes emerged.

Responses from an open question in the survey of employers, asking people to define what they thought a Good Job was in general, revealed several strong themes. Table 2 below shows characteristics cited. Importantly 78% of employers questioned did not mention the importance of pay or remuneration in their definition. Of the 22% that did, it was never the sole characteristic, being combined in all cases with a variety of the factors listed below.

Table 3: How would you define a Good Job?

Characteristic of a Good Job	% responses where it appeared
Being valued/ appreciated (getting credit for the work you do)	16%
Interesting	16%
Fulfilling role/ personally rewarding	16%
Job satisfaction	16%
Autonomy/ decision making / responsibility	14%
Working conditions/ environment (including location)	14%
Team working/ staff morale	13%
Good management / management support	11%
Training/ staff development	11%
Enjoyable work	11%
Challenging	9%
Variety	9%
Success/ doing a good job/ achievement	8%
Meeting the needs of the customer/ client	7%
Flexible (inc. working hours)	6%
Promotion prospects / advancement	5%

Participate / contribution to decision making	5%
Skills/ ability/ equipment/ tools to do the job	3%
Other fringe benefits (e.g. healthcare)	3%
Clear objectives/ goals/ expectations	2%
Good communication	2%

Around one in six (16%) of employers included being valued and appreciated in their definition of a Good Job, whilst job satisfaction and having a fulfilling and personally rewarding role each appeared in 16% of responses. Autonomy was important to 14% of employers and team working, and feeling part of the organisation appeared in 13% of responses. Good management, which is often considered as a crucial part of Good Work and will be discussed later, was also a prevalent characteristic of a Good Job, appearing in 11% of responses.

Dividing the definitions of a Good Job by sector, the only significant difference was for the importance of training and development. Twice as many individuals in the public sector (18%) included training and development in their definitions of a Good Job, compared to 9% in the private sector.

More generally, though, these results present an encouraging picture of the way in which the concept of a 'Good Job' is understood and conceptualised by organisations, suggesting that it is broadly interpreted by employers in terms that are consistent with research evidence and the developing policy debate.⁴⁰ For a long time the epidemiology around health in the workplace has been clear: individuals enjoy better health when they have better job quality. A recent paper by The Work Foundation highlighted the seven key determinants of what makes work 'good' reflecting the work of Marmot and others⁴¹:

- Employment security
- Work that is not characterised by monotony and repetition
- Autonomy and control and task discretion
- A balance between the efforts workers make and the rewards that they receive
- Whether the workers have the skills they need to cope with periods of intense pressure
- Workplace fairness
- Strong workplace relationships (social capital)

It is striking but not surprising that the survey results are consistent with these principles; many of the themes such as autonomy, control, being valued and having interesting work emerging as the descriptions given by employers of what makes a job good. However, it should be acknowledged that these responses were the views of employers rather than employees, who might have responded differently.

Remuneration was accompanied in all responses also by other characteristics, many of which fit with the Good Work principles identified by academics and policy analysts. However, while the epidemiological research attributes a rank order to

⁴⁰ M. Marmot, Status Syndrome, (2004); World Health Organisation, *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health*, (2008)

⁴¹ D. Coats, R. Lekhi, *Good Work: Job Quality in a Changing Economy*, (2008)

these factors (with control emerging as particularly important), the weighting given in the employers' survey varied from one employer to another.

Being valued, appreciation, and autonomy were also highly prevalent in the responses gathered from the workshops. Workshop definitions of a Good Job focused on issues of empowerment, employee development and good management. Several words, which repeatedly appeared in definitions of a Good Job were: communication, autonomy, trust, reward, control, and variety. One employer described providing a Good Job as 'being able to treat employees like adults,' giving them autonomy and responsibility. Having a satisfying physical and social environment also appeared during the workshops as a factor defining a Good Job, echoing the importance of working conditions established in the survey.

Motivation

There were several suggestions made by some of the workshop participants about why their organisations were finding it hard to motivate employees, and the factors that did and did not motivate staff. One organisation, a small assessment and training business, explained that they had issues with the motivation of recent graduates, who were often required to undertake mundane low-skill administrative tasks. Another organisation, an NGO, described issues with highly skilled individuals, who they found it difficult to retain, in part because there was often no way to promote good employees in such a small organisation. Presenteeism was felt to be a problem for an organisation in the health sector. At this organisation, the HR manager described that she often felt that managers measured employees' hours at their desk rather than output and productivity, which disincentivised hard work.

Section 6 - Employer policies and practices for Good Jobs

This section reports the experiences of employers in attempting to improve the quality of work. The findings presented here are drawn mainly from the regional workshops with some additional evidence taken from the quantitative survey.

In one sense the story is encouraging because most employers understood why job quality mattered and how it was potentially related to organisational performance. However, the number of organisations with experience of innovative practice was quite limited, with many organisations understanding the argument but being at a loss when it came to implementation. We will explore here the experiences that some employers had in developing Good Jobs, as well as the HR practices that all the organisations had in place and how they perceived their organisations were doing on the Good Jobs agenda.

Awareness of sickness absence levels in organisations

At several of the workshops, when asked if they had a good idea of the levels of sickness absence in their organisations, a large number of individuals with HR responsibilities responded that they did not. Even those that did, when probed about the full cost impact on their organisation, did not appear to fully take account of the impact of sickness absence on the organisation as a whole, including the impact on other staff.

The sickness absence data gathered from the survey also showed that many of the individuals in HR were not particularly familiar with sickness absence data - 30% of employers were unable to tell us how many days on average employees had lost through sickness absence in the previous 12 months. A significant proportion of these employers, who were not able to give an indication of sickness absence levels, also said that they had sole or a major input into HR policy and practice. Almost one in five of those with sole responsibility for HR policy and practice were unable to give a figure for sickness absence (19%) and one in four (25%) of those with some influence over policy and practice were in the same position.

The median figure for sickness absence from the 70% of employers that could give a figure was 4 days; 73% of these reported that their employees had taken 5 days or under. In the private sector, 71% of employers were able to give a figure for sickness absence, whilst in the public sector this was only 66%. There was no significant difference in the average number of days of sickness absence per employee by sector.

Experience of developing Good Jobs issues

Not surprisingly, the organisations attending the workshop programme seemed sympathetic to the Good Jobs agenda, but only a small number of participants suggested that their organisations had previous experience of experimenting with improving job quality through job re-design and other techniques. A small software firm had experimented with flexible working. With 25 staff, including part time and contract staff, many of the programmers in the organisation were given the flexibility to work at home or to work remotely from other countries.

An organisation in the health sector, meanwhile, was trying to tackle issues around well-being and wellness with a new programme of measures. In addition, the interim HR manager had also recently completed the job redesign of an administrative role within the organisation, with the aim of empowering the individuals in this role to

make more decisions on their own. An individual from a manufacturing company was also familiar with idea of job re-design and explained that his organisation had discussed redesigning roles within the organisation, but that no action had ever taken this forward.

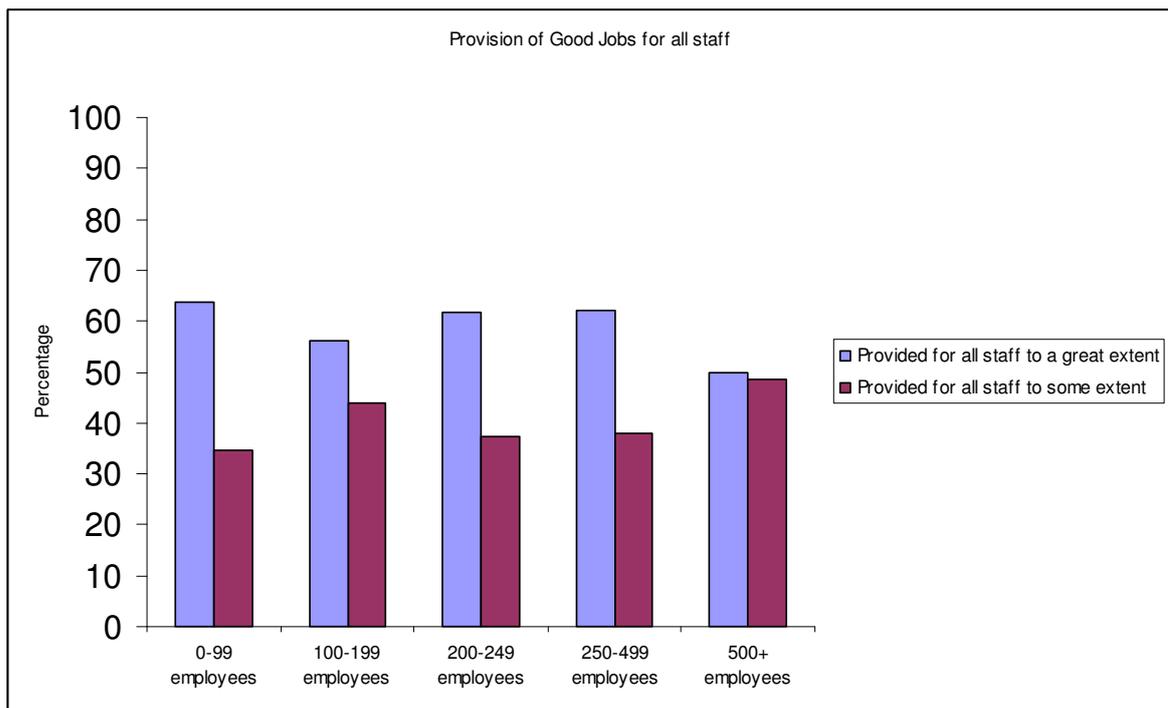
Another manufacturing organisation had attempted to improve job quality by employing a production manager whose task was to improve the skills and experience of individuals in the organisation. Despite encountering some difficulties, he managed to set up a knowledge sharing system across the organisation, so that individuals in different jobs shared skills. He also set up a system whereby the entire workforce was encouraged to complete an NVQ programme to improve their skill levels. A different manufacturing organisation, meanwhile, was working with the local Chamber of Commerce to try and set up a leadership academy, in part reflecting the problems of poor management, that were identified strongly as a barrier to improving job quality in that workshop.

Perceptions of the level of job quality in organisations

There was a mixed response from workshop participants when asked how they felt their own organisation was doing on the Good Jobs agenda with some believing they had high job quality and others believing they did not. Some employers believed that their organisations could be considered employers of choice, able to attract and retain the best staff because of their record on job quality, but others were less convinced. On the other hand, some employers from the larger organisations were sceptical about the extent to which individual departments in their organisations could control job quality because of centralised HR processes. Equally there were organisations that reported mixed experiences within their own organisation. For example, a representative from a public sector organisation felt that it was doing well on leadership, reputation, job content and rewards, but that there was a need to gather more feedback from employees. A large private sector organisation in financial services, meanwhile, suggested that it had been good at promoting job quality but that it was at risk of 'falling down', because managers were crowded by other pressures.

However, the mixed responses received from individuals participating in the workshop programme, were not mirrored by similar mixed results in the survey. A large majority of employers felt that their organisations were doing well on the Good Jobs agenda. Employers were asked to rate the extent to which Good Jobs were provided for all staff by their organisations. 62% said that Good Jobs were provided to a great extent for all staff. 37% said that Good Jobs were provided for all staff to some extent, and 1% said that Good Jobs were not at all provided for all staff. There were no significant differences in responses between organisations in the public and private sectors.

Perceptions of the number of staff being provided with Good Jobs did not vary much according to size of organisation as revealed in graph 1 below. The percentage of organisations that provided Good Jobs for all staff to a great extent was slightly lower amongst organisations with more than 500 employees, compared with the other size groups, although this was not a significant difference. Graph 1 below shows the breakdown according to size.

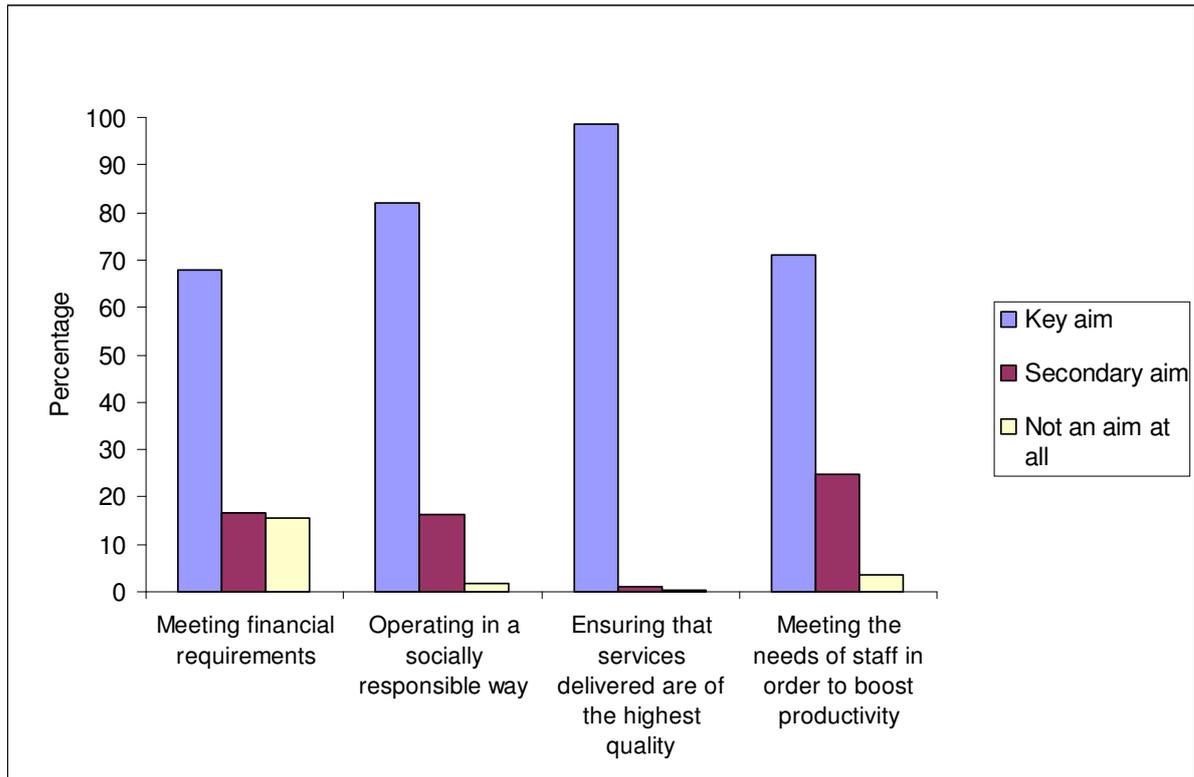


Graph 1: Chart showing extent to which organisations provide Good Jobs for all staff by size

We also asked employers in both the public and private sectors to rate a series of organisational priorities as to whether they were a key aim, a secondary aim, not an aim at all for their organisation. Most employers rated all as key aims but the findings clearly point to customer satisfaction as the highest priority.

Whilst ‘meeting the needs of staff in order to boost productivity, through schemes such as flexible working’ (a possible indicator of an objective to have Good Jobs) was rated a key objective by 72% of all employers surveyed. ‘Ensuring that the products and services offered to customers are of the highest quality’ and ‘operating in a socially responsible way’ were rated as key aims by a higher number of employers. Whilst employers were not specifically asked to rank the priority of each, the number of employers rating each objective as important provides an indicator of the relative importance employers place on the objectives.

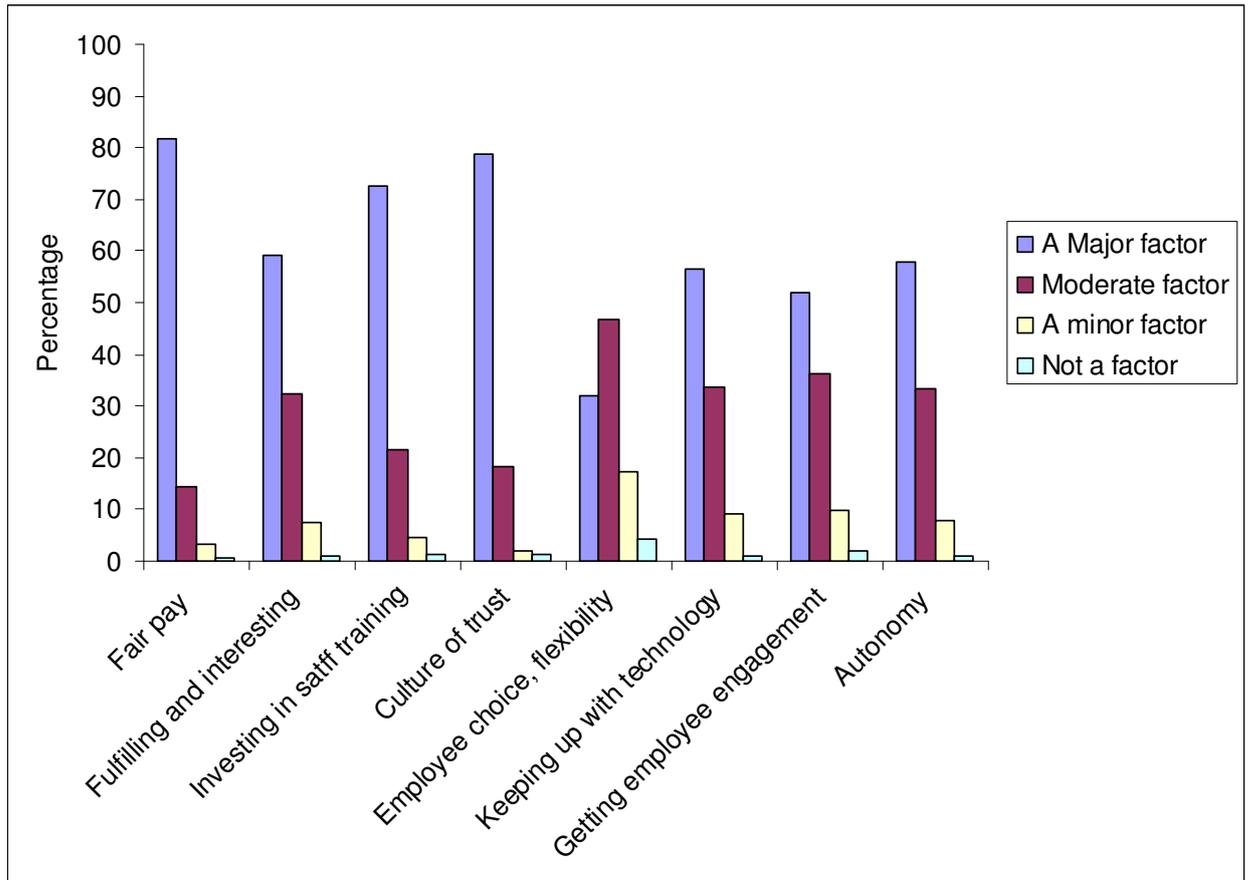
Therefore, whilst providing Good Jobs was a key concern for the majority of employer responses, it was not the most important aim of business strategy for organisations. However, ‘meeting the needs of staff in order to boost productivity’ ranked above ‘meeting the financial requirements of the organisation’, whether for shareholders in the case of private sector, or Government procurement requirements in the case of the public sector. This latter finding demonstrates that, in addition to performance, employers recognise that the welfare of employees is an important factor. The chart below plots the full breakdown of responses rating the series of business priorities that the question addressed.



Graph 2: Rating business priorities (% of responses)

We also asked employers to rate a series of business factors known to be elements that contribute to Good Jobs⁴², including fair pay, keeping up with new technology and employee flexibility, each according to their contribution to organisational effectiveness. For all but one item employers were most likely to say the item was a major factor in organisational effectiveness. Employee flexibility over working hours was the only factor considered to make a moderate rather than major contribution to organisational effectiveness by the majority of employers. Graph 3 shows how employers rated the various factors in their contribution to organisational effectiveness. It should be noted here once again that these views were those of employers rather than employees, and therefore should not be assumed to be representative of what employees themselves would have said.

⁴² M. Marmot, *Status Syndrome*, (2004); D. Coats, R. Lekhi, *Good Work: Job Quality in a Changing Economy*, (2008); R. Lekhi, R. Blaug, *Job quality & work organisation*, (2008)



Graph 3: Rating importance of job quality factors to organisational effectiveness (% responses)

Employers who reported that their organisation had barriers to introducing more flexible working, were more likely to see employee flexibility and choice being only a moderate (53%) or minor factor (23%) in contributing to organisational effectiveness, whilst organisations that did not think there were barriers were more likely to attribute a major (46%) or moderate (40%) role to employee choice and flexibility. Therefore, those organisations that were less able to introduce flexible working also saw it as being less important to organisational effectiveness.

Organisations experiencing job quality related problems

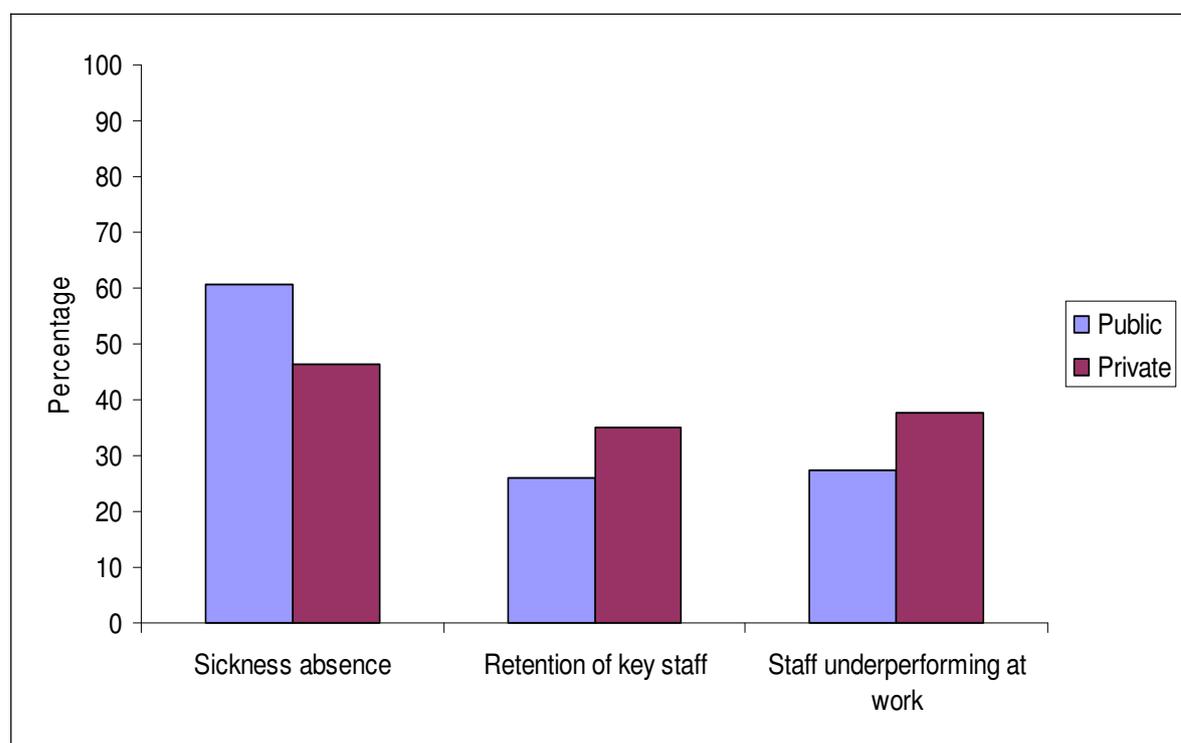
As part of the survey, we asked employers to rate the extent to which the following issues were problems for their organisation:

- sickness absence
- recruiting key staff
- retaining key staff
- staff under-performing at work
- staff coming to work when they are ill (presenteeism)
- staff too disengaged to offer discretionary effort

Around half either agreed or strongly agreed that sickness absence (49%) and recruitment of key staff (50%) were problems for their organisations. (It is noteworthy that most respondents reported having monitoring systems in place for sickness

absence- 92% in the private sector and 85% in the public sector - though the existence of a system does not indicate the quality of the information recorded). For a third of the organisations, staff retention and underperformance were problems and for another quarter, staff presenteeism and de-motivated / uninterested staff were all identified as problems. Therefore, these issues singly, and potentially as a combination, were real problems for a sizeable section of the sample, with 80% of the employers questioned either strongly agreeing or agreeing that at least one of the problems was an issue for their organisation.

Notable significant differences⁴³ were observed between public and private sector organisations for three problems – sickness absence, retaining key staff, and staff under performing at work. A larger proportion of public sector organisations agreed that sickness absence was a problem, compared to private sector organisations. The reverse was the case for staff under performing at work and the retention of key staff, which was perceived to be a problem by more private sector organisations than public sector ones. The problems where there was a significant difference between sectors are shown in the graph below.



Graph 4: Percentage that agree or strongly agree that sickness absence, recruitment and motivation issues were a problem for their organisation

NB: for all three of the problems in the graph above there were significant differences at 5% level between the public and private sectors

The existence of two of the problems also varied significantly by size of organisation. There was a significant difference for sickness absence and staff being uninterested in putting in the extra effort if required, each being more of a problem for organisations with over 250 employees compared with organisations with fewer than 250 employees.

⁴³ Note all significant differences were significant at 5% level unless otherwise stated

Human Resource Management Practices

Turning to HR practices, several of the basic practices, which might be associated with Good Jobs, were found in a high percentage of the organisations surveyed and were in place for all staff not just management. The Table below shows the percentage of organisations in which these key practices were in place for all staff.

Table 5: HR practices in place

HR Practice	% organisations with the practice in place for all
Induction processes	89%
Sickness absence monitoring	86%
Job descriptions	83%
Team briefing	77%
Performance appraisal	75%
Upward feedback channels	74%
Equal pay reviews for all staff	72%

However, the connection between HR management processes and job quality is not necessarily consequential. In several of the workshops, employers had difficulty in equating the presence of personnel practices with good job quality. One individual from a law firm, for example, spoke passionately about the fact that her organisation had a large number of personnel policies and procedures in place to support the Good Jobs agenda. Despite this, however, she claimed that job quality in her organisation was poor, and that managers in particular, did not have the skills to ensure that employees were supported and developed. This view was reflected in other participants in the group who suggested that paper policies and procedures to support job quality were in place, but they were not utilised properly.

This finding is also borne out by the survey results. Public sector organisations were more likely to report having key personnel practices associated with Good Jobs in place, yet despite this, were no more likely than private sector organisations to report either having Good Jobs as a central concern or having Good Jobs in place for all staff to a great extent.

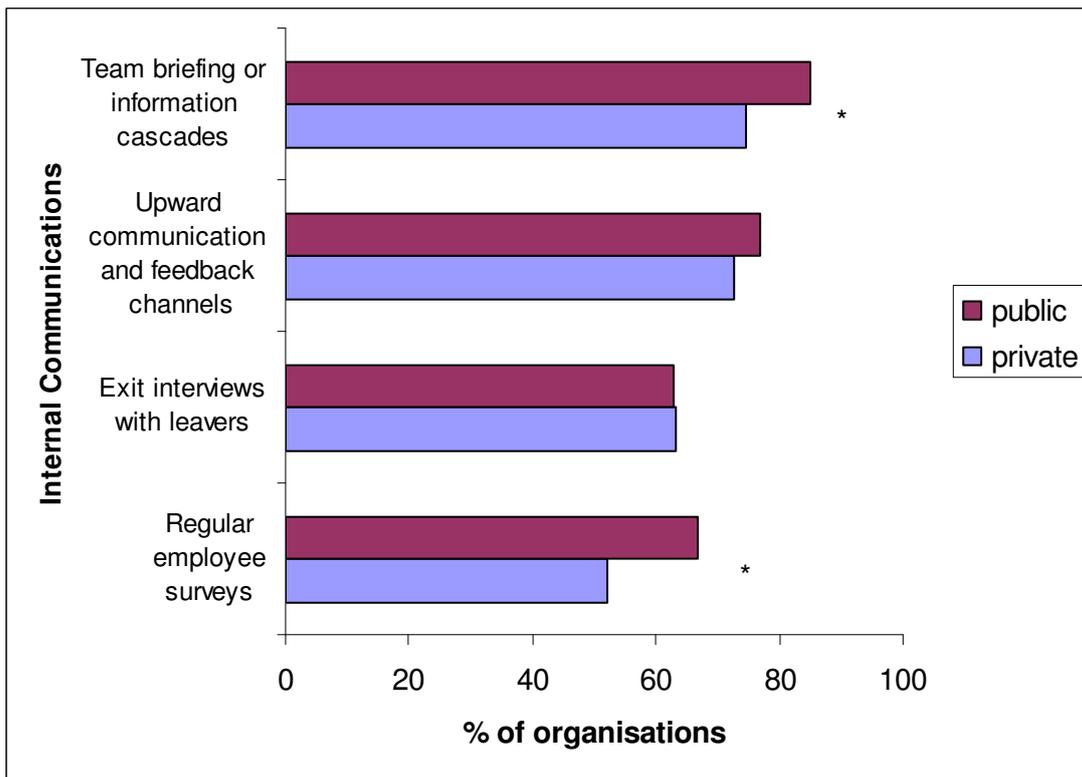
It is also clear that there is a pattern in the type of practices organisations in the public and private sectors have in place. We asked employers whether each of 29 policies were in place for all or some of their employees. The practices fell into five themes:

- Internal communications
- Pay and incentives
- Well-being
- Work life balance
- Training and development

The practices within these themes were a mix of policies and procedures that could be said to help create an environment where Good Jobs could thrive and those that had only a tangential relationship to the Good Jobs agenda. For example, equal pay reviews and stress management training might be said to have a more direct relationship to the Good Jobs agenda than some of the other policies such as share options for senior managers, profit share schemes, and shift working. Graphs 5-9 reveal the percentages of public and private sector organisations that reported

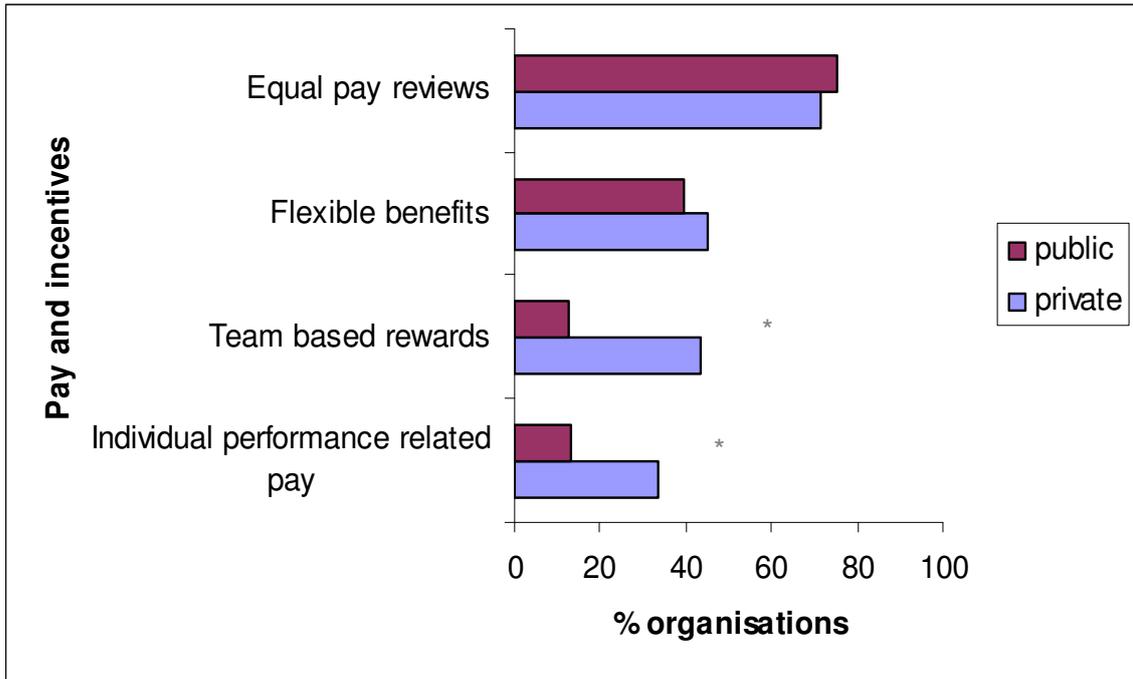
having each of the practices we asked employers about in place for all employees (share options and profit sharing are excluded from sectoral analysis).

Examining differences in availability of these policies for all employees (as opposed to some or none) between the public and private sectors revealed some patterns in the themes of policies. Public sector organisations were more likely than private sector organisations to report policies related to well-being and training and development such as stress management and line manager training, wellness programmes, regular employee surveys and employee assistance programmes, being available for all employees. Private sector organisations were more likely to report pay and incentive related policies, such as flexible benefits, team based rewards and shift working being available for all employees. A few specific policies within the themes were in the opposite direction to the overall trends, for example whilst the public sector was more likely to report the existence of training and development policies in general, the private sector was more likely to support career development specifically than the public sector. The practices more likely to be available to all employees in the public sector were more directly related to Good Job quality in contrast to those more likely to be seen in the private sector which had an indirect link to job quality. Graphs 5- 9 illustrate the public and private sector prevalence of the five types of personnel practice identified.



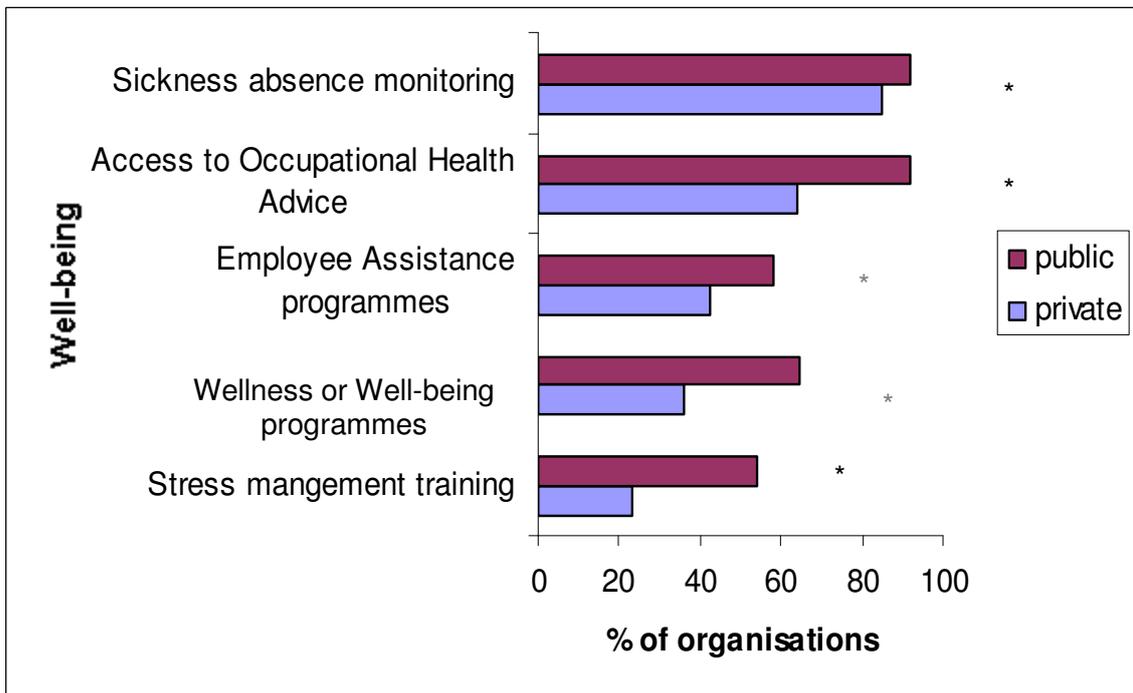
* significant difference at 5% level

Graph 5: Internal communication policies in place for all employees by sector



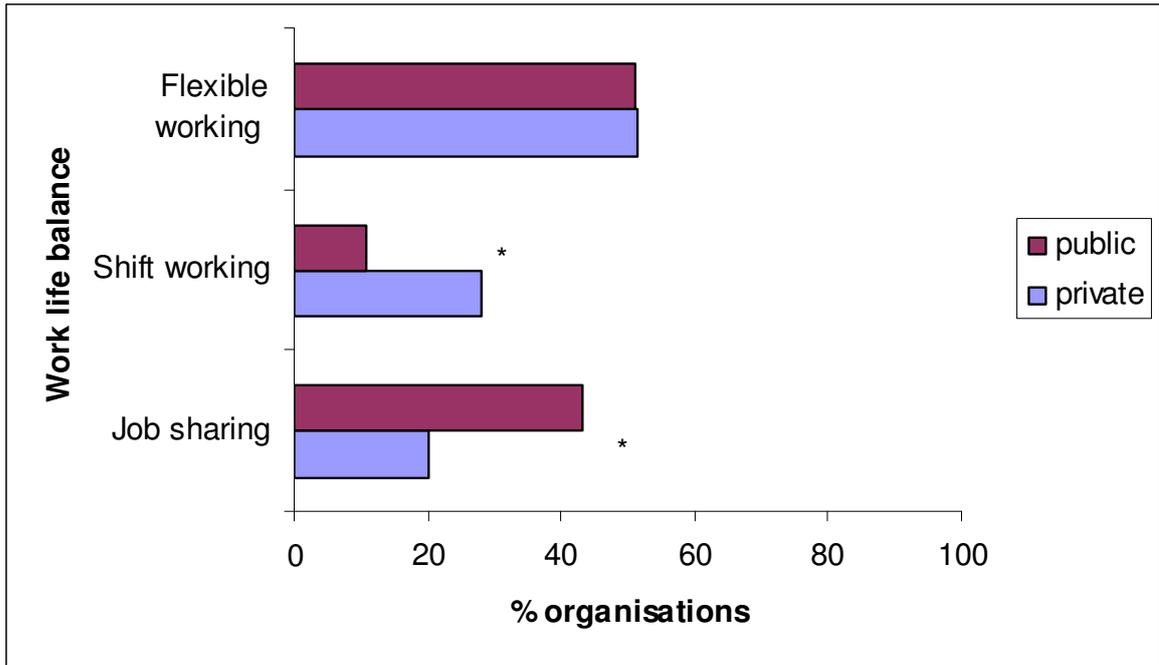
* significant difference at 5% level

Graph 6: Pay and incentive policies in place for all employees by sector



* significant difference at 5% level

Graph 7: Well-being policies in place for all employees by sector



* significant difference at 5% level

Graph 8: Work life balance policies in place for all employees by sector



* significant difference at 5% level

Graph 9: Training and development policies in place for all employees by sector

Differences between organisations with over 250 employees and those with fewer did not reveal such clear patterns of difference. For policies concerning internal communication, work life balance and well-being, there were no differences between larger and smaller organisations as to whether they held the policy for all employees or not. For policies concerning training and development and pay incentives if the policies were available it was more likely they were available for all in smaller organisations than larger ones. It is possible that it is simply easier to ensure these policies happen for everyone, particularly training and development, where there are fewer employees e.g. performance objectives, inductions, training needs analysis and job descriptions.

Our analysis therefore reveals that the types of personnel policies put in place by organisations often vary according to their sector and in some cases size. However, it is important to note that the presence of more policies related to well-being and training, for example, in the public sector should not be seen to reflect a higher level or focus on Good Jobs in this sector than in the private sector. The evidence clearly highlights that the presence of personnel policies does not necessarily equate to better job quality and to some extent employers can therefore be accused of introducing palliatives to treat the symptoms of bad job quality rather than dealing with the underlying problem. The types of practices put in place, though, do give an indication of where the organisation's strategic focus in the area of HR lies and as shown above, this appears to differ according to sector. However top level commitment to good HR practices does not necessarily result in adequate implementation⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ F. Visser and L. Williams, *Work-life balance: Rhetoric versus reality?*, The Work Foundation, 2006

Section 7 – Moving the agenda forward

In this section we explore our findings from the workshops and the survey about moving the Good Jobs agenda forward. We report the barriers to improving job quality that emerged from both the workshops and the survey. We also examine the findings concerning the potential role for external organisations in providing advice and support on this agenda.

Barriers in improving job quality

Weak management skills

Poor management was a recurring theme that came out strongly from the workshop programme as a barrier to improving job quality. Employers raised several problems with managers. It was felt that managers who failed to treat all employees consistently caused problems with an adverse impact on employees' health. This reflects the importance of fair treatment and consistency of treatment as a component of 'Good Work'.⁴⁵ It is vital that employees can trust their employer to treat them all equally. There are research findings that show an absence of such fairness in the workplace is a significant cause of ill health.⁴⁶

Another problem that came up in all six of the workshops related to managers who felt they could 'do' a management role without training. Several participants in different workshops gave examples of individuals with technical expertise being promoted to managerial roles, because of their good technical work, but then failing to perform their management duties successfully, either because of a lack of aptitude for the role, or because of a lack of training, or both.

It was also suggested that some managers had a problem delivering the 'softer' side of their role. It was said that some managers did not take line management responsibilities, one to one meetings, and mentoring seriously, thereby stifling the development of their employees. Several individuals commented on the fact that personal development reviews and other appraisal instruments were in place in their organisation, but were not used consistently by managers. Managers not taking flexible working requests seriously were also felt to stifle job quality. It was said in one workshop that even where flexible working was granted, employees who job shared were often considered to be "slackers" by their managers and accused of not taking their job seriously, regardless of their actual productivity.

Stories of bad management were rife across the workshops. One individual from a public sector education establishment said that one in five of her middle managers were a "disaster". She claimed that they often didn't take their line management responsibilities seriously, failing to speak to staff with appropriate respect and showing no interest in supporting their colleagues. A representative from a manufacturing firm, meanwhile, related that in his experience, different styles of leadership that were not easily translated across departments within organisations were also a problem. He felt that the styles of leadership adopted by managers were key to supporting job quality, pointing out that more focus needed to be placed on

⁴⁵ D. Coats, R. Lekhi, *Good Work: Job Quality in a Changing Economy*, (2008)

⁴⁶ M. Kivimaki et al., 'Effort-reward imbalance, procedural injustice and relational injustice as psychosocial predictors of health: complementary or redundant models?', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Vol. 64, pp. 659-665, (2007); Nyberg A, et al. 'Managerial leadership and ischaemic heart disease among employees: the Swedish WOLF study'; *Occupational Environmental Medicine*, (2008)

how leadership skills could be passed on to the next generation of managers within an organisation.

Tradition

Aside from the failure of managers, tradition, and a sense that “things have always been done this way” emerged from several workshops as a barrier to improving job quality. One of the individuals who expressed this view came from a manufacturing company, which had been owned by the same family for decades. He had been brought in to try and modernise the organisation and up-skill the employees, but had found resistance to his ideas from the managing director, whose family owned the organisation. Another individual emphasised the importance of history to an organisation, but emphasised the difficulties in implementing change where tradition was so important. This finding supports the notion that improving job quality requires a holistic approach and in many cases should be approached as a change programme. This is the approach being taken in the two intervention case studies which form the final phase of the research.

Low trust

A lack of trust in employees was also cited as a barrier. An individual from a local Chamber of Commerce commented that when employees have the opportunity to contribute beyond their basic job they are often more motivated. She gave the example of employees interested in re-recycling, and how giving them autonomy and making them responsible for this, encouraged them to also commit more effort to other elements of their job. Several participants, including the director of a manufacturing company, emphasised how they liked employees to take ownership of what they did. However, it was felt by many participants that some managers did not delegate enough and that employees, who were fully capable of taking on more responsibility, were often not allowed to. Linked to this was a feeling that in some organisations there was a prevalent culture that failed to empower staff and help them make their own decisions and innovate. One of the definitions of a Good Job expressed by an individual in one workshop was “the freedom to take a risk, within reasonable bounds”. However, it was felt that the freedom to innovate and risk-take was rarely cultivated in organisations.

Time Pressures

A lack of time to implement Good Jobs was also cited as a barrier to improving job quality. An individual at a healthcare organisation, for example, suggested that most managers are too busy chasing targets and numbers to think clearly about Good Jobs. A lack of imagination about how to redefine jobs was also a barrier that was considered to be holding back the advancement of Good Jobs. Some participants, however, expressed doubts about the extent to which you could re-design all jobs. Whilst variety is only one aspect of a Good Job, one participant cited the example of a call centre worker, claiming that it was not always possible to make mundane jobs more varied.

External Pressures

An external influence cited as preventing the creation of better jobs was the economy, which at the time of this research was beginning to enter a downturn. It was claimed by several participants that it was very difficult to focus on Good Jobs and the bottom line at the same time.

Further attitudinal barriers

Building on the findings from the workshops, the survey asked employers to rate a range of perceptual problems which might act as a barrier to improving job quality.

Several of the perceptual issues asked about referred to management issues, which had arisen from the workshops as a potential barrier to improving job quality. Employers were able to mention more than one issue as an obstacle to improving job quality in their organisation. The Table below reveals how strong an obstacle each item was to creating Good Jobs.

Table 6: Barriers to creating Good Jobs

Characteristic	Major obstacle	Minor obstacle	Not an obstacle
A belief that high turn over of certain staff makes it difficult to develop staff in their jobs	31%	35%	35%
Lack of management skills	25%	43%	32%
A belief that there is no time for management to think about Good Jobs	22%	43%	36%
Management assumption that some jobs can't be made more interesting	21%	45%	34%
Managers not trusting employees to do their job autonomously	19%	46%	35%
The fact that we don't have any problems filling the jobs we offer	19%	40%	41%
A belief that workers are only interested in the next pay packet, and not having to think about the nature of their work	19%	49%	32%
Lack of knowledge of how to transform jobs into Good Jobs	18%	44%	38%
Managers' assumptions that all our jobs are Good Jobs already	18%	44%	38%
A belief that ensuring job quality for all jobs would be too difficult	17%	46%	37%
A belief that staff not are not skilled enough to take on more responsibility	16%	42%	42%
A belief that job quality is a luxury we can't afford	12%	36%	52%
Management not convinced that Good Jobs are good for business	11%	33%	56%

High staff turnover and management capabilities were most commonly cited as major obstacles to improving job quality amongst the employers (by 31% and 25% respectively). The finding that management capabilities are a key obstacle supports the workshops findings. However, when obstacles were analysed by the reported centrality of Good Jobs to business strategy, the only obstacle for which there was a significant difference was 'management not being convinced that Good Jobs are good for business', which is a logical association. There were no significant differences between the issues that were mentioned as obstacles by public and private sector organisations, or their severity according to sector. It can be inferred from this evidence, that perceptual barriers to job quality issues are equally as likely to be prevalent in private and public sector organisations.

Role for external advice and support

Many of the organisations that attended the workshop programme seemed to struggle with the idea that external agencies could have a role in supporting Good

Jobs. This appeared not to be a result of them actively thinking that intervention was a bad idea, but more as a result of them not really understanding how an external agency could support what they viewed to be an internal problem. This was a more prevalent attitude amongst private sector organisations; there tended to a slightly more positive response from individuals in the public sector. Even so, the only real external sources of support that could be envisaged were either GPs, who could help get people back to work rather than signing them off sick, or accountants, who offer general business advice to some of their smaller clients. When it was suggested that Government might be able to support this agenda, and we asked what types of support could be provided, the establishment of a body of best practice case studies, to enable organisations to benchmark against each other, was the only suggestion that the participants could generate.

Analysis from the survey, however, suggested that more employers saw a role for external support in the creation of Good Jobs than the workshops had suggested. Examining the overall sample, 41% of organisations thought that there could be a role for external organisations. There was no significant difference between the private and public sector employers in the numbers that reported a role for external help, and there were no significant differences in the attitudes of organisations to external help according to size of organisation.

Turning to analyse whether organisations that were experiencing problems with sickness absence and retention problems saw a role for external organisations, reveals they were more likely than not to agree that there was a role. 67% of organisations that either agreed, or strongly agreed that sickness absence was a problem for their organisation, also thought that there was a role for external organisations in offering support and advice in the delivery of better jobs, whilst 33% did not or did not know. 69% of employers from organisations who either agreed or strongly agreed that they had problems recruiting key staff also saw a role for help from external organisations, compared with 31% that did not or did not know.

Despite the positive evidence gathered from the survey analysis, there is obviously still a need for Government to convince organisations that the Good Jobs agenda is one that they can look outside for help with. Interestingly, extra funding was not mentioned as a method of support which organisations felt would help them, perhaps reflecting the extent to which organisations see the problems they face as being wide-ranging, specific to them, and not necessarily something that could be solved by a single Government intervention. Given the wide variety of definitions employers had of a Good Job and the barriers they identified to improving job quality, it seems advisable that a multi-faceted approach is adopted to help support the Good Jobs agenda in organisations.

Section 8 – Working with organisations to improve an issue related to Good Jobs

One of the key objectives of the third phase of the Good Jobs project was to explore the process of working with organisations to facilitate improvements in job quality. In order to draw out transferable lessons for future attempts to engage and work with business on the Good Jobs agenda this section of the report the process of engagement itself will be analysed, and the stages undertaken and barriers presented will be explored,. Analysis of the subsequent interventions we design and carry out in two organisations to deal with an issue related to Good Jobs will follow in a separate appendix to this report, once work with the organisations has been completed and fully analysed. The appendix report will be available at www.theworkfoundation.com

Initial attempts to engage organisations for the workshop programme

Time and knowledge constraints

From the beginning of this project whenever we attempted to engage organisations in a series of workshops around the country, time constraints were presented by many as the reason they felt unable to participate. A frequent response was that managers found it difficult to spare time away from their key business tasks to attend a workshop to discuss issues that they perceived as being additional to their core business concerns. This was especially the case for workshops targeting SMEs, where the owners of some very small companies said that they could not attend because there was no one to cover for them in their absence. Our key consideration therefore, when designing the third section of the project, was that the organisations we targeted should be in some way aware of the Good Jobs agenda already, so that they were familiar with the merits of engagement with it, and were therefore more likely to take part.

Another problem was the difficulty of determining what was going on inside organisations. Firstly, it was not easy to get organisations to describe the difficulties they were facing to outsiders, and secondly, it was impossible without data to determine whether their “presenting problems” accurately depicted the issues they were facing or whether there were other issues underpinning these. During the workshop process we probed as much as possible to understand the challenges they faced in their organisations, and from this drew up a list of organisations which we felt would benefit and make relevant case study organisations to work with further in the final phase of the study.

Approaching the organisations to take up an offer of free consultancy

Our short listed organisations were contacted by letter which explained the project and outlined the possible benefits to them participating. We also enclosed a flyer giving more background detail about the project and Good Jobs. Despite representatives from these organisations having attended the workshop programme and therefore knowing something about Good Jobs and The Work Foundation, response rates were poor, even after follow-up calls. The evidence suggests the difficulty of giving away free help to organisations. Its value is regarded with scepticism, in part because of the time and disruption such a process can cause. As a business director, being approached with the offer of help for an issue that is not necessarily recognised as a problem, is a very different scenario to contacting an external organisation asking for help to resolve an issue you have identified as being

a problem. This therefore raises an important issue about how to target organisations with offers of external support. The organisations most in need of help because their standard of jobs is so poor, are also more likely to be unaware of the benefits of Good Jobs, which will make engagement much more difficult and perhaps makes them a less appropriate recipient than organisations that have some knowledge of Good Jobs. It is vital therefore that information about health and well-being at work and the positive impact of Good Jobs on performance be circulated as widely as possible, and in advance of attempts to offer help to organisations.

An example of an organisation that was interested but could not ultimately take part

We took forward the conversation about consultancy work with one organisation, that was ultimately to drop out of the project, but the process of engaging with them was revealing. Our contact there had originally taken part in the workshop programme, and was interested in job re-design. Initial discussions went well, and it looked as though the organisation might participate. Our contact was aiming to re-organise work at his manufacturing firm to give more autonomy to teams. The organisation had previously undertaken a number of initiatives to encourage staff to be more innovative, instigated by the individual we spoke to. It was difficult to convince the managing director of the importance of such work, which was furthermore viewed by the executive team as a distraction and far too radical for the organisation. In this instance, the organisation withdrew from our study. The HR Steering Group rejected the Good Jobs offer on the grounds that there were already enough initiatives in place, and a proposal to increase the autonomy of some teams was seen as being too far reaching. This scenario, where one individual identifies a need for development work, but is unable to 'sell' the idea to the organisation more broadly is a common barrier to furthering the Good Jobs agenda, as to many other organisational initiatives .

This story illustrates how important the way in which an approach or an initiative gets framed is. The research evidence on Good Jobs can help a client understand and convey to organisational decision makers the case for Good Jobs. But it is not unusual for a client to need advice or assistance to make explicit the links between the quality of job design, organisational structure and management practices and organisational performance, and the relevance of the approach to their existing system.

The organisations we're working with

We are, at time of writing, working with two organisations to examine and address issues in their organisations, which relate to Good Jobs. Below we present an overview of the organisations and how we arrived at these two case studies.

One organisation is a public sector organisation that has grown steadily in recent years from employing around 100 to 220 people. The other is a manufacturing organisation that employs just over 300 employees at multiple sites. Variable line management practices were cited as current issues in both cases. In one organisation these were a consequence of quick growth, with attendant increase of line management positions; in the other organisation line management was assessed as a pivotal position to bring about the proposed changes, and held to be wanting. Further exploration of the organisational systems, and a clearer understanding of the current context of each organisation, each of them being poised to undertake serious

change, uncovered where and how the Good Jobs approach could bring meaningful thinking and practices.

The importance of a strong existing relationship

The Work Foundation already had strong relationships with both of our case study organisations. The working relationship with the manufacturing organisation has existed for several decades, and a significant number of their senior management team has participated in a leadership programme run by The Work Foundation for many years. Representatives from both the organisations have attended many events that we run discussing the world of work and issues relating to the creation of Good Working environments and they are members of our partnership scheme, which also means they are sent regular updates on The Work Foundation activities. The representative from the public sector organisation, who has become our main contact for the consultancy work, attended the London workshop that formed phase 3 of this project. The strength of our relationships with these organisations has played an important part in convincing them to take up the offer of free consultancy help. It seems that attempts to engage with organisations to persuade them to take up the offer of help will be more successful where a relationship of recognition and trust already exists. Another important issue for Government to consider is the need for any external agents to be viewed as highly skilled and capable. It is vital that the staff working in external agencies are viewed as being experts in their field.

Overcoming previous negative experiences of consultancy and external help

Two important barriers that had to be acknowledged and addressed when discussing potential initiatives with both organisations were (1) a negative perception of consultancy and (2) potential disruption, anticipated as a result of previous bad experiences with 'one-size fits all' solutions for complex problems. One of the organisations clearly stated that previous consultancy interventions had not been well received where "off the shelf" solutions were proposed. In the other, a member of the senior leadership team had previously had a bad experience when a staff survey was completed and the organisation was left with no help to tackle the employee issues that emerged. We had to reassure senior leaders in both organisations that the work undertaken with them would leave them in better positions and with manageable outcomes. This was achieved through a series of meetings and by clearly outlining our proposals. It is unlikely without the existing relationships that we would have even got to discuss such practicalities.

Importance of fitting in with existing strategic plans for the organisation

It was essential that the senior teams of both organisations endorse the projects and this was helped by making clear the links between Good Jobs and each organisation's strategic business aims clear. Both organisations were already running internal programmes to change aspects of the way they operated, and it was therefore important to tie our work to these initiatives. One of the case study organisations planned to merge two important departments to be more responsive to customer demands, and the other organisation wanted to radically change their business planning, with team leaders being required for the first time to create their own business plans for the forthcoming year.

Focusing on business performance

For both organisations, the focus for our proposed work with them was framed in terms of creating the conditions in which employees could work more productively in order to improve business performance amid the changes they were undergoing and an intensification of competition in their markets. It was therefore necessary to show that our work would compliment and contribute to performance improvements, and align with other initiatives they already had running to improve performance. Only once we had shown the senior teams of each organisation how a Good Jobs project could contribute to this aim, were we able to progress with the projects.

Importance of establishing a key contact

In both case study organisations we had a key contact – in one organisation it was the Personnel Manager and in the other the Head of Corporate Services. Having a key client contact was crucial for getting acceptance for, and momentum behind, each Good Jobs project. It was these key contacts who helped us understand the concerns and needs of each organisation and without their influence and their sustained belief in the benefits to performance and to job quality of Good Jobs, it is unlikely that we would have been given the opportunity to present to the senior management teams. The development of the Good Jobs initiatives in each organisation has been a co-productive and collaborative process. The key contacts have helped interpret the terrain of their organisations, have championed the impact such a project could have to the senior management teams, and have also helped to logistically organise the work.

Importance of getting support from the leadership team

Getting senior management endorsement is vital to the success of any initiative in an organisation, and in these instances leadership 'buy-in' has been extensive. Senior 'buy-in' also sends a message to the organisation about how important the project is, and this is important in effectively engaging employees once the project has been agreed and attention turns to collecting information on the current situation as part of the diagnostic phase. In both organisations, a member of the executive leadership team attended the first steering group meeting of the project, which fed into the design of the work undertaken. In one organisation the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services is a steering group member, and in the other organisation the Director of Operations has a role. The steering groups in each organisation comprise a range of staff from across the departments and levels of the organisations and they report back to their respective executive teams regularly.

Building extra time into the process for delays

Progress in moving each of the interventions forward has been both rapid, and at times slow. This has been for a combination of reasons including the need to sell the project in several ways to different stakeholders and the competing work demands placed on the contacts at the organisations. Progress has been especially slow where the key contacts have multiple and competing demands on their time. This is not a new problem but especially in SMEs where senior managers often hold more than one role, it's an increasing factor.

Key learning points:

- organisations that are already aware of the Good Jobs agenda are likely to be more receptive to help adopting and adapting it
- Strong relationships with the organisations or with individuals in them are the bases for trust. Even if advice is being offered free, organisations often express reluctance to unknown or potential disruption (and rightly so). Credentials that show how the external provider works, what their values are and their track record is very important, no matter how appealing Good Jobs seems to be.
- Having knowledge or understanding of the organisation you want to help enables you to more successfully frame the way you relate Good Jobs to match organisational needs, strengths and culture.
- Negative perceptions of consultancy and 'one size fits all' solutions need to be explicitly addressed.
- Tailoring the work to the organisation in question is vital, and discovering the relevance of Good Jobs to an existing strategic programme is helpful, so that the organisation can more clearly see and realise benefits and positive outcomes.
- Focusing on Good Jobs as a way of improving business performance and retention and motivation levels amongst staff, has immediate appeal and tends to be an effective way of creating an appetite for the ideas of Good Jobs
- This must be accompanied by language that they identify with and fits with their organisational culture.
- It's vital that the organisation has a sense of ownership for the work being undertaken, and while applications or recommendations may be developed collaboratively decisions need to be taken by the client
- Expect time delays

Valuable practical themes emerged through the case studies to illustrate how the Good Jobs agenda can serve to help frame the objectives of an organisation to be better focused, more efficient and improve its performance while at the same time improving the working environment for its employees.

The cases show how the Good Jobs agenda can meaningful contribute to change initiatives seeking to improve the way a specific organisation responds to its customers, enhances its business performance, and ensures its very future.

Examples of doing this in our case studies include:

- drawing on the evidence base of what is important to employees
- encouraging input from all levels of an organisation about how to meet its improvement aims
- integrating Good Jobs thinking in the early stages of planning organisational change programmes

A detailed write up of the case studies that expands on the above examples can be found at: www.theworkfoundation.com

Section 9 – Assessment and Conclusion

This study brings a broad message of optimism about the extent to which employers identify with the Good Jobs agenda. The workshop programme provided evidence that the link between good quality jobs, retention and motivation was broadly accepted by many organisations. The survey, meanwhile, illustrated that many employers included key issues such as being valued, autonomy and a pleasant working environment in a definition of a Good Job, echoing the factors identified as influencing both employee morbidity and mortality in the work of Michael Marmot.⁴⁷ Moreover, 78% of employers mentioned these issues without once referring to pay as a factor. This evidence is encouraging for policy makers, as it provides positive information about the level of awareness of the idea of 'Good Jobs' in a sample of UK organisations.

However, whilst being broadly aware and accepting of the idea of creating Good Jobs, several of the attitudes that emerged about achieving this in practice, reinforce that there is still much more work to be done. This research, which was firmly employer rather than employee focused, saw management emerging as a key barrier to improving the quality of jobs provided in organisations. In the workshops, managers failing to take the 'softer' side of their duties emerged as an important obstacle. In the survey, meanwhile, issues such as a 'lack of management skills', and 'assumptions by management that some jobs can't be made more interesting', were viewed as major obstacles by some of the survey respondents. However, by placing a large amount of the blame at the door of managers, this employer study illustrates the extent to which employers still have a predominantly 'top down' view of the workplace. Especially in the workshops, there seemed to be a sense that creating a Good Job was something that was done by managers and the organisational hierarchy to, rather than with employees. This underlines the extent to which there is still a way to go before the idea of co-production in the workplace between employer and employee could be achieved. Involving employees in processes such as job re-design, and giving them the space to innovate and take work autonomously, are not currently on the agenda despite the clear benefits of doing so.

There was also little evidence that many employers had experimented with Good Jobs in practice. There were a handful of organisations attending the workshops, that had experience of re-designing jobs, or de-layering their organisational structure in order to provide more autonomy for employees, but these were firmly a tiny minority. One such example, was an organisation that we later approached to be part of the consultancy intervention stage of the study, but was unfortunately unable to take part. Although our original contact there was keen to foster innovation and give autonomy to teams, and had discussed job re-design in the past, this idea eventually proved to be a sticking point with the HR steering group responsible for approving the intervention, and illustrates the extent to which giving autonomy to employees is viewed as risky by organisational management, worried about their ability to control the outcome.

What can we learn out how organisations are currently thinking and operating?

Much of the literature on the Good Jobs agenda suggests a link between creating Good Jobs and improving performance. However, this was not a message familiar to the organisations we studied. In the workshops, those organisations that commented

⁴⁷ M. Marmot, *Status Syndrome*, (2004)

on it, tended to see Good Jobs as being an agenda pulling in the opposite direction to financial performance, almost a distraction that could be accommodated in the good times, but not in the bad. However, this appears to have been predominantly a problem of terminology. When the relationship between organisational performance and the underlying issues that impact on staff motivation and retention, i.e. job quality factors, were explained to them, the stark either/or dichotomy disappeared and the participants seemed to see that the two agendas were necessarily intertwined rather than opposing.

One of the reasons why representatives from business might have trouble linking job quality to organisational performance, and certainly an important issue for the HSE and Government to bear in mind with articulating this agenda to business, is that our evidence suggests that organisations do not necessarily use the language of performance and 'the bottom-line' when discussing their objectives. Improving or maintaining customer experience was considered a much more key objective than meeting financial requirements by employers to the survey questionnaire, showing that organisations have a highly customer-centric view, where improving profit levels is not necessarily seen as a route to improving customer experience.

Various weightings given to the range of factors survey respondents viewed as being central to a definition of a Good Job is also important. 22 categories were created to encompass all the responses gathered to this open question in the survey, 11 of which were mentioned in over 10% of the responses. Therefore, whilst interesting work, autonomy, flexibility, good working conditions, pay and team working all featured in a significant number of responses, the ways that they were combined, and the other factors that joined them in some responses, illustrate the variety of ways in which individuals with an important input into HR or business strategy in organisations defined the term.

This level of nuance reflects the variety of organisational cultures across different sectors, sizes and locations of organisation. This sends a strong message that nuance is important in any Government action on this agenda, and that getting organisations to adopt Good Jobs in practice will require a much more segmented approach to communicating the Good Jobs message to them than has so far been adopted. Whilst the core epidemiological evidence gathered by Michael Marmot⁴⁸ and the World Health Organisation⁴⁹, for example, shows that there are core factors that have health outcome implications, communicating the importance of employee autonomy at first contact to a highly hierarchical organisation, will switch them off rather than engage them. Therefore, an adapted and segmented approach to organisations, depending on their organisational culture is important. Once an organisation has bought-in to the Good Jobs agenda, re-visiting issues such as employee autonomy are likely to be much easier. Dealing first with whatever presenting problem that an organisation has, and using this to get the organisation to understand why Good Jobs matter, is likely to be the most effective way of getting organisations to take action and embed the concepts associated with Good Jobs in its organisational culture.

How should Government discuss this agenda with organisations?

Another key issue for the HSE and Government to address is the way they articulate any type of support offered to organisations in the Good Jobs area. Our research shows encouragingly that a significant proportion, 41%, of employers asked in the survey, saw a role for external agencies to help them with the Good Jobs agenda.

⁴⁸ M Marmot, *Status Syndrome*, (2004)

⁴⁹ World Health Organisation, *Closing the gap in a generation*, (2008)

There was no significant difference between public and private responses to this question. However, this still means that a majority of the organisations surveyed did not see a role for external help. Evidence from the workshop programme seems to show that this lack of desire for external help sprang more from a lack of comprehension of how an external agency could help with what was perceived as an internal agenda, than as a judgement on quality of potential sources of help. However, the Government therefore needs to make the case for external involvement strongly, and the best way to do this would be to have a much more joined up approach to health and well-being at work. As our stakeholder interviews showed, some Government departments with remit over this area were much more engaged than others. However, to an external business audience, there are problems associated with Government initiatives lying within one area of Government alone. There is a danger that perceptions of what the department is interested in will tarnish how businesses receive offers of help. Support provided solely by the Health and Safety Executive, for example, runs the risk of being interpreted and potentially dismissed as being about safety at work and regulation, rather than the broader well-being agenda.

What should the Government do to support Good Jobs?

The Government recently released its response to the Carol Black Review, entitled *Working for a healthier tomorrow*⁵⁰, outlining a series of new initiatives to help raise the profile of the health and well-being agenda, and which included several strategies to support the improvement of factors in the workplace that have a significant impact on the ability of organisations to provide Good Jobs. We broadly welcome the Government's recommendations, but in this section will outline a series of additional approaches that should be considered based on our research findings, along with refinements we believe need be made to what the Government is proposing.

Our first message is that a two-part approach to improving the standard and number of Good Jobs provided by organisations needs to be adopted by the Government. From our research, it is clear that only those organisations engaged with the agenda are likely to identify that they have problems related to Good Jobs, and also welcome any interventions from external bodies. Therefore, the first job for Government is to sell the message of Good Jobs more convincingly. This needs to be achieved by using a language that organisations identify with, including emphasising that satisfied and engaged staff lead to improved customer experience, in addition to referring directly to the bottom-line. In her review of Health and Well-being at work, Carol Black suggested that a lack of information was the strongest barrier to increasing Good Jobs, and to help remedy this in addition to the proposals drawn up by the Government response, we suggest a further range of avenues should be pursued.

- Accountants are often a source of general advice and support for small organisations. Engaging accountancy bodies such as ICAS, ACCA and others, in the Good Jobs agenda, and through these bodies raising accountants' awareness of the various avenues of support available for small businesses struggling with Good Jobs related issues, would enable them to signpost sources of help to their small business clients. This would help ensure that businesses were aware of the sources of help available to them.
- A series of best practice case studies should be widely publicised to enable organisations to draw on the lessons of others that have already invested in

⁵⁰ <http://www.workingforhealth.gov.uk/documents/working-for-a-healthier-tomorrow-tagged.pdf>, [As accessed 29 Jan 2009].

the agenda. Provision of benchmarking was one of the key ways in which the employers we spoke to felt that Government could have a role, and learning from the mistakes of others was a key part of this. This could fall under the remit of the Government's proposed National Centre for Working-Age Health and Well-being.

- Encouraging business networking around Good Jobs, perhaps through existing business channels such as business link would also incentivise organisations to try initiatives that had been successful for others.

The Government should also build on the work of schemes such as Business in the Community⁵¹ and its own Health, Work and Well-being Programme⁵², to build up a detailed picture of the different segments of the business market, based on differences of organisational culture and attitudes to well-being. The market needs to be segmented further, to encompass differences such as size, levels of autonomy, bureaucracy and innovation. Building up an accurate picture of the different types of organisation will enable a much more targeted response to specific business problems.

It is here, therefore, that we see the need for the Government to supplement its proposals to introduce locally based champions of health and well-being, that will engage with business through regional development agencies, and administer funding for initiatives from a Good Work Challenge Fund, with champions hosted by different bodies that are not focused on 'place' but on specific sectors and sizes of organisation. This broader approach would reflect the many ways in which organisations can be segmented, the variety of ways in which they might identify themselves, and therefore maximise the number that feel that the information and support being offered by the champions is for them. Sector Skills Council might be one good host for sector-focused champions. In addition, we also propose that:

- The Government's Good Work Challenge Fund and any other similar initiative to provide funding for organisations to address health and well-being issues should not be too prescriptive in the types of initiative they will provide help with, as often organisations will present with one problem that they face, and end up with the realisation that this issue is being caused by some other underlying cause.
- Organisations should be encouraged to involve both management and employees in any process designed to address a business problem as is fitting with their own organisational culture, to ensure that the vision being followed by the organisation is embedded widely.
- Any organisations taking part in a scheme supported by the Government should be encouraged to feedback their lessons learned. Such information could be held by a best practice organisation, potentially incorporated within the proposed National Centre for Working-Age Health and Well-being, and this information could then be used to feedback into the information dissemination process designed to enable organisations to benchmark against each other.

⁵¹ <http://www.bitc.org.uk/marketplace/index.html>

⁵² <http://www.hse.gov.uk/hwwb/>

Contact Details

Prepared For:
David Riley

Health and Safety Executive
Rose Court
2 Southwark Bridge
London
SE1 9HS

David.HSE.Riley@hse.gsi.gov.uk

Prepared by:
Susannah Constable, David Coats, Stephen Bevan, Michelle Mahdon

The Work Foundation
Registered office: 21 Palmer Street, London, SW1H 0AD
Incorporated under Royal Charter, Registered Charity Number 290003
www.theworkfoundation.com

Tel: 0207 976 3622
sconstable@theworkfoundation.com

Good jobs

In a speech to celebrate the centenary of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2004, Gordon Brown, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, argued that the UK should aim for both 'full and fulfilling employment'. Implicit in this aspiration is the notion that just 'having a job' – regardless of its quality - is not sufficient. The objective must be to ensure that for as many people as possible, work in the UK is a source of well-being, personal growth, fulfilment, autonomy and meaning – in other words, that the jobs available in today's labour market should offer 'Good Work'. A significant weight of evidence supports the argument that job quality, employee health, and an employee's ability to perform productively at work, are closely linked. This evidence comes from a range of academic and professional disciplines. We have good epidemiological data to support the Good Jobs principle, we also have data from occupational health specialists, labour economists, educationalists and, Health and Safety specialists and HR/IR specialists. Even more encouragingly, there appears to be a broad consensus among these experts about the characteristics which define 'Good Jobs'. When we refer to 'job quality' in this report, this term should be defined as the extent to which the factors outlined below are in place a job role.

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