

# CIPD

*Championing better  
work and working lives*

SUMMARY | 2018

# UK Working Lives

In search of  
job quality



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 145,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

## Summary

# UK Working Lives

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# 1 Foreword

Work can, and should, be a force for good, for all. But what does good work look like?

As the professional body for HR and people development, we champion better work and working lives. The growing agenda around good work couldn't be more central to that purpose. Good work or job quality has been talked about over many years and was highlighted by Matthew Taylor in his review of *Modern Working Practices* (July 2017) as being a common goal for all forms of working.

Evidence shows that we are not utilising effectively the skills of our workforces, that we have underinvested in the workplace, and that the general quality of people management needs to improve. These are all drivers of slow productivity growth, together with the growing concerns about stress and well-being at work. In the context of the changing world of work – from advances in technology to more choice in where and how we work – and in a post-Brexit economy, how we create more good jobs has never been more important.

However, it's important to have an evidence-based understanding of what defines good work. We worked closely with academics and researchers, including the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University, to draw together research on good work and define seven dimensions that affect job quality, which have all been shown to be key drivers of productivity, well-being and engagement. Unsurprisingly, many of them are very human in nature, like having a good relationship with your line manager, or feeling part of a community.

That's why we've produced this comprehensive measure of job quality and the *UK Working Lives* survey 2018. This will be an annual survey, against which we can track progress and help inform the debate, in support of the UK Government's intention to raise awareness and understanding of good work across the economy.

While the overall findings suggest reasonable satisfaction with work and the jobs people do, there are significant underlying systemic issues which we need to address. There are clear concerns from workers in lower-skilled jobs, where over 40% don't see opportunities to develop their skills, and from middle and senior managers who feel stressed and overworked. This is a heady mix, with over-stressed managers passing that stress down, which impacts productivity. Our previous research shows that stress is already the biggest source of workplace absence.

We must find ways to work smarter and not just harder. Through policy and practice, we need to encourage more investment in skills, and provide support to businesses to help them understand and manage their people, their workplaces, and their organisations effectively.

We recognise the crucial role that people professionals, from HR to L&D, can and should play in this agenda. This report is as much about helping them to understand what good work looks like in their organisations and where they can have the biggest impact, as it is about understanding the dynamics of what work means in today's market.

The Taylor Review reminded us of the importance of better work for all as a key economic and social driver, and the Government has demonstrated their commitment to that agenda. We hope that the *UK Working Lives* survey will make an important and sustained contribution to improving job quality.



**Peter Cheese**  
Chief Executive  
CIPD



## 2 Introduction

A quality job. What's not to like? As workers we enjoy performing them. As employers we feel pride in creating them. As parents we wish our children to have one – especially if we feel we are not fortunate enough to have one ourselves. As a competitive nation we like the thought that we have more of them than our neighbours and economic competitors. (Indeed, in the globalised world we fear losing them to rivals.) Most of all there is nothing a politician adores more than announcing the creation of 'quality jobs':

*'The Business Secretary, Greg Clark, announced an industrial strategy to prepare Britain for Brexit, the pharmaceutical company Merck confirmed that 950 high-quality jobs would be supported by its new research facility in an investment thought to be worth about £700 million' (The Times, 27 November 2017).*

But what do we mean by 'quality' in this context? Language is important here. People care very much how their work is described. When considering the issue of working lives, the International Labour Organization refers to 'decent work'. The Taylor Report of 2017 refers to 'good work'. These days, who wants a job that isn't 'quality'? Especially when you consider what the opposite entails. The opposite is 'menial', perhaps even, in millennial language, 'basic'. Menial is dictionary-defined as, **1. (of work) not requiring much skill and lacking prestige, for example "menial factory jobs."** Its synonyms are: *unskilled, lowly, humble, low-grade, low-status, routine, humdrum, boring, dull.*

Who wants work that is described in any of these ways? But can a modern, developed economy comprise nothing but quality jobs? That may sound unrealistic, but it might be a worthy, humane and sensibly progressive thing to be aiming for. Gross domestic product, growth rates and productivity have long been ways of measuring the health of an economy. In recent years they have been added to by the Gini coefficient measures of inequality and even the global UN Happiness Index. Maybe an index of job quality is the next step forward. This is what the CIPD has set out to achieve in launching its *UK Working Lives 2018* report – the first comprehensive measure of job quality in the UK.

### What is a quality job?

To achieve quality jobs, you must be able to know one when you see one. So the ability to measure job quality is a vital step in improving the whole world of work – even better if you can measure quality over a period of time and observe improvements or otherwise. The CIPD's purpose is to champion better work and working lives – studying job quality is a vital part of this mission. So, this detailed and extensive survey of approximately 6,000 workers was carried out with YouGov between December 2017 and January 2018 using an online questionnaire.

*'To achieve quality jobs, you must be able to know one when you see one. So the ability to measure job quality is a vital step in improving the whole world of work...'*

The celebrated management writer Peter Drucker, said that 'what gets measured gets managed'. Drucker was far too subtle a thinker to believe that what cannot be measured isn't worth consideration. However, a combination of hard facts combined with the attitudes of those in employment towards their jobs can help build a useful picture. This report has identified seven distinct but interlinked criteria – the CIPD Job Quality Index – which can be used to measure overall job quality.



### **Subjective versus objective**

The first thing to note is that these dimensions are both objective and subjective. Pay and benefits are a key area that are objective. Few would say that a lower wage is intrinsically better than a higher salary. However, a full-time contract is not necessarily better for everyone than a non-standard or even ‘gig’ system of employment. Such factors’ desirability depends on an individual’s personal preferences, life stage or general situation. A student seeking to supplement a maintenance grant by delivering pizzas on a push bike has an entirely different outlook from an individual in her late 20s who is looking to settle down, buy a house or start a family, or a 72-year-old retiree eager to keep active and stimulated with ten hours of paid employment each week.

### **The world of work is changing rapidly all the time**

Things change in individuals’ lives, as they do across generations. To cut to the nub of a hotly contemporary example, does every Uber driver feel they are engaged in holding down ‘a quality job’? Commentators have much to say about Uber and the roles of their drivers – that they are exploited, dead-end, even menial positions. But a glance at the websites where Uber operatives discuss their lot reveals as many five-star reviews as single-star dismissals. (One only has to see the seriousness with which modern employers regard their evaluation on sites such as Glassdoor.)

### **Well-being is critical**

Much comes down to job satisfaction. It’s long been argued that an engaged, enthusiastic individual is likely to be more productive than someone who is so dissatisfied with their lot that they are always on the verge of quitting.

Having employment is in itself vital to people’s health and well-being, and the quality of the work people undertake is a major factor in helping them remain healthy and content. Worker well-being is the single biggest contributor to good work and job quality in the UK and elsewhere. (This works on a macro-economic level – in 2016, 15 million working days were lost because of stress, anxiety or depression.) So measurement becomes important for government as it seeks to form and institute policy in the labour market – a labour market that is set to change radically over the next two decades.

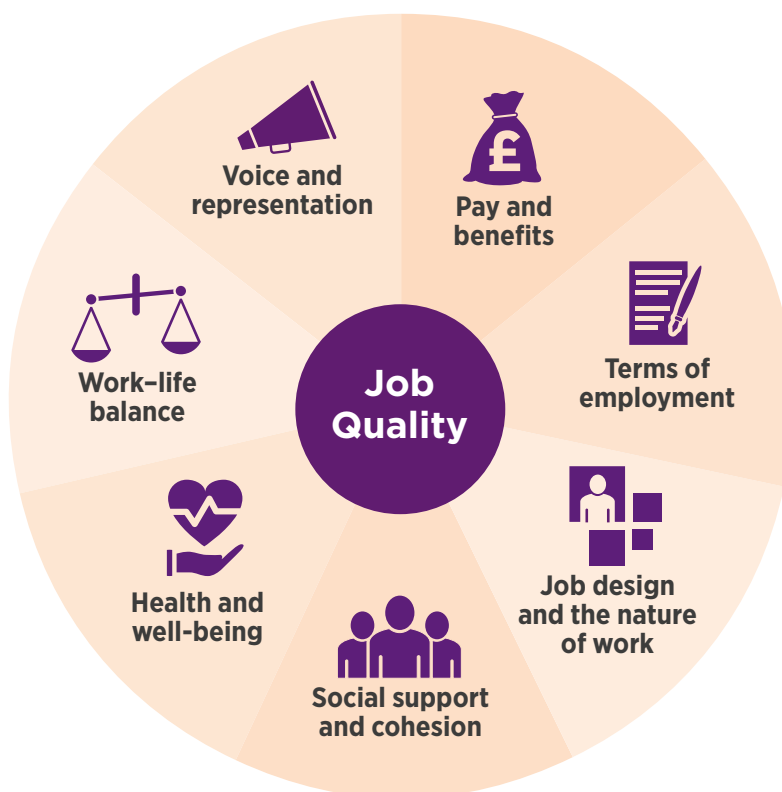
Two-thirds of workers (64%) are satisfied with their job overall (18% very satisfied and 46% satisfied), while just 18% are dissatisfied. On a day-to-day basis, just over half of workers (53%) say that they ‘always’ or ‘often’, feel enthusiastic about their jobs. And look what that does to discretionary effort – or engagement – as 55% say they are willing to work harder than necessary to help their employers or clients.

### 3 CIPD Job Quality Index

The Job Quality Index is made up of seven dimensions – pay and benefits; terms of employment; job design and the nature of work; social support and cohesion; health and well-being; work-life balance; and voice and representation.

We have taken the responses from our survey of 6,000 UK workers and applied them to each dimension – which covers a number of factors – to provide a picture of what job quality looks like in Britain today. What follows is a snapshot of the findings. You can find the full analysis in our main report: [cipd.co.uk/workinglives](http://cipd.co.uk/workinglives)

#### CIPD Job Quality Index



## Money

**We looked at:** pay, benefits and pensions

### One in four workers are on less than the Living Wage



The median gross pay across the survey respondents was £26,612.



One in four workers were in effect on less than the real Living Wage.



Almost half of workers (44%) think that their pay is 'appropriate' for what they do and 36% do not.

### 59% would work even if they didn't need the money

Jobs are central to our lives. But there is a non-monetary value. The survey shows that, overall, people place a positive intrinsic value on their jobs. Almost half of all workers (47%) do not think that 'a job is just a way of earning money'. More than half (59%) say that they would enjoy having a paid job even if they didn't need the money (only 21% disagree with this statement).

## Terms of employment

**We looked at:** contract type, job security and development opportunities

### There are still many 9-5ers with regular monthly payslips

Although a disproportionate amount of time is spent these days discussing the relatively new world of 'gig' employment and the issue of zero-hours contracts, neither is as commonplace as the noise would have you believe. There are still many 9-5ers with regular monthly payslips.

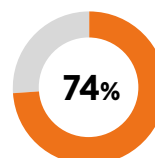
But age is an important differentiator. The youngest members of the workforce (18-24) are far more likely to have atypical contracts, and the oldest (65+ or 'retirees') are the most likely to enjoy a rainbow blend of self-employment or have temporary, zero-hours or short-hours contracts. Neither is an especial cause for alarm.



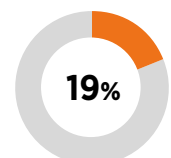
Only 2.7% of workers had taken part in the gig economy.



2.9% of workers are on zero-hours contracts.



74% of the respondents are in full-time or part-time permanent employment.



Just under a fifth (19%) are self-employed.

### Nearly half of all jobs fail to provide decent career development

The survey also looked at development opportunities across the UK workforce under 'terms of employment'. One of the most worrying aspects is that those typically worse off also have fewer opportunities to develop their skills and careers within their employment.



As such, there is a higher risk they remain stuck in poor quality jobs. Of course, some may prefer to do jobs in lower occupational groups, but as far as possible, the *opportunity* to develop and progress should be there.

Nearly half of all jobs fail to provide decent career development, with one in six workers – normally in the lower social grades – being in jobs that offer no way up or out. This does little to assuage the concerns of those worried about UK social mobility.

Neither does self-employment always resemble a land where the grass is greener. The development picture for the self-employed is highly polarised. Their jobs tend to be good at helping them develop skills but very poor at helping them advance their careers in different directions from the one they are currently in. They may have a wide range of skills they have developed that are necessary to run their business, but diversification into other types of work is tough. Self-employment can offer freedoms but it forms its own ruts.

## Job design and the nature of work

**We looked at:** workload, qualifications and skills, empowerment and meaningful work

### People feel overworked and overloaded

Overload is a key finding. This cannot be seen as anything other than a substantial problem. What's more, it is in the middle ranks that this problem is at its most acute. The middle manager is rarely seen as a heroic figure.

In popular culture, the middle manager is either a beast or a buffoon. As has been written in *Management Today*: *'From the lofty altitude of the C-suite, middle managers are seen as the barrier between the CEO's ingenious vision and its swift implementation by the noble worker.'*



Three in ten workers (30%) have workloads that are to some extent unmanageable.



One in twenty workers (6%) are swamped by what they do each day at work with 'far too much' work.

The research strongly suggests it is this middle layer where day-to-day deliverables cannot just be placed to one side if there are higher-level organisational and strategic concerns to busy oneself with. It's common for HR and senior leaders to lament the shortcomings of middle managers, but our data points to them having sometimes far too much to deal with.

## Social support and cohesion plus voice and representation



**We looked at:** relationships at work, psychological safety, people management and opportunities to have a voice at work



### 80% of employees rate their relationship with their managers positively

These aspects of job quality are important because they make the workplace more human, but also because they seem to contribute to other dimensions of job quality. The most important of these is social support and cohesion, which is strongly related to health and well-being and consistently related to key outcomes of job quality: day-to-day enthusiasm for the job, job satisfaction, work effort and intention to quit (negative relationship).



80% of employees rate their relationship with their manager positively.



91% of employees have good relationships with team colleagues.

### Employee voice is most positive in the private sector and least positive in the voluntary sector

Despite the emphasis placed on employee voice – both historically by employment relations scholars, and by internal communications professionals and advocates of employee engagement – we find that voice seems to be less important than the quality of the relationships with colleagues, one's boss and others. Loyalty, it seems, can also be silent. It is no surprise that satisfaction with employee voice decreases as the organisation size increases. Strikingly, the data shows clearly that the culture of employee voice is most positive in the private sector and least positive in the voluntary sector.

## Health and well-being

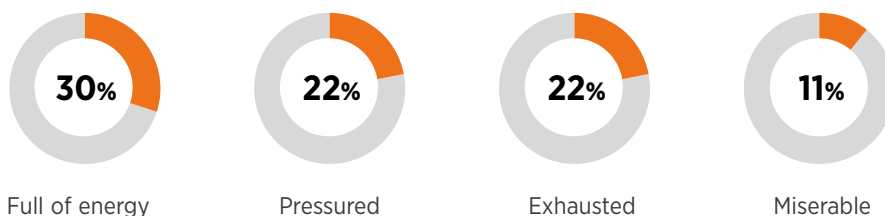
**We looked at:** positive and negative impacts of work on physical health

### Well-being is central to job quality

Well-being lies at the centre of job quality. And jobs can impact in both a negative or a positive way on our sense of well-being. Overall, the report shows a slightly positive impact from work on people’s mental health (44% positive, 25% negative) and an even spread of views of how work affects people’s physical health (33% positive, 27% negative).

On the plus side there is further positive news about work’s positive aspects.

More people feel ‘full of energy’ at work (30% ‘always’ or ‘often’) than ‘under excessive pressure’ (22%) or exhausted (22%). One in ten (11%) report regularly feeling miserable.



While only a small minority regularly feel miserable at work, it does indicate a serious problem for these people. Many jobs have occasional points of pressure that people, by and large, cope with well. It is the relentless pressure that does the damage and it is the middle managers suffering the most in this respect.

## Work-life balance

**We looked at:** overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal time and visa versa, and the provision for flexible working

The erosion of the boundary between work and personal life, in particular due to mobile and social technology, is hardly news in 2017. The ‘always on’ culture has been much-commented on. In France they have even tried to ban emails being sent to staff after they’ve clocked off for the night or are on holiday.



Working too much remains a far more common problem than not having enough work.

## 4 How can employers improve job quality?

### UK worker trends: The Stuck, Squeezed and Satisfied

We have identified a number of common trends and themes in the approximately 6,000 responses to our survey that point to three types of worker – the Stuck, the Squeezed and the Satisfied.

These worker ‘types’ provide us with a more detailed picture of how employees in particular jobs/social grades (National Readership Survey – NRS) experience work and what employers can do to improve job quality for everyone. (The worker types don’t represent everyone we interviewed, nor do they correspond with every worker in the NRS grade they relate to.)

#### The Stuck worker

- Low skilled and casual workers (NRS grades D and E)
- Have the qualifications to do the job – and in some instances over-qualified to do the role
- Under-developed and under-employed – which is impacting on people’s progression
- Lack of access to flexible working

#### The headlines: a snapshot

- **Even if you’re stuck it doesn’t mean you are unhappy** – 59% of low skilled and casual workers still remain satisfied with their current jobs.
- **But you are far less likely to have training and development opportunities** – which, arguably, means remaining trapped in a role due to a lack of opportunity. Just 35% of low skilled and casual workers agree that their job offers them good opportunities to develop their skills, compared with 50% of workers in other social grades. One in three (32%) of low skilled and casual workers have not received any training in the last twelve months, compared with one in four (24%) overall.
- **And you don’t get as much time with your line manager as some of your co-workers** – less than half of low skilled and casual workers have had a one-to-one meeting with their line managers in the last year.
- **Flexible working doesn’t appear to be an option for most** – only 11% of low skilled and casual workers have worked from home in the last twelve months compared with 42% of workers in other social grades.

#### Improving job quality for the Stuck worker

The challenge	Employers can...	CIPD resources
<b>Better career progression</b>	1 <b>Introduce career conversation training</b> with line managers.	<b>Factsheets</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Talent management</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Coaching and mentoring</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Performance management</a></li> </ul> <b>Short courses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Progressive talent strategies</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Introduction to coaching</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Creating a coaching culture</a></li> </ul>
	2 <b>Provide learning and development opportunities</b> such as concentrated on-the-job training and coaching.	
	3 <b>Offer clear pathways for progression</b> such as apprenticeships and mentoring schemes.	
	4 <b>Recognition schemes for good work</b>	
	5 <b>Provide clear role descriptions</b> that allow for workers to add further value by utilising additional skills they have.	
	6 <b>Provide opportunities for workers to have a voice</b> in when, what and how work is done.	



<b>A voice at work</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1 Develop inclusive mechanisms</b> that take into account the diverse needs of the workforce, to ensure that all workers have a meaningful voice.</li> <li><b>2 Ensure that an individual’s voice is captured effectively</b> by responding to issues raised and communicating the reasons behind organisational decisions.</li> <li><b>3 Ensure managers understand the importance of communicating and listening</b>, and have the necessary skills to enter into dialogue with workers.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Factsheets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Employee voice</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Employee communication</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Employee relations</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Diversity and inclusion in the workplace</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Employee engagement and motivation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Workforce planning</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Short courses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Developing an employee engagement strategy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Managing diversity and inclusion</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Employee relations and the law</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Leveraging HR analytics and data</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Reports</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Have your say: alternative forms of workplace voice</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Social media and employee voice: the current landscape</a></li> </ul>
<b>Access to flexible working</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1 Adopt a clear approach to flexible working</b>, creating a wider enabling culture where workers feel trusted and empowered to take ownership of their work.</li> <li><b>2 Asses how supportive organisational process is to flexible working</b>, such as performance measurement and management, recruitment and job design.</li> <li><b>3 Ensure all roles offered are subject to flexible working.</b></li> </ol>	<p><b>Factsheets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Flexible working practices</a></li> </ul>

## The Squeezed middle manager

- Middle-management and mid level professionals (NRS grade B)
- High levels of job satisfaction
- Under the most pressure at work, with excessive workloads
- Most likely to need support with mental health

### The headlines: a snapshot

- **Even if you’re squeezed you’re satisfied with your job** – 65% of middle managers say that they are satisfied with work.
- **But you are likely to feel overloaded or under excessive pressure** – 31% and 23% (nearly one in four) respectively of middle managers and mid-level professionals agreed with these statements.
- **And you are most concerned about mental health** with 28% of middle managers and mid-level professionals saying that their work negatively affects their mental health (40% positive).

### Improving job quality for the Squeezed worker

The challenge	Employers can...	CIPD resources
<b>Reducing excessive workload and pressure</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1 Review job design.</b> Providing meaningful work and development opportunities helps workers feel engaged and satisfied at work which can contribute to positive mental health.</li> <li><b>2 Increase the provision of flexible working:</b> Employers should monitor workloads and deadlines to ensure people aren’t feeling under excessive pressure at work.</li> <li><b>3 Conduct a stress audit</b> and direct resources to reduce or eliminate the sources of stress at work.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Factsheets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Job design</a> and <a href="#">organisation design</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Flexible Working Practices</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Short courses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Maternity and family leave: rights and the law</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">developing an employee engagement strategy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">organisational development for HR leaders</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Webinar</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Family friendly rights</a></li> </ul>

**Improving mental health and wellbeing**

- 1 **Promote good mental health to the whole workforce** as well as providing support when an issue emerges.
- 2 **Promote mental health policies clearly at the recruitment stage** and demonstrate willingness to make reasonable adjustments for applicants.
- 3 **Develop line managers' people management skills** through training. Good line management can help manage and prevent stress which can be linked to poor mental health. Managers should be able to provide clear objectives, feedback and support to staff and proactively manage conflict when it occurs which can help to create positive working environments which foster employee well-being and resilience.
- 4 **Spot the early signs of mental health issues.** Employers and managers should be alert to early signs of mental ill health, have confidence to have sensitive conversations and have clear support pathways in place.
- 5 **Signpost support services** to all staff and **consider offering an employer-funded support programme**, such as counselling.
- 6 **Sign up to Time to Change**

**Factsheets**

- [Mental health in the workplace](#)
- [Occupational health](#)
- [Stress in the workplace](#)
- [Management development](#)

**Short courses**

- [Building resilience](#)
- [Developing personal effectiveness](#)
- [Re-energise your management](#)

**Articles**

- [Raising our game on work, health and disability](#)



**The Satisfied senior leader**

- Senior leaders and managers (NRS grade A)
- Well paid and appropriately paid
- High levels of job satisfaction
- Great access to flexible working, but failing to use it

**The headlines: a snapshot**

- **Highly satisfied with work** – say 72% of senior leaders and managers
- **Most likely to associate work with good mental health and well-being** – 51% of senior leaders and managers enjoy the quality of their job and say that it has a positive effect on their mental health (with 22% saying it has a negative effect). They are also less likely to feel exhausted or bored at work compared with others
- **But work-life balance is likely to be out of kilter** – 28% of senior leaders and managers admit that they find it difficult outside of work to fulfil personal commitments and 29% say they find it difficult to fulfil personal commitments because of the amount of time they spend at work

**Improving job quality for the Satisfied worker**

The challenge	Employers can...	CIPD resources
<b>Work-life balance</b>	1. <b>Support senior leaders</b> to adopt flexible working arrangements in order to role model approaches, and ultimately impact on attitudes and a culture of work life balance across the organisation.	<p><b>Factsheets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Working hours and time off work</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Leadership in the workplace</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Short courses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The psychology of managing performance management</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Recruitment, selection and resourcing talent</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">HRBP programme</a></li> </ul>



## 5 Conclusions

In the UK we've long held nuanced attitudes towards work and the role it plays in our lives. Brits were behind two of the more sceptical mantras of modern times: 'I work to live, I don't live to work', and 'Nobody ever says on their deathbed they wish they'd spent more time in the office.'

And yet when you actually do some close research and ask pertinent questions, as this report does, a more encouraging picture emerges. Job quality in the UK is generally good. But it gets worse – as one might expect – the lower down the workforce you are in terms of occupational group.

### **Regrets? Some have had a few**

The relationship between work, contentment and well-being is complex. Work takes up more waking hours than any other activity. Most of us would probably work whether we needed the money or not. What else would we get up to? And it's probably true that there are plenty who might even spend more time at work if they were being more honest. Many individuals get more out of work than other aspects of their lives despite it being not socially acceptable to say so. However, few come out and pronounce that they've found work that is interesting enough for them to want to spend more time in the office.

A survey of retired people once posed the question: 'What do you most regret in your life?' Four out of five retirees picked the response, 'Staying in a job I did not like' – the missed opportunity of the jobs that got away. Not all of us are sufficiently fortunate to choose what we do for a living.

This research puts some flesh on the bare bones of the impressive employment numbers the UK has enjoyed since the global financial crisis. There has been much talk of most of the jobs created since 2008 being of poor quality. Talk of ‘hollowing out’ of the middle has been frequent, although actual evidence on whether this is happening is mixed at best. There has been a sense that many newly created positions are Sports Direct or Amazon warehouse type employment – high intensity, poorly paid and insecure. The UK has a strong record in job creation. For a nation that often appears to take pleasure in putting itself down, it is important to note that there are many clear positives about the current state of the working nation.

### **Brit ‘exceptionalism’**

One of the things that surprised many in the Taylor Report was its confidence, pride even, in the British way of doing things on the employment front. There was even a mild sense of Brit exceptionalism.

While it may be true that up until this year take-home pay rates have stagnated for many workers, when tax levels and tax credits are taken into account, the average take-home pay for families who have a member in full-time employment – which is still the vast majority of UK jobs – is higher in the UK than the rest of the G7.

But there is no cause for complacency. Brexit brings in a host of unknowns when it comes to the world of work in the UK – no nation has tried it before. UK Working Lives 2018 shows that 15% of the UK workforce are underemployed and one in six is underdeveloped. The research even shows that one in ten people say that they often feel ‘miserable’ at work. The lack of access to training found by the research is alarming. The world of work is changing rapidly, with technology being a major driver. The digital revolution has been upon us for more than a decade.

### **Digital intensity**

The Brookings Institution in the United States recently looked at 14 million ‘good or quality jobs’ in the US and found that their ‘digital score – based on the knowledge, skills and tools needed to fulfil those roles – had risen from 29 to 50 between 2002 and 2016, out of a possible score of 100, for the most ‘digitally intense’ occupations. This shows quite plainly basic digital skills are now a prerequisite for positions – mechanic, nurse, builder – that traditionally open the door to advancement for the two-thirds of Americans who lack a college degree.

It is the responsibility of good organisations and their managers to be aware of what is coming down the line and adapt accordingly. Better quality and more frequent career conversations on the building site or in the office are vital.

Skill shortages occur when a country pays insufficient attention to quality jobs. If change is coming, the role of line managers in developing people’s skills through training is critical. Three-quarters of HR professionals tell us that they have difficulties recruiting and nearly two-thirds (65%) agree that the skills needed for jobs in their organisation are changing. So it’s essential that apprenticeships, for example, can lead to high-skilled, high-paid jobs that are competitive in the twenty-first century, but the UK also needs a sustained focus on lifelong learning beyond the age of 25.

### **Skills are vital**

It is now 14 years since the then chancellor Gordon Brown commissioned Lord [Sandy] Leitch to conduct a review of skills and make recommendations for turning Britain into ‘a world leader in skills’. In his final report Leitch put it well: *‘In the twenty-first century, our*



*natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast,’ he wrote. ‘Skills will unlock that potential. The prize will be enormous – higher productivity, the creation of wealth and social justice. The alternative? Without increased skills, we would condemn ourselves to a lingering decline in competitiveness, diminishing economic growth and a bleaker future for all.’* An important part of job quality is skills – creating them, developing them, improving them. This CIPD *UK Working Lives* report would have helped Leitch in his quest for change.

To do something about this enduring problem requires being able to measure the extent of the problem. To this end the CIPD *UK Working Lives* Job Quality Index is an important attempt to work out where we stand. External economic and societal change factors will always have huge effects that shape our labour market. However, employers have a major role to play in improving outcomes for workers through good practice. In a civilised world work should provide us all with the opportunity to fulfil our own needs and potential in ways that suit our situations when we enter the workforce to the point where we choose, finally, to leave it. Because unless you know where you are, you cannot work out where to go or how to get there.

If we want happiness, the solution lies not only in GDP growth or nuclear families. It also lies in meaningful work for us all through quality employment. When he was writing about jobs in the 1970s, the American author Studs Terkel said work is *‘about a search ... for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.’* In the intervening 50 years the landscape of work in the West has changed. But that personal individual search for fulfilment has not.

## 6 About the research

### Seven dimensions of job quality

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

Source: based on Warhurst et al (2017) and Wright et al (2018)

The survey was carried out by YouGov using its UK panel of approximately 350,000 adults in work, being run from December 2017 to January 2018 using an online questionnaire. A targeted sample of approximately 6,000 workers were surveyed. The quota used and

subsequent weighting give a sample that is representative, *based upon the latest ONS figures, of the UK workforce in terms of their gender, full- or part-time work status, organisation size within each sector, and industry.*

For the purpose of representing the data, the group definitions used throughout are as follows:

- Senior managers refers to those in NRS social grade A, in higher managerial, administrative and professional jobs.
- Middle management refers to those in NRS grade B, in intermediate managerial, administrative and professional jobs.
- Unskilled and casual workers refers to those in NRS grades D and E, including semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and casual and lowest grade workers.

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### Matthew Gwyther

Matthew edited *Management Today* for 17 years and during that time won the coveted BSME Business Magazine Editor of the year on five occasions. During a fifteen year career as a freelance he wrote for the *Sunday Times* magazine, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *The Observer*, *GQ* and was a contributing editor to *Business* magazine. He was PPA Business Feature Writer of the Year in 2001. He has also worked on two drama serials one for Channel 4 and one for the BBC. Before becoming a journalist he had a brief spell as a civil servant working at the Medical Research Council in its London Secretariat.

Matthew is the main presenter on BBC Radio 4's In Business programme.

Matthew is also the co-author of *Exposure*, published by Penguin in London and New York in the Autumn of 2012.



# CIPD

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

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