

Urgent action needed on UK job quality as new research suggests people are less engaged, less fulfilled and more stressed in their working life

2 years ago



New research from the CIPD exploring the quality of UK working lives has been released today, suggesting there has been a negative shift in how people think about and value their work.

The CIPD's Good Work Index 2023 finds that most people like their work and find it satisfying. However, as many as 6-9 million workers*, experience poor-quality work in some major respects. CIPD's survey indicators show that there has been no significant improvement in job quality in the past four years and, in some respects, job quality has gone backwards. Compared to 2019, workers today are less enthused about work, less likely to perceive their work as useful and more likely to simply see work as purely transactional – simply for the money.

In response to this shift, the CIPD is calling on businesses and the Government to renew their focus on good work and improving job quality, citing the significant lack of progress on this agenda since the Government's Good Work Plan was published in 2019.

Jake Young, research associate at the CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development, comments:

"Despite the upheaval of recent years, most UK workers remain broadly positive about their jobs. However, there's a mixed experience of job quality, especially between private sector and public sector roles, and as

many as nine million people stand to have poor quality work in some key respects. Not all jobs can be transformed, but significant improvements in areas such as training, development, and people management should be possible.

“Our data suggests a slow slide into mediocrity, away from enriching and rewarding jobs and towards roles where many people are demotivated, lack commitment and are less productive. Work can and should be good for us. It’s vital that the Government and employers renew their commitment to good work as it’s fundamental to supporting individual wellbeing, fair society, productive organisations and a strong economy.”

The CIPD surveyed 5000 UK workers across seven key dimensions of good work: pay and benefits, contracts, work-life balance, job design and nature of work, relationships at work, employee voice, and health and wellbeing. From the results, the CIPD has identified three key areas that Government and employers must address to support better working lives:

A renewed policy focus on ‘good work’ and improving job quality is needed:

- Overall, workers are more likely to think that work is purely transactional, just for the pay, compared to four years ago (43% in 2023, compared to 36% in 2019).
- Workers are less likely to work harder than needed to help their employer, falling from 57% in 2019 to 51% in 2023, marking a shift in willingness to put in discretionary effort.
- Most people have a good experience of work but the number of people who feel enthusiastic about their job ‘always or often’ has fallen from 54% in 2019 to 49% in 2023. A third of people sometimes feel bored at work (33%), 26% sometimes feel miserable, and 21% sometimes feel lonely.

The gap between the quality of working life in the public sector versus the private sector must be narrowed to address current challenges and attract future workers:

- Many public sector workers don’t feel their pay reflects the responsibilities of the job (45% compared to 32% in the private sector) and are much more likely to ‘strongly disagree that pay reflects responsibilities’ (17% vs 8% in the private sector).
- Public sector workers are more likely to report that work has a negative impact on their mental health than private sector workers (35% vs 25%).
- Workload in a normal week is a big issue, with 42% of public sector workers thinking it is either ‘too much or far too much’ compared to 29% in the private sector.

We must make work more flexible and more attractive if there is to be a sustainable solution to major labour supply challenges:

- In the continued cost-of-living crisis, better pay and benefits are a key motive behind people moving jobs (34%), followed by better job satisfaction (27%), a better work-life balance (23%) and people wanting to do a different type of work (22%).

- While most people have a reasonable work-life balance, a quarter of workers (25%), said they found it difficult to meet commitments in their personal life because of the time they spend at work, with carers struggling the most. Flexible working and flexitime are accessible to many workers (49% and 37% respectively) but many respondents said that flexible working wasn't possible at their workplace: 44% can't access homeworking, 46% can't access flexitime and 47% can't reduce their hours to become part-time.

The report concludes with a number of practical recommendations to improve job quality, including:

For policy-makers

- Revamp the labour market enforcement system to improve the protection of workers' rights and help raise employment standards across the economy.
- Improve the quality of careers information and guidance to help workers at all stages make better-informed choices on training, qualifications and careers.

And for employers:

- Improve access to flexible working options and financial wellbeing support.
- Identify and manage skills mismatches to engage, satisfy and develop staff.

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