



Understanding employer delivery of good work in the UK ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship

The University of Warwick and the Living Wage Foundation

[Full details of the academic content of the studentship - Understanding employer delivery of good work in the UK](#)

To be co-supervised by Professor Chris Warhurst and Sally Wright from the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick in collaboration with the Living Wage Foundation. The liaison at the Foundation is John Hood.

Background to the research project

The Industrial Strategy (HM Government 2017) commits the UK Government to creating more good work as a national socio-economic imperative, including to raise the UK's poor levels of productivity. Currently 5.5m UK workers are paid less than the real living wage. There is also increasing concern about the impact of rising precarious work on in-work poverty. There are 1.8m zero-hours contracts in the economy (ONS 2018a) and 3.4m people under-employed (working fewer hours than they would like) (ONS 2018b). An estimated 3.2m people have working-hours insecurity.

These problems are concentrated in three industries – wholesale and retail; accommodation and food services; and health and social work. These industries comprise a third of all jobs but over half of all workers paid less than the real Living Wage (D'Arcy 2018). They are also associated with insecurity and underemployment. Almost a quarter of accommodation and food services employees are on zero-hours contracts, with high levels of precarious work also found in health and social care, and retail. These industries account for a significant proportion of the UK's productivity gap with key competitor countries (CBI 2014), suggesting that this situation is bad for the economy, as well as individual workers and their families. Generating good work in these industries could therefore address UK productivity performance problems (Forth and Aznar 2018). Ultimately, it is employers who provide jobs, whether good or bad (Findlay et al. 2017). As Warhurst and Luchinskaya (2018) argue, it is the choices of employers (or managers as employers in loco) that therefore matter, and better understanding of the factors that underpin choices to offer good work, rather than poor work, is required.

Research questions

1. What factors influence the provision of good work by firms in industries that typically offer low wages and high insecurity?
2. What relationship exists between this good work and firm performance?
3. What business lessons do these firms offer to other firms in these industries?
4. What policy pointers do these firms offer for government policy on productivity and good work?

Methodology and techniques to be employed

The research design is mixed method, using and generating quantitative and qualitative data. Beyond any required doctoral training, there are three stages to the study:

Stage 1: Reviews of the three industries signalled above based on academic and grey literatures, official statistical data and data from key actor interviews. The aim will be to understand key trends and developments in job quality.

Stage 2: A deep dive into these industries with a purposive sample of employers who are Living Wage Accredited and therefore providing good work. With Living Wage Foundation access support, two case studies in each industry will be selected.

Stage 3: Comparative analysis across the industries and case studies to identify common drivers, enablers and deliverers of selected good work measures.

The student will be engaged in research that seeks to better understand good work in low wage industries, aligning this research with the work of the Living Wage Foundation. As part of the project the student will undertake monthly placements at the Foundation. As part of the monthly placements, the student will convert the three academic industry reviews into user-friendly reports for the Living Wage Foundation. In addition, and also emerging from the research, the student will produce briefing papers on specific low pay industries and international debates around the promotion of good work. There will also be final user-friendly report from the study with recommendations for developing business models that deliver good work. The student will have office/desk space in the Living Wage Foundation during his/her monthly visits and, wherever practicable and as part of his/her professional development, the student will also participate in Living Wage Foundation networking and dissemination events not related to the study and which involve practitioners, policymakers and other civic organisations relevant to the field.

Applicants must have a minimum of a good undergraduate degree (2.1 or higher) in a social sciences discipline and we welcome applicants with a higher degree in a relevant discipline. Applicants should have an interest in the study of inequalities in work and employment and evidence of previous relevant/applicable research methods training and experience, including qualitative research would also be welcome. The applicant must be prepared for regular travel to the Living Wage Foundation in London as part of the research project.¹

About the Institute for Employment Research

The University of Warwick is one of the UK's top 10 universities by research, a member of the Russell Group, and has an acknowledged reputation for its links with business and government. Within the University, the Institute for Employment Research (IER) is a department in the Faculty of Social Sciences. It is a research-only institute.

IER is one of Europe's leading centres for research in the following areas: labour markets, skills; work and welfare; careers; technology and work; gender and work; higher and vocational education; and job quality research. It is concerned principally with the development of scientific knowledge about the socioeconomic system. It provides inter-disciplinary and multi-method research intended to have impact with policymakers and practitioners.

¹Return rail travel expenses will be covered as part of the studentship.