

Monitoring UK job quality – developing a new approach Summary of ReWAGE’s feasibility study

In the Good Work Plan (2018) the UK government committed to a wide range of policy and legislative changes to ensure that workers can access fair and decent work, that both employers and workers have the clarity they need to understand their employment relationships, and that the enforcement system is fair and fit for purpose.

But how can the quality of jobs be measured consistently across roles, sectors and geographical areas in a way that will enable the government to demonstrate the impact of its Good Work Plan?

A ReWAGE sub-group was convened to conduct a feasibility study into whether there are ways in which job quality can be measured using some of the information already available in large-scale national data sources such as the Annual Population Survey and the Census of Population.

The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017) defined good work as ‘work that is fair and decent, with realistic scope for development and fulfilment’.

Job quality is important for both individuals and organisations and research reveals:

- there is a strong link between the nature of work, the existence of social support and workers having voice and representation in the workplace and higher productivity;
- that jobs characterised by high demands, low control over decision-making, and job insecurity are as bad for worker well-being as unemployment; and
- that good job quality can also boost firms’ capacity to be innovative which can increase competitiveness (QulnnE research project <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/quinne/>)

When trying to measure job quality, a useful place to start is the recognised **Seven Dimensions of Job Quality**, along with 18 sub-elements within these dimensions. These dimensions emerged out of a review of existing research undertaken for the UK’s CIPD. Recommended for use by the UK Government, they have the support in the UK of employers, trade unions and civil society organisations and were developed with the participation of the UK’s Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The Seven Dimensions of Job Quality:



However, as measurement of these seven dimensions of job quality requires a significant amount of information that is not readily available, ReWAGE convened a sub-group, sponsored by Warwick University's Policy Support Fund, to conduct a feasibility study into whether there are ways in which job quality can be measured using some of the information already available in large-scale national data sources such as the Annual Population Survey and the Census of Population.

The sub-group set out to see if it could identify a set of variables within available data sources that could act as proxy measures for the seven dimensions of job quality, and to consider the possibility of aggregating these into a single broad indicator.

Data from four annual surveys conducted by the CIPD (*UK Working Lives Surveys*) provided information on occupation, sector, employment status, organisation size and type of employment contract. Statistical analysis of these data was undertaken, which demonstrated that these variables could approximate the dimensions of job quality. Examples of what the analysis was able to show include:

- Sectors – in the presence of a large set of variables representing 175 occupation unit groups, further information about the sector in which a job is held is also important in helping to measure job quality, particularly for the identification of high-quality jobs.
- Organisation size – smaller organisations score better in terms of work-life balance and social support but fare less well on terms of employment, and health and wellbeing. Larger organisations score more highly on pay and benefits.
- Work sectors – public sector workers report higher quality scores on the dimensions of pay and benefits, terms of employment and voice.

Review and recommendations

Overall, the study revealed that it is feasible to use proxy measures available on large-scale data sources to develop broad indicators of job quality. This approach will be particularly useful for measuring differences in job quality between relatively small geographical areas and demographic groups and helping central and devolved government to improve job quality.

However, the statistical analysis undertaken in this feasibility study needs to be replicated using survey data sources that can provide more detail for small occupation unit groups, based upon survey methods that systematically represent the entire working population.

Recommendations include:

- Reducing the number of questions used to produce each of the seven indicators of job quality to create a manageable set that could be implemented on another data source such as the UK Labour Force Survey, to provide a sample representative of the working population.
- Using detailed statistical analysis of the responses obtained from this larger data source to create a mapping matrix from the selected proxy variables to the seven dimensions of job quality.
- Using the resulting job quality indicators to give a broad indication of job quality as being 'below average', 'average' or 'above average'.

The full version of the feasibility study is available on the ReWAGE website:

<https://bit.ly/3P59yGX>

About the authors

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- This summary represents the views of the authors based on the available research. It is not intended to represent the views of all ReWAGE members:
<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/rewage/rewageexperts/>

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About ReWAGE

- ReWAGE is an independent expert advisory group modelled on SAGE, which supports government's strategic response to the recovery and renewal of work and employment in the UK as it tackles the impact of Covid-19.
- Its recommendations cover: the maintenance and creation of jobs, improving the quality of jobs, ensuring that the workforce has the right skills to access those jobs, and access to training and jobs is available to all. Its scope covers employers, employees and the self-employed.
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