



# What is a good job?



## Analysis of the British 2012 Skills and Employment Survey – Summary



## About the What Works Centre for Wellbeing

We are an independent organisation set up to produce robust, relevant and accessible evidence on wellbeing. We work with individuals, communities, businesses and government, to enable them to use this evidence make decisions and take action to improve wellbeing.

The Centre is supported by the ESRC and partners to produce evidence on wellbeing in four areas: work and learning; culture and sport; community; and cross-cutting capabilities in definitions, evaluation, determinants and effects.

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## WHAT IS A GOOD JOB?

### Key messages

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- i) *Workers with better wellbeing, better work-life balance and more positive attitudes to work are in jobs characterised by high work involvement, skill use, training and development opportunities, team working, information sharing, regular performance appraisals and job security.*

*Although workers with such jobs appear to experience more demands at work than other workers, it appears the positive features of their work offset higher work demands. It does not seem to matter whether workers receive performance-related pay or not.*

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- ii) *These high quality jobs tend to be associated with managerial, professional, associate professional and technical work.*

*However, we find evidence that all occupational types can experience high work involvement, skill use, training and development opportunities, team working, information sharing, and receive regular performance appraisals. It may be possible to create or develop high quality jobs for many occupations.*

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- iii) *We noticed differences within groups and across the country:*

*There are regional differences between the proportion of workers experiencing higher quality and lower quality work.*

*Younger and older workers tend to experience lower quality work.*

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- iv) *High quality jobs are characterised not just by how work and tasks are designed (through for example involvement in decisions and using skills), high quality jobs are also characterised by supporting employment practices such as secure employment contracts, training and development opportunities and good performance management.*

*Therefore, those seeking to develop high quality jobs need to look at a range of work and employment practices together.*

## Background

In the workplace, wellbeing consists of a person's assessments of satisfaction with their work or job, positive feelings about work (e.g. motivation) and the relative absence of unpleasant feelings about work (e.g., lack of anxiety or worry about work). Wellbeing also implies a sense of purpose, feeling in control of one's life, personal growth, positive relations with others and self-esteem.

There is considerable evidence that work units that have high levels of wellbeing also have high levels of productivity.<sup>1</sup> The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reports that 9.9 million working days were lost to absence caused by stress, anxiety and depression in 2014/15 in the UK, and that stress, anxiety and depression accounted for 43% of all working days lost due to ill health.<sup>2</sup>

In consultations with a range of stakeholders, including business leaders, trades union officials, employment relations and occupational health practitioners and experts, as well as members of the public, we at the Work and Learning Programme of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing found that there was a consistent message across all stakeholders that high quality work is important for wellbeing.

High quality work is characterised by features such as:

- input into decisions that affect how, when and what work is accomplished;
- reasonable work demands and working hours;
- clear role descriptions;
- use of skills;
- variety in tasks;
- support from co-workers and a positive relationship with line manager;
- job security.

We found that high quality work is more likely to improve worker wellbeing<sup>3</sup> if introduced alongside things like:

- training and development opportunities for workers and their managers;
- improved communications;
- improvements to performance management and rewards systems.

High quality work has many features. To help our understanding of high quality work, we asked whether it was possible to identify a small number of categories or types of jobs that could summarise relationships between work and employment practices that make up 'good' (or 'bad') jobs for wellbeing. Put differently, we were interested in the whether work and employment factors that are related to wellbeing tend to cluster together or occur together. This kind of cluster analysis is used in many areas to identify people or things that are similar – such as in market research to identify people with similar tastes or shopping habits.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bryson, A., Forth, J., & Stokes, L. (2014). *Does Worker Well-being Affect Workplace Performance?* Department of Business Innovation and Skills.

Whitman, D.S., Van Rooy, D.L., & Viswesvaran, C. (2010). Satisfaction, citizenship behaviors, and performance in work units: A meta-analysis of collective construct relations. *Personnel Psychology*, 63, 41-81.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> See Daniels, K., Gedikli, C., Watson, D., Semkina, A., Vaughn, O. (in press). Job design, employment practices and well-being: A systematic review of intervention studies. *Ergonomics*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00140139.2017.1303085>

<sup>4</sup> Sarstedt, M., & Mooi, E. (2014). *A concise guide to market research: the process, data, and methods using IBM SPSS statistics*. Springer.

This cluster analysis makes it possible for high-level analysis of these categories - we were also interested in whether such categories are different in terms of the wellbeing of workers in each category, and whether there are differences between categories in terms of factors such as gender, age, occupation, sector and region in the UK. If there are notable patterns in the analyses, then there is a basis for more detailed investigation.

We conducted an analysis of British 2012 Skills and Employment Survey.<sup>5</sup> This is a survey of workers' skills, employment experiences and wellbeing. In total, some 3200 workers completed the survey from across Great Britain.

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<sup>5</sup> A full technical report of the findings is available from [www.whatworkswellbeing.org](http://www.whatworkswellbeing.org).

## Findings

### Job types

Using this clustering, we found evidence for five categories of jobs. These are:

- i) **Jobs with low work involvement, low demands and low performance management.**  
Workers with jobs in this category have little input into decisions that affect their work, low skill use, few training and development opportunities, and low levels of team working and information sharing. They also have low job security, do not receive performance-related pay and tend not to have much in the way of performance appraisal.

**For short, we refer to these jobs as NONOs (NOt COnulted, NOt much else)**

- ii) **Jobs with low work involvement, moderate demands and performance management.**  
Workers with jobs in this category also have little input into decisions, low skill use and low job security. Jobs in this category are characterised by moderate scores on job demands, information sharing and team working, performance-related pay and training. Workers in this category do experience performance management.

**For short, we refer to these jobs as NOCOs (NOt COnulted)**

- iii) **Jobs with some work involvement and job security but low performance management.**  
Workers with jobs in this category have input into some decisions that affect their work, use their skills, feel their jobs are secure and can receive performance-related pay. However, they are unlikely to work in teams or engage in much information sharing and receive little in the way of performance appraisal or training.

**We refer to these jobs as SOCSs (SOme COnultation and SOcurity)**

- iv) **Jobs with high involvement, high demands, high performance management and performance-related pay.** Although workers with jobs in this category report high levels of demands in their work, they also report high levels of involvement in decisions that affect their work, use of skills, they engage in team working and sharing information with other workers, they receive performance appraisals and their jobs are secure. They are also likely to receive some form of performance-related pay.

**We refer to these jobs as HIIPs (HIgh InvolveMEnt, DEmands and PErformance-related PAy)**

- v) **Jobs with high work involvement, high job demands, high performance management and internal motivation.** Workers with jobs in this category also report high levels of demands in their work, they also report high levels of involvement in decisions that affect their work, use of skills, they engage in team working and sharing information with other workers, they receive performance appraisals and their job are secure. The key difference between this category and the previous category is that they are unlikely to receive much in the way of performance-related pay. Therefore, motivation in the job is likely to come primarily from the nature of the work itself – hence the work is intrinsically motivating.

**We refer to these jobs as HIIMs (HIgh InvolveMEnt, DEmands and MOtivation through the WOrk itself)**

**Job types and wellbeing**

The category that tended to fare worst in terms of wellbeing was the NONOs (*jobs with low work involvement, low demands and low performance management orientation*). On average, workers in this category had lower scores on work-life balance, fewer positive emotions and fewer positive attitudes to work - specifically lower job satisfaction and lower commitment to their organisation. Workers in this category also tended to experience more negative emotions compared to some of the other categories.<sup>6</sup> The figure shows the standings for each job category relative to the NONOs.<sup>7</sup>

We found that workers in HIIPs jobs (*with high involvement, high demands high performance management and performance-related pay*) and HIIMs jobs (*with high work involvement, high job demands, high performance management and intrinsic motivation*) tended to score better in terms of emotional wellbeing, work-life balance and positive attitudes towards work. Therefore, these two categories form the highest quality jobs in terms of wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

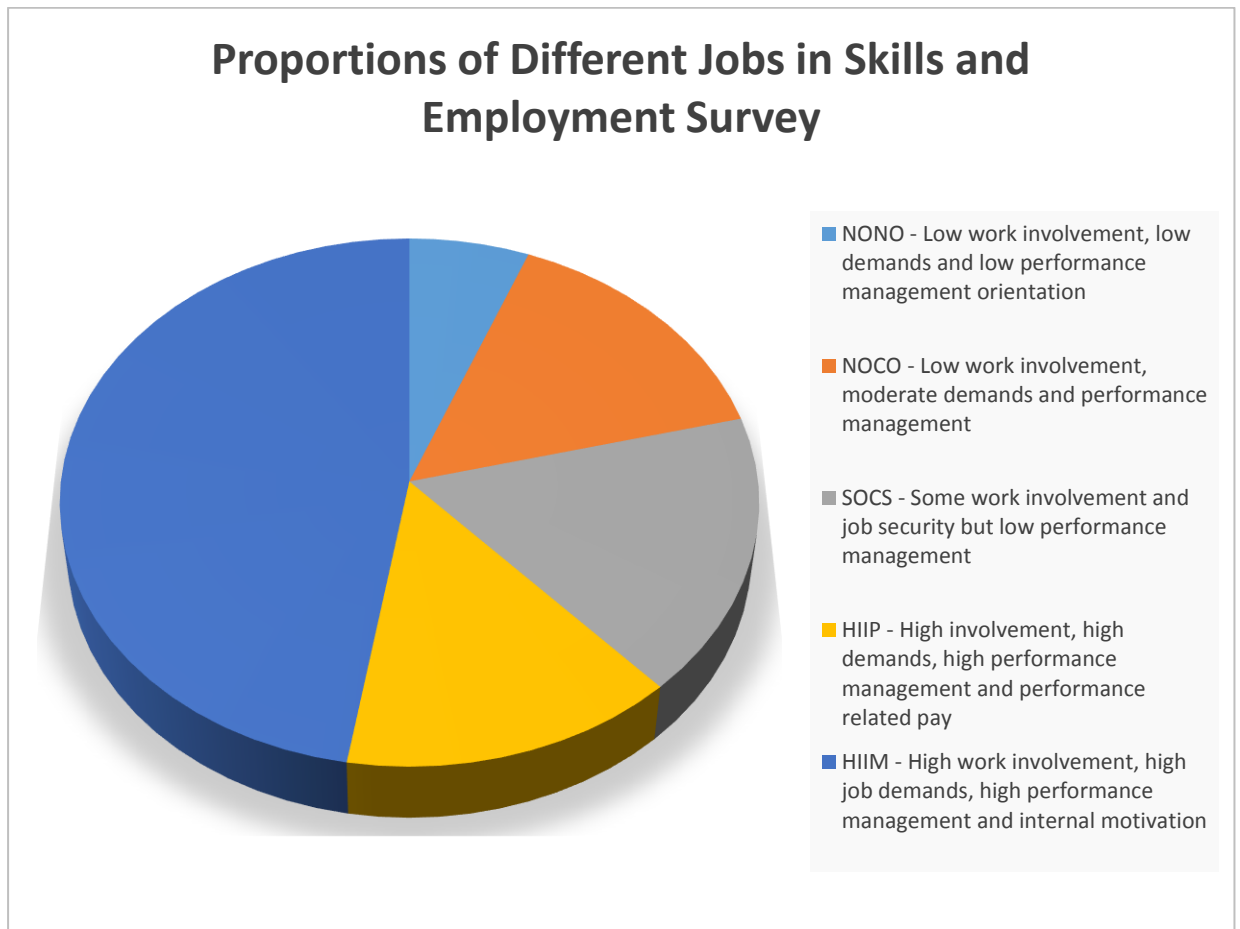


<sup>6</sup> In 16 out of 20 possible comparisons, the differences between NONOs and the other groups were statistically reliable. That is, we are highly confident that the low wellbeing observed in the NONO group is not due to random and trivial errors in the measures or the sample. Full details are available for in the technical report that accompanies this briefing.

<sup>7</sup> This is expressed as the average for each other job type divided by the average for NONOs.

<sup>8</sup> In 27 out of 30 possible comparisons, the differences between HIIPs and HIIMs and the other groups were statistically reliable. Therefore, we are confident the differences are not trivial and not due to random error. For all indicators, differences between HIIPs and HIIMs were not statistically reliable, and therefore we consider the differences to be trivial between the forms of high quality jobs.

**Who has the best jobs and where are the best jobs?**



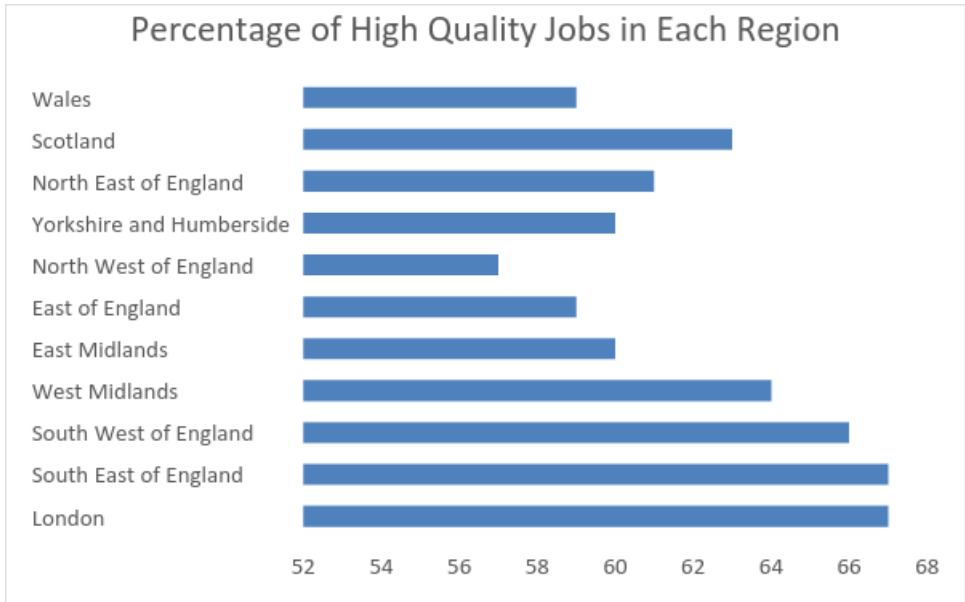
The pie chart shows that most people – over 60% in the Skills and Employment Survey – reported being in the better quality jobs for wellbeing (HIIPs and HIIMs). On the other hand, nearly 38% of people reported being in the lower quality jobs associated with lower well-being (NONOs, NOCOs and SOCSs).

However, there were regional differences.

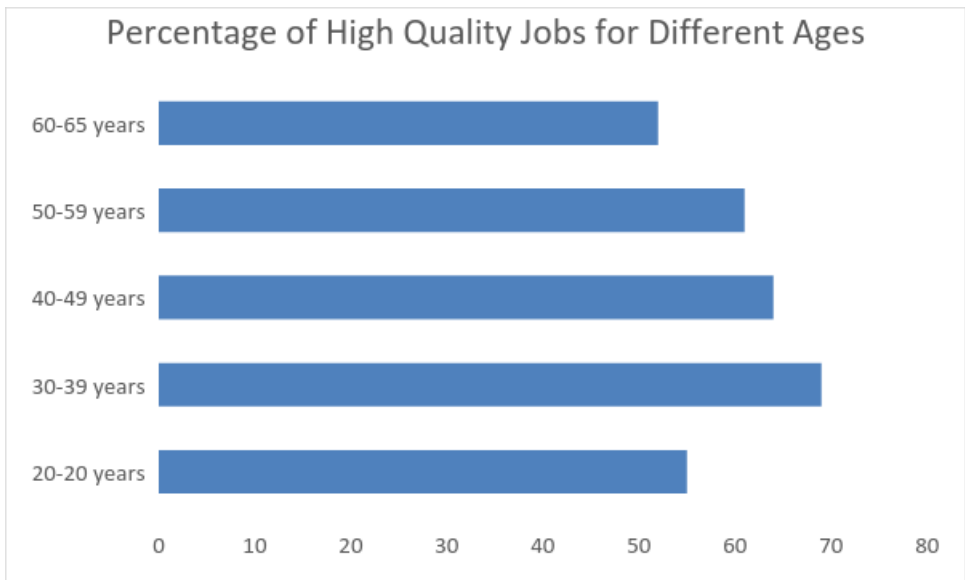
According to the 2012 Skills and Employment Survey, the South East of England, London and the South West of England have the highest percentage of high quality jobs (HIIPs and HIIMs) and therefore the lowest percentage of lower quality jobs (NONOs, NOCOs and SOCSs). The West Midlands and Scotland score above average for Great Britain. Falling below the national average in the percentage of better quality jobs are the North East of England, the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, the East of England, Wales and the North West of England.



Because of relatively small samples in some of the areas, not too much can be concluded about specific regions in Great Britain, but the South of England does appear to have a job quality advantage over other areas of Great Britain.



Workers aged 30-39 have the highest percentage of better quality jobs (HIIPs and HIIMs). Younger and older workers seem to be less likely to have a higher quality job.

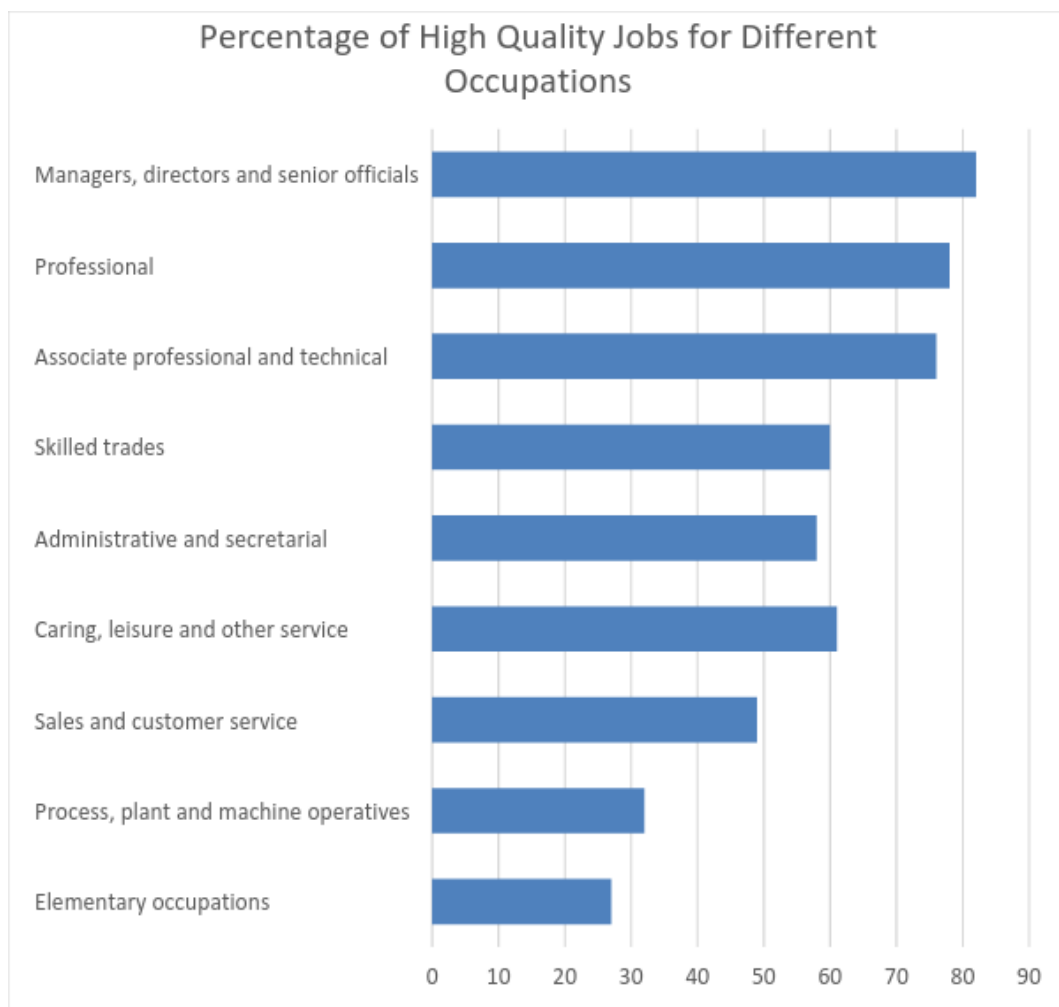


There were no gender differences in the percentage of higher quality jobs (HIIPs and HIIMs) or lower quality jobs (NONOs, NOCOs and SOCSs).

Around 57% of workers in the private sector reported having a higher quality job (HIIPs and HIIMs) to lower quality jobs (NONOs, NOCOs and SOCSs). In the public sector, the percentage with higher quality jobs was around 68%. In the not-for-profit sector, 77% of workers had higher quality jobs.

Managers, directors, senior officials, professionals, associate professionals and technicians tended to have the better quality HIIPs and HIIMs jobs. Administrators, secretaries, skilled trades, caring, leisure and services workers reported the next highest proportion of better quality HIIPs and HIIMs jobs followed by sales and customer services workers. The lowest proportions of high quality HIIPs and HIIMs jobs were found amongst process, plant and machine operatives and in elementary occupations.

Even in elementary occupations, some 27.2% of respondents reported being in better quality HIIPs and HIIMs jobs, indicating all of the occupational groups in the sample had representation amongst the highest quality job categories.



**Recommendations for managers and job seekers.**

The higher quality HIIP jobs (with high involvement, high demands, high performance management and performance-related pay) and HIIM jobs (with high work involvement, high job demands, high performance management and internal motivation) are characterised by high commitment to the organization as well as better wellbeing.

These categories of jobs are characterised by work and employment practices often associated with ‘High Performance Work Systems’ that have been shown to be related to better organisational performance<sup>9</sup> and better wellbeing provided by managers who are concerned with worker wellbeing.<sup>10</sup> Our analysis also shows that the characteristics of high quality work can be found across a range of occupations.

Our recommendation to **managers** is:

*To develop high quality jobs through enhancing workers’ involvement and decision making on their tasks and their work environment, use of skills, working with others in teams, access to training and development opportunities, job security and feedback on their work through good performance management systems.*

*This means not just looking at how jobs are done, but also at other employment practices that support high quality work.*

Although use of performance-related pay does not appear to have much influence on wellbeing in these analyses, it may be that performance-related pay is useful in some sectors and in some instances, for example because it is a norm in the sector or for retention issues.

For **workers seeking new jobs**, we recommend they look for jobs that:

*Offer involvement in decision making on tasks and the work environment, use of skills, working with others in teams, access to training and development opportunities, job security and feedback on work through good performance management systems.*

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<sup>9</sup> Combs, J., Liu, Y., Hall, A., & Ketchen, D. (2006). How much do high-performance work practices matter? A meta-analysis of their effects on organizational performance. *Personnel Psychology*, 59, 501-528

For a case study see: Tregaskis, O., Daniels, K., Glover, L., Butler, P., & Meyer, M. (2013). High performance work practices and firm performance: A longitudinal case study. *British Journal of Management*, 24, 225-244. A summary of this case is given in Daniels, K., Gedikli, C., Watson, D. Semkina, A, Vaughn, O. (2017). *Job quality and wellbeing*. What Works for Wellbeing Centre.

<sup>10</sup> Daniels, K., Gedikli, C., Watson, D., Semkina, A., Vaughn, O. (in press). Job design, employment practices and well-being: A systematic review of intervention studies. *Ergonomics*.

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### Implications for policy and knowledge gaps

Our analyses indicate that high quality, skilled work is associated with access to training and development, involvement in decisions and team working. To improve the creation and development of high skilled work, we recommend that:

*Initiatives are put in place to educate managers at all levels on the benefits of high quality work for wellbeing and worker engagement.*

*Regional development and inward investment be encouraged that would develop higher quality jobs, either through targeting employers known to create high quality work or providing incentives for employers to develop high quality work.*

The public sector to act as exemplars and to encourage good practice through:

*Seeking to develop jobs with the features of high quality work;*

*Service commissioners prioritising purchasing goods and services from suppliers that can demonstrate a commitment to developing high quality jobs.*

Specific priority groups for such policy initiatives could be younger and older workers, as well as regions where better quality jobs are found less frequently. For this we recommend:

*Further, more detailed investigation into whether higher quality work tends to concentrate in certain regions or amongst certain groups, why such concentrations occur and what may be done to reduce inequalities in access to high quality work where those inequalities exist.*

Our analysis is at a very high level, and aggregates data to form ‘types’ of jobs. Clearly there will be variation in the wellbeing of people in these different types of jobs and variation in the experience of employment practices. Further survey work, conducted at scale, would provide more fine-grained analysis of nuanced differences within specific regions and demographic groups.

Our previous evidence review<sup>11</sup> found that the evidence on specific interventions to improve wellbeing through the development of high quality jobs is at best *promising* rather than *proven*. The evidence base lacks detailed and extensive case studies that have tracked organisations as they deliberately enhance the quality of jobs. There is a need for more studies of this nature. There is also a need for evidence on the impact of different policy initiatives to improve the quality of work, as current policy recommendations are based on logical extrapolations from surveys rather than evidence that demonstrates the impact of policy initiatives.

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<sup>11</sup> Daniels, K., Gedikli, C., Watson, D., Semkina, A., Vaughn, O. (in press). Job design, employment practices and well-being: A systematic review of intervention studies. *Ergonomics*.  
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