

LIVE,  
WORK,  
CREATE.

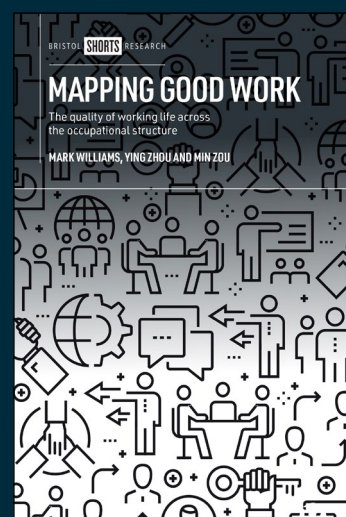
# Mapping Good Work

## SUMMARY

Following the publication of its 'Good Work Plan', the government committed to an industrial strategy of 'driving productivity and enabling more rewarding working lives' through the promotion of high quality jobs (decently-paid, secure jobs that offer 'realistic scope for development and fulfilment').

While the current crisis has understandably thrust the quantity of jobs back into the spotlight, there have been calls to ensure that job creation does not occur at the expense of job quality, as arguably happened in the previous recovery.

One issue in promoting a 'Good Work recovery', as this approach may be termed, is pinning down what exactly is 'Good Work'. In our book *Mapping Good Work*, we set out to discover the answer and establish where 'Good Work' is most likely to be found across the occupational structure. The findings and framework we developed can provide a useful guide as to which sorts of jobs we may wish to promote and also act as a yardstick for quantifying the progress of the labour market recovery through the lens of worker wellbeing. The book also provides new insights into wider debates about how technology is shaping the future of work.



*Mapping Good Work* by Mark Williams, Ying Zhou and Min Zou is published by Bristol University Press, September 2020.

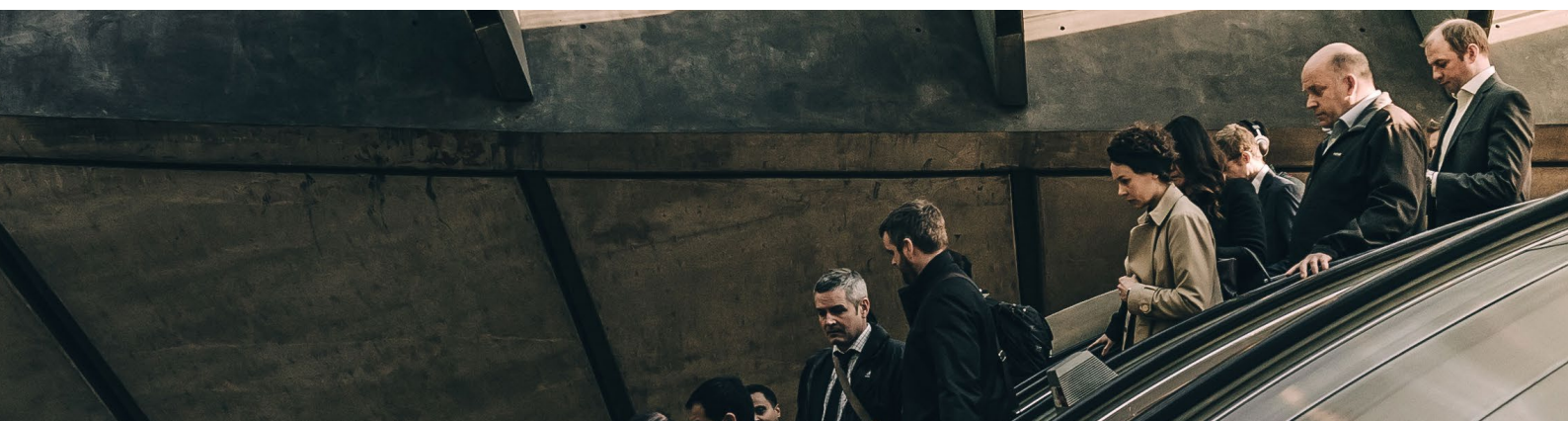
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## KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Work is more than earning an income; Good Work is its own reward.** In our research, rather than impose what we might believe to be 'good' for workers, we deferred to what workers themselves tell us is good about their work by analysing decades of large-scale survey data. We find that 'work itself' is the single most important determinant of our overall job satisfaction. We also find that work that makes the most of our skills, involves varied tasks and affords us a great deal of control significantly enhance our wellbeing. Pay turns out to be of lesser importance. We developed the Good Work Index (GWI) – a new job quality index – which explicitly builds in what workers think is 'Good Work'.
- 2. Good Work is highly stratified by occupation.** We trawled through data from hundreds of occupations and found that the best jobs are generally managerial and professional ones such as CEOs, doctors, teachers, while the worst jobs are generally routine and manual ones such as supermarket cashiers, warehouse workers and cleaners. While there is a clear class divide, it would be simplistic to say this is the entire story. There are some poorly paid jobs that do not have correspondingly low job quality, such as hairdressers, beauticians and publicans (who do about average overall). Likewise, there are some highly paid ones – solicitors, software engineers and accountants – that do not enjoy overall high job quality (who also do about average).
- 3. The lowest quality occupations are more likely to be automated, while growth in the highest quality ones has slowed.** In contrast to narratives of a polarizing labour market, when ranking occupations by the Good Work Index, it is generally the higher quality jobs that were growing and the lower quality ones which were disappearing over the past few decades. However, the pace of occupational upgrading has all but ground to a halt over the last decade. The slowdown requires urgent attention.
- 4. The quality of work is deteriorating for all workers in some critical respects.** While changes in the overall occupational structure have been largely positive, we found less positive patterns of development in the nature of work within occupations. Work is becoming more routine, more controlled and more intense for all occupations. This is a profound insight for the future of work debates which are largely about entire occupations disappearing. Instead, our findings suggest that we should be more concerned with the changes in the nature of jobs.
- 5. Career changes can work – but the relative quality of occupations switching from and to really matters.** In connected research we have conducted and referenced in the book, we found that upward occupational mobility (that is, moving from a lower quality occupation to a higher quality one) is associated with a steady improvement in job satisfaction. This is an encouraging finding in the context of the current COVID-19 crisis as it implies that transitioning to a new line of work needs not be detrimental to wellbeing if people are moving into higher quality jobs. By contrast, lateral and particularly downward occupational mobility can result in dissatisfaction that lasts for several years after the career transition.

**Key messages from this research have been presented to the DWP Committee in the House of Commons on 4 November 2020.**







WORK in PROGRESS

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Good Work agenda must continue to emphasise the nature of work.** The findings of our research reiterate the notion that improving the quality of work is more than eliminating ‘bad work’ – the nature of work also matters. Our research reveals that the well-known divide between occupations in terms of pay and security broadly extend to more intrinsic job factors, too. Disparities in intrinsic job quality need to be given the attention they deserve if fostering high levels of wellbeing at work is to be an organisational and policy goal.
- 2. Make visible job quality by publishing national statistics by detailed occupation.** Given the quality of work is highly differentiated by occupation and increasingly so, we believe that the Office for National Statistics or other government authority should publish job quality statistics by detailed occupation. Very poor job quality is often concentrated in small labour market pockets. Such statistics can inform policy-makers what types of jobs to grow and help workers make more informed career decisions. This is especially pertinent in the current crisis where increasing numbers of workers are considering career changes.
- 3. Increase support for retraining and career changes.** We welcome recent government focus to help with changing careers. However, we recommend increasing support for upward occupational mobility. We also need more support for those experiencing downward mobility because they are particularly vulnerable to experiencing a long-term decline in wellbeing. As well as government, employers may consider finding ways to support the downwardly mobile to make the most of their prior experience and skills.
- 4. Encourage growth in higher quality occupations.** While any kind of job growth in a time of crisis must not be discouraged, special emphasis should be placed on retaining and encouraging high quality work. In the long term, general upgrading of the occupational quality structure is likely to be key because as the number of low-quality jobs declines, the risk of downward mobility will also decline. Policy makers may wish to consider building in bonuses of job protection and job guarantee schemes for particularly high quality jobs, even if they are not well-paid. Indicative research applying the Good Work Index has demonstrated that higher quality occupations are generally more productive, as well as being good for wellbeing, so are especially worth protecting.
- 5. Greater worker control over work as well as workplaces.** Finally, our wider project reveals that organisations have a major role to play in facilitating employee wellbeing through job design which can help prevent anxiety, depression, and create positive working environments – for all occupations. The Taylor Review rightfully recommended workplace policies such as stronger participation, representation and consultation. We recommend that these policies should be supplemented with a more job-level focus, giving workers a greater say in how they do their jobs as well as how their organisations are run, taking into considerations of the nature of the occupations at workplace. Such an approach is likely to see greater improvements in job-related wellbeing and protect workers from the more deleterious aspects of the crisis and technological change such as routinisation and work intensification.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

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In this enlightening study of modern working lives in Britain, leading experts on the sociology of work draw on detailed statistical analyses to assess job quality and job satisfaction.

Drawing on decades of research data on hundreds of occupational groups, the authors challenge conventional notions of 'good work' and consider them afresh through the lens of workers themselves. With examples from many professions, the book examines why some occupations feel more rewarding than others, regardless of factors like pay and security.

Exploring fresh policies to promote the agenda for fulfilling employment, it builds an important case for genuine and sustained satisfaction in working lives.

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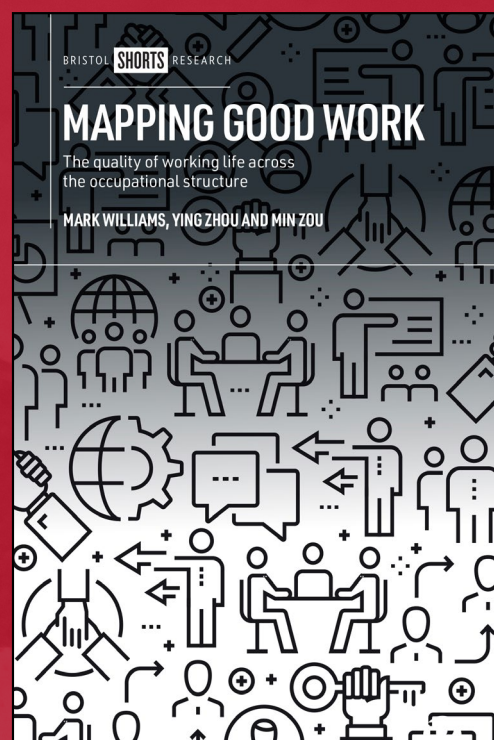
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For 'Good Work Recovery' see <http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2020/09/03/a-good-work-recovery-is-key-to-unlocking-britains-productive-potential/>

For full results of the ESRC project of which the book is one output, see [www.qualityofworkinglife.org](http://www.qualityofworkinglife.org)

For a related project exploring occupational disparities in the quality of work, see <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/trends/goodwork>

For more policy recommendations on the Good Work Recovery, see the recent report by the Carnegie Trust UK <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/good-work-for-wellbeing-in-the-coronavirus-economy-summary/>



*"This book provides a systematic map of job quality across occupations in the UK and will surely enrich social science research for years to come."*

**Andrew Clark, Paris School of Economics**

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