



University of  
Central Lancashire  
UCLan

# Work in Lancashire

**Understanding Job Quality and  
Productivity in the Region**

## About the Authors

**Dr Adrian Wright**, Director of the Institute for Research into Organisations, Work and Employment, and Deputy Head of the School of Management at the University Of Central Lancashire. His research is focussed on fair, equitable, 'good' and sustainable work. He has undertaken research across many occupations and workplaces exploring the experiences of workforce, relationships with employers and capital. Adrian is the principle investigator of the social impact evaluation of the Business Health Matters Project. Other research projects include good work and productivity in Lancashire; union organising; and employment relations in the NHS. Adrian is a Fellow of the RSA.

**Mary Lawler**, Senior Research Assistant at iROWE (Institute for Research into Organisations, Work and Employment), University of Central Lancashire. Her research focuses on workplace wellbeing, good work and productivity in Lancashire, and project evaluation.

**Professor George Ellison** is a Professor of Data Science at the University of Central Lancashire and specialises in methodological design to support the mitigation of potential biases in analyses of complex and diverse real-world datasets. His current research spans the applied social sciences and focuses on generating data-centric insights into the underlying mechanisms involved; and the opportunities these provide for the three 'P's (preparation, prevention and prescription).

**Dr. Tony Bennett**, Senior Research Fellow at iROWE (Institute for Research into Organisations, Work and Employment), University of Central Lancashire. His current areas of research interest and expertise include managing workplace conflict, the role and value of mediation, equality and diversity, employee development and trade unions, and the impact of domestic abuse in the workplace.

## About this Paper

This report is part of a larger programme of work coordinated by Active Lancashire, with UCLAN as partners, funded by UK Research and Innovation's Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund for Healthy Ageing.



# Contents

Executive Summary	5
Work in Lancashire	6
Industries, Sectors and Locations	9
Pay and Benefits	11
Contracts	13
Work-life balance	15
Job design and the nature of work	17
Relationships at work	20
Employee voice	22
Health and wellbeing	24
Conclusion	26
Recommendations	27
References	28
Methodology	31

# Figures

Figure 1. Strategic Weaknesses in the Lancashire Workforce <sup>5</sup>	6
Figure 2. Dimensions of Good Work	8
Figure 3. Respondents' Work Locations	9
Figure 4. Organisation Size	10
Figure 5. Response by Sector	10
Figure 6. Fair pay responses broken out by gender and degree attainment	11
Figure 7. Benefits offered by employers	12
Figure 8. Contract split full or part time	13
Figure 9. Breakdown of part time contracts by gender	13
Figure 10. Job security	13
Figure 11. Skills matched to job breakdown by age and gender	14
Figure 12. Flexible working options offered split by manager and employee views	15
Figure 13. Issues of Overwork	16
Figure 14. Respondents' perceived control over work	17
Figure 15. Self-rated productivity and meaningfulness of work	18
Figure 16. Career development and training opportunities	18
Figure 17. Employees felt managers had not fully explained their role	19
Figure 18. Is your manager good at providing direction and guidance for the work you do?	20
Figure 19. Responses split by role on "How well does our workplace deal with..	21
Figure 20. Trade union representation	22
Figure 21. Channels used to guide and communicate with staff	23
Figure 22. Breakdown by gender of workplace stress	24
Figure 23. Organisations viewpoints on workplace health and wellbeing	25

# Executive Summary

The work in Lancashire project aimed to capture the views and experiences of a cross section of managers and employees in Lancashire regarding key components of work and its impact on the management of productivity. It gives a greater insight into the relationship between work conditions and productivity, focusing on job quality, the employee work experience and productivity.

Workplace health and wellbeing presents an area where Lancashire employers require support. Although respondents highlighted that their organisations took health and wellbeing seriously our research suggested that employers needed support in policy and practice. A large number of respondents described the negative impact work has on their health and wellbeing. Perhaps the most concerning finding of our survey, over 50% of participants reported that stress, anxiety or depression was caused by, or made worse by work in the last 12 months. Overwork and long hours appear to be commonplace in the region with only around 1 in 3 participants surveyed highlighting that they could carry out their work tasks within their contracted hours, while 68% carry out work outside of contracted hours without additional pay. This data presents concerns regarding the future health and wellbeing of our workforce.

Our findings support returning to the core principles of job quality and effective people management to help solve the productivity puzzle and support health and wellbeing within workplaces in Lancashire. For example, the significant disparity between manager and employee views regarding the management of conflict leaves the region vulnerable to losses in productivity and may further exacerbate poor health and wellbeing. We call for attention to core management principles that focus on addressing the barriers to job quality, and the formulation, implementation and communication of effective policy and practice such as health and wellbeing. This renewed focus could quickly enhance job quality and productivity, alongside supporting broader government objectives around levelling up, health inequalities, living standards, and spatial disparities across the UK.

# Work in Lancashire

## Enhancing job quality and Productivity in Lancashire's workforce

**'Two big questions currently dominate policy thinking on the world of work. The first asks how we can make our organisations more productive, and the second asks how we can improve the quality of working lives'<sup>1</sup>**

Answering these questions will have a considerable impact on levelling up, finding solutions to solving health inequalities, raising living standards, and addressing spatial disparities across the UK. The Work in Lancashire Report aims to help provide answers as to how policymakers, employers, organisations, and key stakeholders can improve the quality of work to assist in enhancing the region's productivity. Lancashire provides a useful focus to understand the benefits of better quality work and productivity. Lancashire as a region, like many other geographical areas, faces challenges in terms of productivity and lower than average wages<sup>2</sup>. The health and wellbeing of Lancashire's workforce also provides cause for concern. For example, 'sickness absence from work' places Lancashire behind the UK and North West average for the percentage of hours of work lost annually. An additional challenge is ensuring its ageing workforce is supported as Lancashire has a lower working-age population than compared with other areas of the UK. Furthermore, Lancashire lags behind the North West and England in employment at the managerial level, suggesting a focus on managerial capacity, skills and capabilities could go some way towards enhancing the job quality, health, wellbeing and productivity in the region. These points suggest interventions may be needed to sustain and build the workforce to meet the challenges of the region.

The report responds to the aims and objectives outlined in the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) influential employment and skills plan<sup>3</sup> to give strategic and practical context. In a SWOT analysis, carried out by the LEP<sup>4</sup>, several key areas of improvements were identified (Figure 1). Improving productivity within the workforce, whilst recognising the need to support and retain older workers and improve the skills

- Lag in productivity (in relation to the rest of the country)
- Lower than average wages + lower attainment levels at Level 4
- Ageing workforce and reducing working age population
- Impact of COVID-19 on the 'levelling up' agenda
- Volatile employment rates and inability of Lancashire to cope well with economic shocks
- Health of the workforce

**Figure 1. Strategic Weaknesses in the Lancashire Workforce<sup>5</sup>**



of employees, are cited as major challenges in the region. This report argues that a focus on job quality can help tackle the 'productivity puzzle' while supporting the health and wellbeing of workers.

The national, social and economic argument around the relationship between work, productivity and health is clear that worker wellbeing plays an important role in productivity. When translated to the micro-level of the employer, better quality of work with a focus on health and wellbeing can realise a real increase in output whilst producing a healthier and more contented workforce. Therefore, a renewed focus on job quality and more productive work can also help 'level up' areas of our society. Progressive voices point to the wider impact of better job quality, productivity and its interrelationship with health and economic outcomes.

The link between health outcomes and Gross Value Added (GVA) has been estimated by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), that if local authorities with the poorest health outcomes were boosted to at least equal the level of the top 10th percentile health outcomes, GVA per hour worked would increase by 1.5 percent – or 46 pence more for every hour worked. This illustrates how improving work, and job quality would help in our mission to address health inequalities.

**'We should create better health – for its own sake, but also to address the biggest weaknesses in the UK economy.....correcting our failures on population health could help alleviate key economic challenges facing the UK, including low growth, low productivity, labour market losses and wide inequality' <sup>6</sup>**

## **From Job Quality to Good Work and Productivity**

Framing the report within the model of good work highlights how enhancing job quality can help provide a solution to solving the productivity puzzle. The concept of good work goes beyond job satisfaction and emphasises work's central place in improving quality of life. Examining job quality and 'good work' requires us to unpick working practices and employment relationships to understand their impact on our lives and productivity, making sure we improve them wherever we can<sup>7</sup>. The challenge for employers is, therefore, through the framework of 'good work', to put into place initiatives that can realise improved employee performance and productivity. A particularly influential study of good work is the government commissioned, Taylor Report<sup>8</sup>, whose recommendations continue to underpin many aspects of government workforce development strategy. Key findings highlighted the relationship between autonomy, wellbeing and productivity. More specifically, how greater employee voice and a more collegiate environment between management and staff, can boost fulfilment and increase productivity and engagement between employees and managers. Building on

key areas in the Taylor Report and the work of the Carnegie Trust in setting a measurement framework for job quality<sup>9</sup>, this report examines the key tenants of job quality including well-being; the nature and design of work; employee autonomy and employee voice. A key focus of this report is to show how these dimensions of good work can impact positively on employee effectiveness in the workplace, but also understand the relationship between work and productivity. Therefore we examine productivity via Boxall and Purcell's<sup>10</sup> definition of performance framed around A, M, O, (ability, motivation and opportunity to perform). In this model, measurements are based on areas such as line manager support, employee voice opportunities, other support services combined with employee commitment, job satisfaction, motivation and self-reported increased effort.

- 1 Pay and benefits** Subjective feelings regarding pay, employer pension contributions, and other employee benefits.
- 2 Contracts** Contract type, underemployment, and job security.
- 3 Work-life balance** Overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and HR provision for flexible working.
- 4 Job design and the nature of work** Workload or work intensity, autonomy or control of work , employee resources, job complexity and alignment to skills and qualifications, meaningfulness of work, and development opportunities provided.
- 5 Relationships at work** Social support and cohesion. The quality of relationships at work, psychological safety, and the quality of people management.
- 6 Employee voice** Channels and opportunities for feeding views to one's employer and managers' openness to employee views.
- 7 Health and wellbeing** Positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health. Often considered as an outcome of job quality.

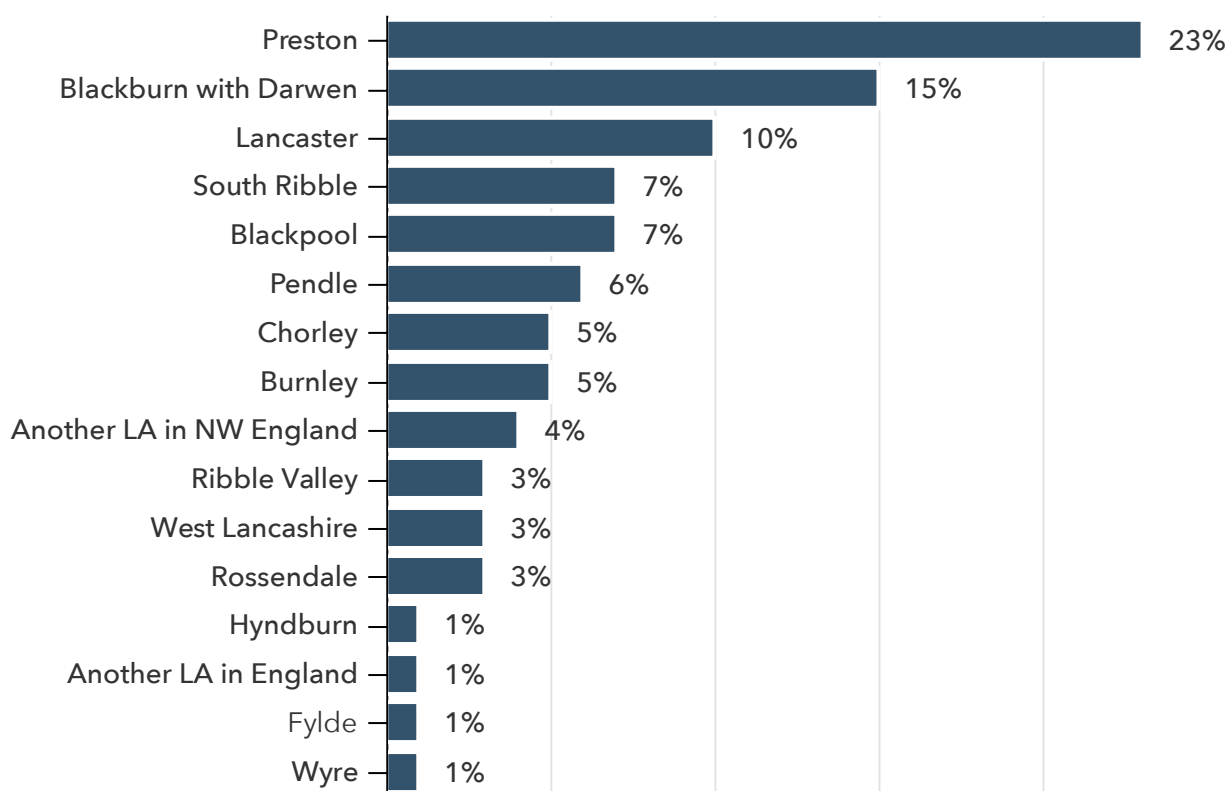
**Figure 2. Dimensions of Good Work**

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) influential seven-dimensional model of good work<sup>11</sup> offers an excellent framework for capturing the relationship between effective people management strategies and practice, well-being, and their potential impact on productivity. The key dimensions of the model, with an explanation of each dimension is shown in Figure 2. Through an in-depth analysis of the survey data, we were able to subsequently match our findings against the seven dimensions of the CIPD model.



# Industries, Sectors and Locations

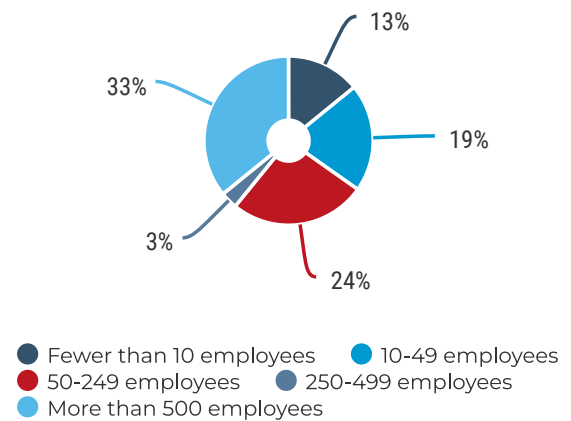
The Work in Lancashire survey draws on experiences of a cross section of organisations, sectors, industries and locations in the region. While the purpose of the Work in Lancashire survey is not aimed to be representative of work in the region, it gives an insight into the experiences of managers and employees across a large scope of industries, across geographical areas, and in businesses varying in size. Responses were gathered from managers and employees, and were broadly reflective of the dominant economic clusters in the region, with Preston, Blackburn and Darwen and Lancaster comprising the largest number of work locations represented in the survey.



**Figure 3. Respondents' Work Locations**

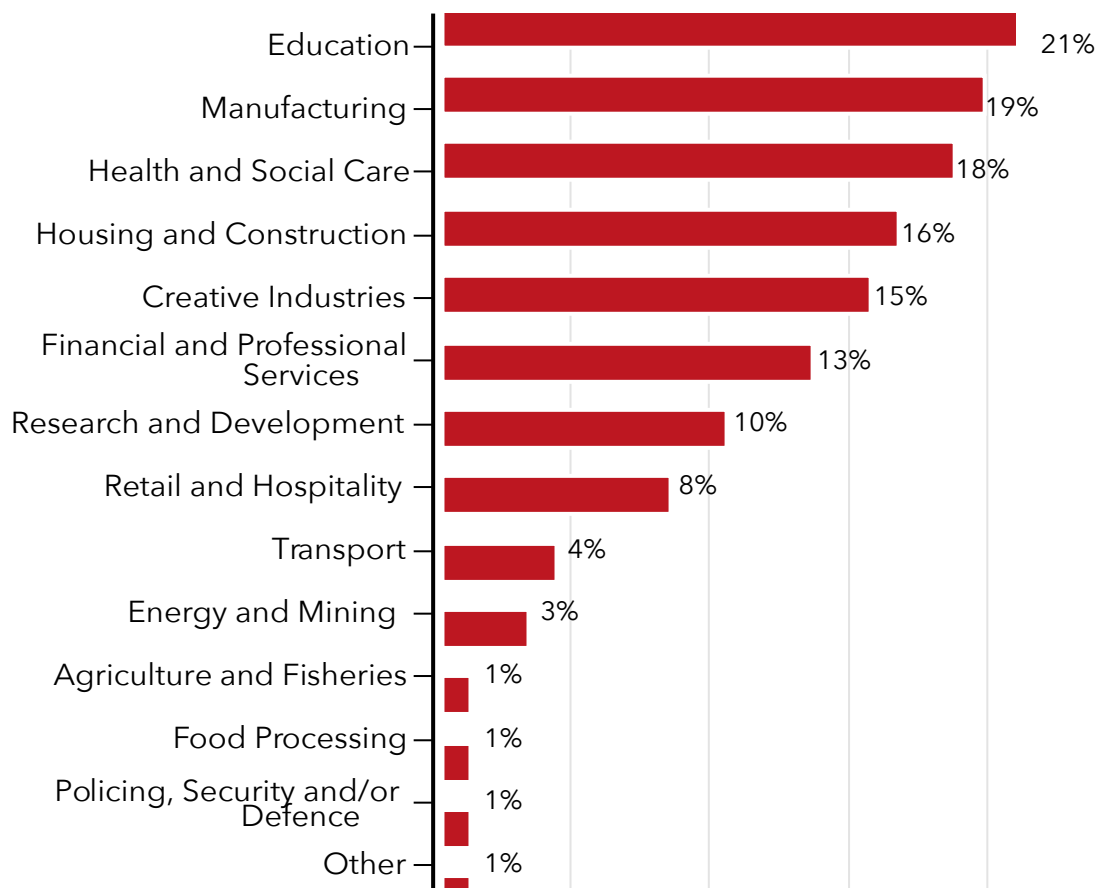
Organisations with over 500 employees represented 33% of responses in the survey, followed by 24% of organisations between 50 and 249 employees, with organisations between 10-49 employees comprising the third largest category of responses in the survey.

The survey is diverse in respect of the variety of industries and sectors it represents. Education was the largest sector in our survey accounting for 21% of survey responses, followed by 19% in Manufacturing, 18% Health and Social Care and 16% Housing and Construction. This compares to Lancashire's industrial composition of Retail 18%, Manufacturing 15%, Health and Social care 15%, and Education 9%<sup>12</sup>. Therefore our survey has a below average response in retail combined with a slightly higher response in Health and Social care and Manufacturing.



**Figure 4. Organisation Size**

The survey drew responses from senior managers, to understand the management policies and practices, and employees, to understand the impact of managerial practices on their experiences of work. It gathered an almost equal response from employees and managers at 51% and 49% respectively. It is of note to mention that 44% of our managerial response rate was from women, resulting in an over representative sample of women managers in comparison to the gender split of managers in the North West region of 64% men and 36% women.



**Figure 5. Response by Sector**

**“I think the culture and the opportunities within your business are absolutely the key things really, that will give people pride and satisfaction and in the job as well, as you know, you can never ignore the pay issue as well”. John, Journalist**

## Pay and Benefits

This first dimension of our model covers how employees feel about their pay and other benefits provided by their employer. Strikingly, a large proportion of both genders did not feel they were adequately paid. Only 55% of our respondents answered that they were fairly paid or rewarded. When breaking this figure down by gender and education background the survey responses drew some interesting comparisons. Only 60% of women stated that they were fairly paid. Furthermore, only 40% of those surveyed who told us they did not have a degree felt fairly paid.

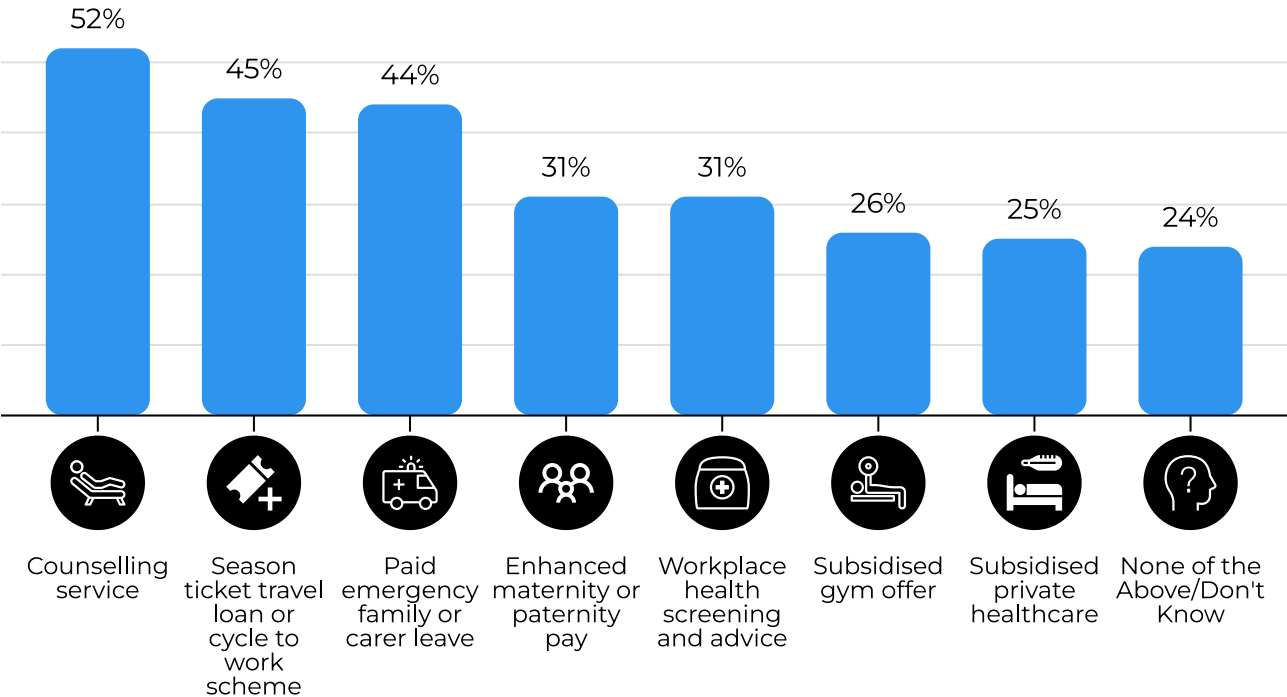


**Figure 6. Fair pay responses broken out by gender and degree attainment**

This information provides some indication that we can link to the so called ‘brain drain’ in Lancashire as workers may be attracted elsewhere by more acceptable rates of pay. Our survey also asked respondents about additional pay when working over contracted hours, concerningly just 2.5% of responses highlighted that they were paid for working overtime. These findings present the first area of concern in relation to pay, good work and productivity. Research suggests that we can achieve higher productivity in those workers most satisfied with pay<sup>13</sup>. Given the relationship between pay and productivity we can see that this area requires attention.

In relation to workplace benefits, employers offered a range of benefits. Notably, over 50% of employers offered talk therapy services, 45% offered support in traveling to work, either by season ticket travel or cycle to work scheme, 25% provided additional private health care and a third of organisations offered health screening and advice. It’s clear from the results of the survey that employers in Lancashire are offering benefits that offer additional financial benefit and support health and wellbeing which can lead to better employee engagement and productivity. However, many employees do not receive the benefits detailed in the graph which suggests some employers do not, or that these benefits are not well communicated so employees are not aware of

the benefits offered to them. When we explored this topic during interviews, many respondents felt that these benefits did not translate into employee engagement or



**Figure 7. Benefits offered by employers**

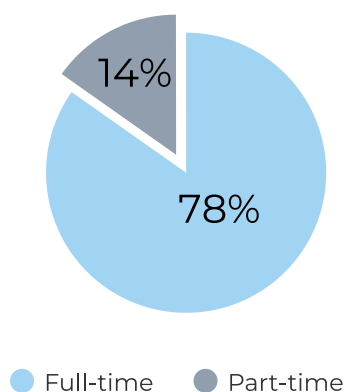
positively influencing workplace culture. They perceived benefits as something separate to the organisation, similar to shopping discounts, often run by an outside organisation, that were not necessarily what was wanted (or used) by staff.

“There appears to be some way of progressing through a pay scale, but I haven’t managed to work that one out and through being on temporary contracts... your next fixed term contract will be exactly the same rate as your last one was, so you’re not seeing pay progression.” Annie, Local Government

# Contracts

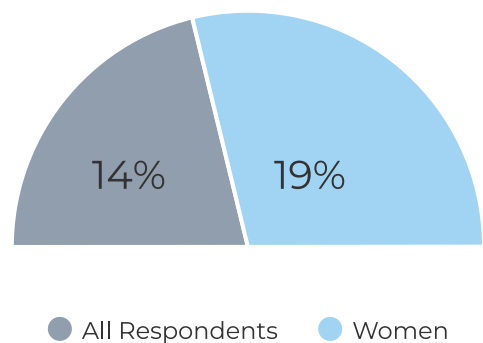
This second dimension covers contract type, underemployment, and job security. In terms of the work patterns of the survey respondents, 78% were full-time and 14% part-time. Unsurprisingly, as aligned with national trends, more women work part-time.

**Contract type**



**Figure 8. Contract split full or part time**

**Part-time contracts**



**Figure 9. Breakdown of part time contracts by gender**

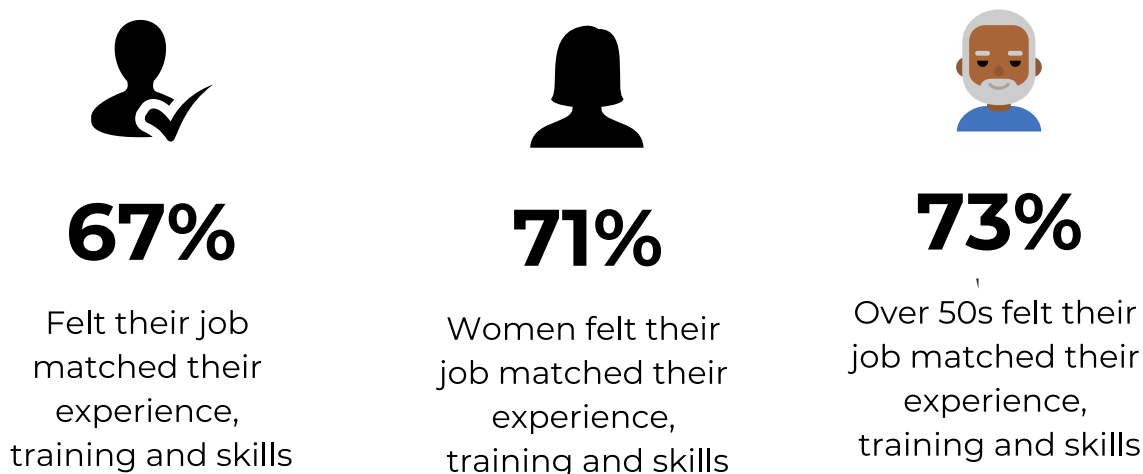


felt secure or very  
secure in their job

Crucially, nearly 80% of the respondents felt quite or very secure in their job, perhaps reflecting the relatively high employment when the survey responses were collected. This is a positive finding from our survey, both in terms of psychosocial wellbeing and, job security, which places Lancashire well for longer-term productivity.

**Figure 10. Job security**

During interviews, the topics of contracts and progression, resulting in a loss of staff was frequently brought up. Qualitative comments regarding contracts were highlighted relating to the use of fixed term contracts. Some participants drew on accounts of skilled members of staff leaving due to short-term contracts, furthering evidence towards the threat of brain drain, as locations that offer better paid work, with permanent contracts could be more desirable to workers. In other cases, the lack of clear routes for promotion, or clear procedures for advancement resulted in employees leaving, with no choice but to move elsewhere to gain career progression. This suggests some



**Figure 11. Skills matched to job breakdown by age and gender**

of Lancashire's workforce experience underemployment where skills and experience are not matched with their job. When asking participants to consider if their current employment matched their skills, training and experience, 67% answered this question positively, with a slightly higher response rate for women and workers in their over 50's.

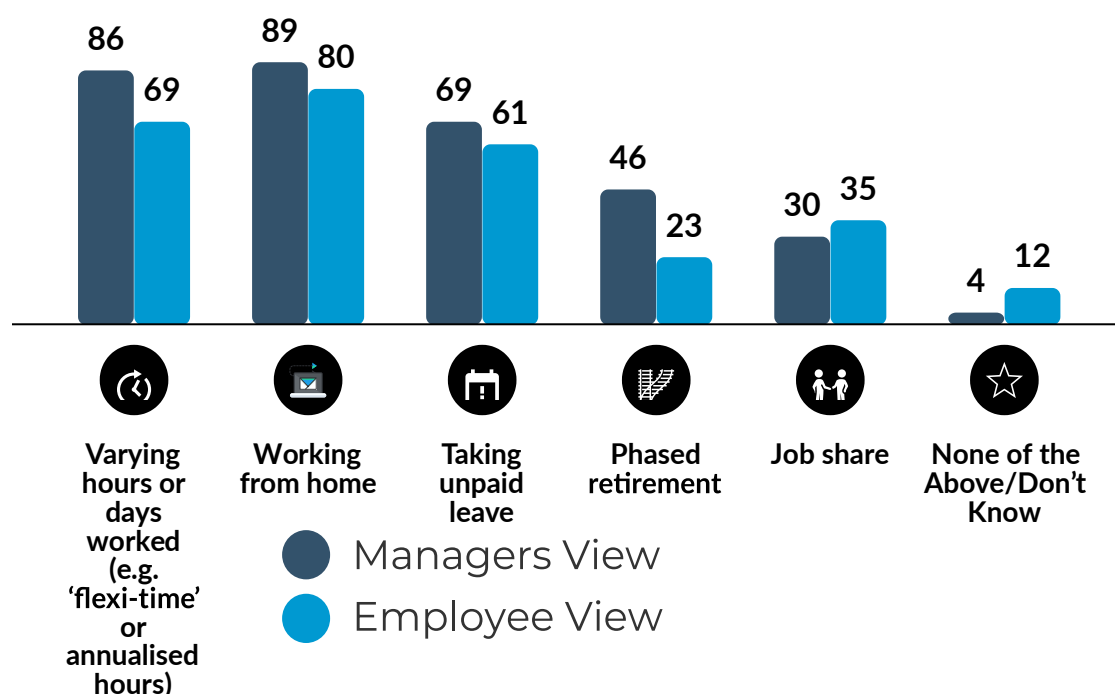
However, looking at this data in an alternative way, 33% of survey respondents failed to identify that their current employment utilised their skills, training and experience. Workers in jobs that clearly match their skills and abilities are more motivated, more engaged and more productive. However, invisible underemployment can have a detrimental impact on worker wellbeing, pay, and result in slower productivity. Furthermore, it can also be an important reason for employees to seek alternative employment, or leave employment all together. Therefore considering the extent in which work matches the employee's skills, training and experience is important focus of attention for businesses and policy makers looking to improve productivity.



“I think a lot of the time people think that you might be letting somebody down, or it might reflect badly on you, if you don’t agree to take on extra work or work outside of your contracted hours. And I think actually, the opposite is the case”. - Louise, Public Relations

## Work-life balance

This section covers work-life balance which considers overwork, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and flexible working. Generally responses in the survey were positive in relation to flexible working. In this section we asked managers and employees slightly different questions. We asked managers to tell us about the opportunities they provide for flexible working, for employees we asked if the employer provided any of the following opportunities for flexible working. By asking the question in this way we were able to understand what opportunities were offered across the region (manager view), and whether this reconciles with the



**Figure 12. Flexible working options offered split by manager and employee views (% response)**

opportunities employees understand are offered (employee view). Most respondents had an opportunity to request some elements of flexible working, with varying hours (flex time or annualised hours), working from home and unpaid leave all scoring highly with both manager and employee groups. It is of note that working from home figures

highly for both manager and employee groups, emphasising how this type of working is becoming far more integrated as we emerge from the pandemic into a 'new normal'. The positive responses around these three aspects of flexible working reinforce how companies are increasingly offering a more flexible approach to work. Genuine flexible working can boost talent and retention, inclusion and diversity, support progression of under-represented groups, and support work life balance if operated correctly, while lessening overheads for businesses. Perhaps of more concern are the comparatively lower scores for phased retirement and job sharing, particularly given the need to respond to concerns of an aging workforce and ensuring jobs are accessible to different segments of the labour market. This suggests the region can do more to design flexible jobs to enable people to access, remain and progress in work as circumstances and individual employment needs change. It is also of note that in each of these categories the manager view of what is available in most cases is significantly above the employee view of what is offered. This suggests that better communication of policies is needed.

One of the most significant findings in our survey was related to working hours. The first section in the report highlighted that overtime was often accompanied without pay. However, our survey found an additional nuance to this finding in that over 50% of respondents reported working additional hours but without additional pay. Moreover, and of equal concern, is that 70% of workers told us they work longer than their contracted hours and only 1 in 3 said they could get their work done inside contracted hours. As this is a key theme we explored further in the interviews as participants told us about their experiences of working long hours.

For several interviewees, the impact of work on the worker's personal life led them to leave their employer, no matter how much they enjoyed aspects of their work. For one the administrative tasks amounted to a near doubling of hours from what was 'paid'. Conversely, interviewees did allow for some voluntary over time as part of doing a 'good job', especially in the cases of supporting colleagues undertaking 'shift' work or flexible work patterns. However, this balance of encroachment must be navigated with care, if not it could result in added stress and poor wellbeing, and can be detrimental in terms of productivity and retention.



**Figure 13. Issues of Overwork**

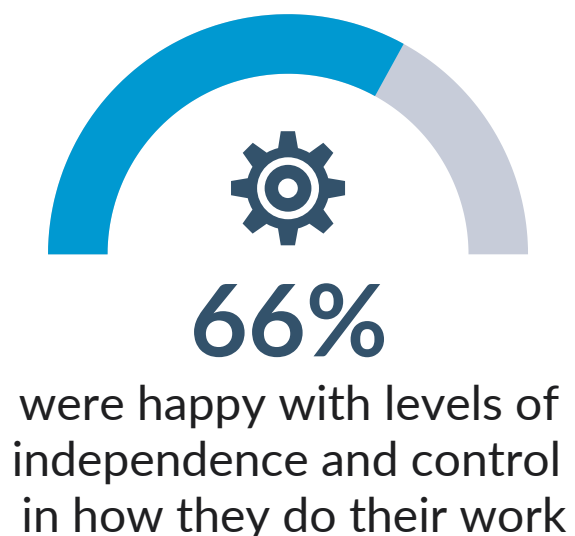
**“But (boss) said, at one point, he said look nothing (and this was to all of us, because there was a few of us kind of struggling) nothing is as important as your health. And if you miss a deadline, nobody’s gonna die”.  
Louise, Public Relations**

# Job design and the nature of work

Unsurprisingly, there is cross over in the utilisation of these dimensions. So, for instance, elements of the nature of a job also impacts on a person’s work-life balance. This section includes many aspects related to job quality, which play an important part in determining individual productivity. A substantial body of research shows that enriched job design that encourages learning, growth and self-determination leads to higher performance and enhanced wellbeing. In contrast, monotonous and demeaning jobs are associated with boredom, passivity and loss of productivity<sup>14</sup>. Therefore in this section we consider the dimensions of job satisfaction, which relate to the quality workers perceive in their jobs.

Worker autonomy is a key measure within these dimensions. It is a positive, therefore, that a sizeable majority, 66% of our sample were satisfied with the level of independence they had to plan and conduct their work. Similarly, a key measure of job satisfaction and fulfilment in work is the meaning people derive from their work. It is also encouraging that nearly 70% of our respondents felt their work was meaningful and productive, particularly in the over 50’s.

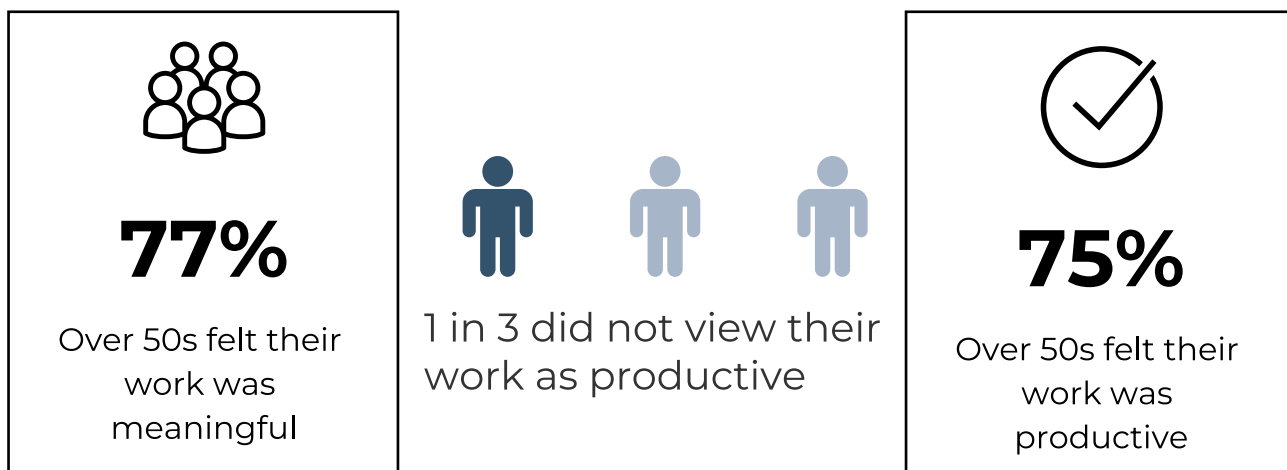
Although these results are a positive representation of this facet of work in the region, it must be noted that 1 in 3 participants in our survey chose not to describe their work as productive. This suggests the region should not be complacent with regard to harnessing the productivity of its workforce. In terms of



**Figure 14. Respondents’ perceived control over work**

recognition and reward, beyond that of basic pay and conditions, there was evidence of varying levels of support in terms of career guidance, development and informal or informal reward or recognition. More significantly, and in accord with the strategic objectives of the LEP in the region, 68% of respondents had undertaken work-related training in the previous 12 months.

Future employment opportunities, the design of training and career guidance and development opportunities formed an important component of the Work in Lancashire survey, which found that less than 50% felt their current job would enhance their future



**Figure 15. Self-rated productivity and meaningfulness of work**

employment, and this figure dropped significantly to 32% for the over 50s. However, exploring this area in further detail highlighted some concerning responses from our participants. Whilst 68% of participants highlighted they received work related training, only 49% highlighted to us that they received staff development opportunities and only 25% received career or promotion guidance. The nature of how training and career development is embedded into the workplace is not only an important facet of good work and productivity, but also an important area to focus on to avoid staff attrition, so much so a recent report published by McKinsey highlighted that a lack of career development and enhancement was the top reason for employees resigning from their jobs in 2021/22 <sup>15</sup>.



**Figure 16. Career development and training opportunities**

Of equal concern, as we will consider in the next section, was that over 4 in 10 employees did not feel that their manager had fully explained their role. This can be a key reason for staff experiencing unnecessary stress and limiting overall performance<sup>16</sup>.



## 4 in 10 do not know their job responsibilities and requirements

**Figure 17. Employees felt managers had not fully explained their role**

Correspondingly, over 60% felt that they cannot achieve the objectives of their job and need to work longer hours. For some employers, it may be seen as optimal to gain more output from their employees. However, should the design and nature of the job require the employee to work long hours to achieve their objectives, not only is this an area of concern regarding the effectiveness of management, but over time it will again have an adverse effect on employee health and wellbeing and ultimately their longer term productivity<sup>17</sup>.

Crucially, and aligned to the instance reported above of working additional hours to achieve objectives, nearly 40% of our sample said that they are often required to work longer than their contractual hours. Strikingly, if we disaggregate for gender although we see that women often show more confidence in understanding their role and being well matched for them, nonetheless this also aligns with a higher proportion of women working longer than contracted.

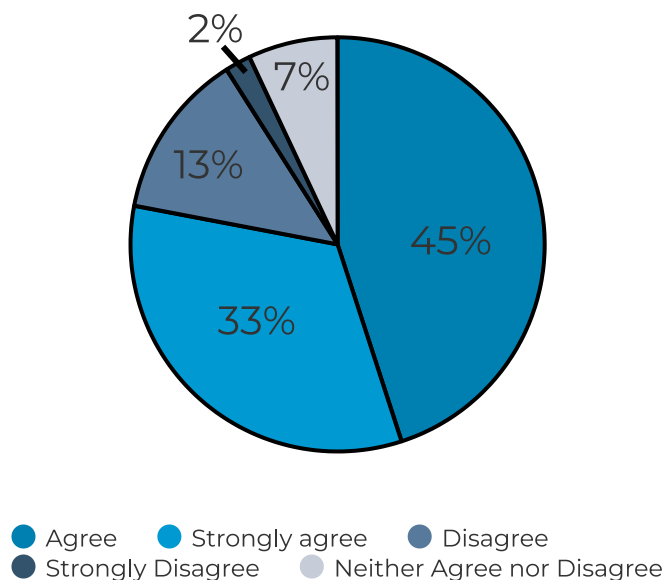
**“And I’ve always felt like I struggle with aloof management and leadership. I don’t know how to get the best out of people, other than building a relationship with them and having them enjoy what they’re doing and move onward.” Shawn, Charity**

## Relationships at work

As we discussed, this element of our model is very much concerned with social support and cohesion (the quality of relationships at work, psychological safety, and the quality of people management). The importance of the workplace as a supporting ‘community’, and as a positive aspect of maintaining health and wellbeing<sup>18</sup>, is equally positive within our sample in terms of the support that people felt they received from their colleagues.

In terms of the ‘quality of people management’<sup>19</sup>, a key objective of the LEP strategic employment and skills plan is to enhance the skills of line managers, particularly in SMEs<sup>20</sup>. As discussed above in the context of promoting good work, the manager plays a key role. Our report finds that over 6 in 10 employees felt supported by their manager, a figure which slightly drops when disaggregating for the over 50’s but rising slightly for women. Furthermore, when asked, ‘is your manager good at giving direction and guidance for the work you do’, 78% thought that was the case. In interviews there was consensus that good management included, at its very base, an open, communicative relationship.

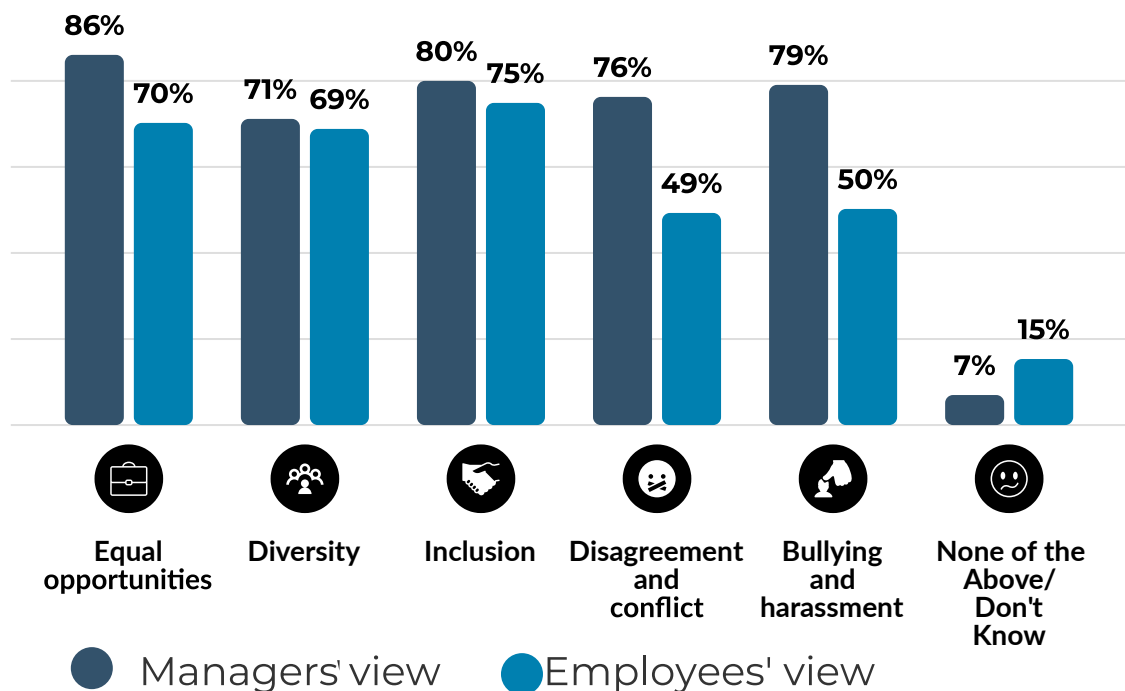
In order to delve deeper into the findings, comparisons were made between key characteristics of the sample to understand if the views expressed so far in the report might vary significantly if we analysed the findings based on a respondent’s role in the organisation. We have used on several occasions a comparison of senior managers’ and employees’ views on aspects of good employment already in the report. To capture their overriding views on a number of key employee relations measures, we asked respondents who identified themselves as senior managers, ‘Which of the following do



**Figure 18. Is your manager good at providing direction and guidance for the work you do?**



you feel you and your management team effectively manages?’ All other respondents to the survey were asked, ‘Which of the following do you feel your employer manages effectively?’ Whilst senior managers and employees share similar perspectives it is of note that in all areas senior managers responses were more positive in relation to their management practices than employees were in their responses. On the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion policy and practice, there is striking difference in views from employees in terms of equal opportunities, managing disagreements and conflict, and bullying and harassment. Women felt that there was a significant difference in how equality, diversity and inclusion was managed. Furthermore, women and over 50’s felt even stronger than the group as a whole that bullying and harassment could be better



**Figure 19. Responses split by role on “How well does our workplace deal with..**

handled by their employer. It would appear that, despite the positive views of the support and ability of their line manager highlighted earlier, for many employees, key measures of effective employee relations, such as equality and conflict management are not being addressed. In order to differentiate between younger and more middle and older aged workers, a comparison between the views of under and over 50 workers was made (30% of the sample were over 50 years of age). A comparative analysis of the data showed interestingly that the older workers were positive with respect to EDI policy and practice. However, again in line with distinctions based on gender and between management representatives and the workers as a whole, over 50’s employees also indicated that bullying and harassment and disagreements and conflict could be better handled by their employer, while over 50’s managers thought they dealt with these issues better than their younger counterparts.

**“There is still a reticence to talk about having problems in work.. upper management assumed everything was fine unless people told them. But actually, when you’re not in a position of sort of historic, traditional power, having the confidence to bring up ideas or bring up issues with senior staff has to be encouraged and nurtured rather than expected”- Simon, Charity**

## Employee voice

The employee voice dimension allows us to establish the effectiveness of channels and opportunities for employees to share their views with their employer, and managers’ openness to those views. Of all the categories of good work that we employed in the analysis this dimension arguably was the most ambiguous. We sought to capture both the nature and extent of individual and collective voice, the fact that only 9% of our sample were trade union members, it can be argued, mediated the outcomes. However, on reflecting on the high proportion of SME and small companies in our sample representing over 60% of the employees, and the high number of private companies, both less likely to recognise a union, this disparity became clearer. Nevertheless, when we consider the responses, the results suggest a more complex picture of employee voice in our sample of organisations, especially as 22% of our employee sample were unsure, or did not know how decision making operated in their workplace.



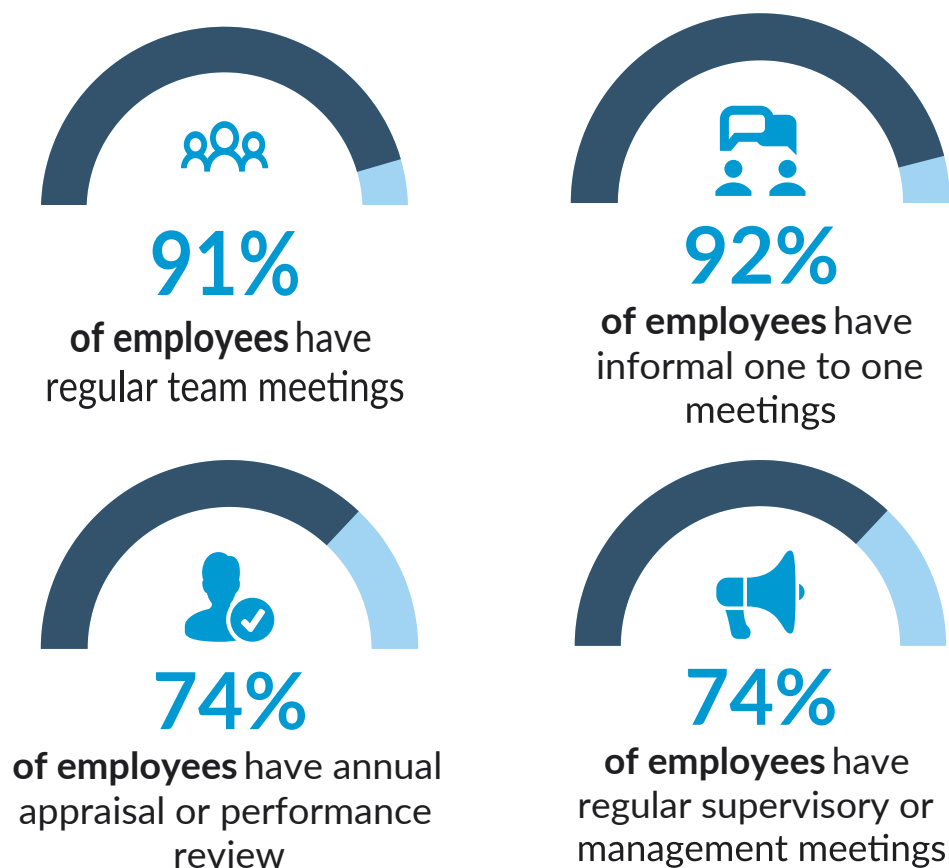
**65% no trade union**

or staff association representatives at their workplace

This was further illuminated in interviews **Figure 20. Trade union representation** with the comment that many decisions were seemingly not led by staff and supports recent CIPD findings that while many employees had opportunities to give their views, this was not translated into influencing decision-making<sup>21</sup>. As a benchmark for organisational strategy on employee involvement and voice, 98% of senior managers thought it important or very important to inform employees about organisational changes. Against this backdrop, our senior managers were also asked, ‘How do you and your management team involve employees in decision-making?’ This topic explored in interviews, highlighted operational issues in putting employee consultations issues to practice.

Turning now to individual employee involvement or voice, the data is somewhat clearer. When asked ‘How good are your workplace managers at informing employees about important organisational changes?’, 73% of employees stated good or very good. This is positive in comparison to CIPD findings where close to half (49%) said managers were good at keeping employees informed about management discussion and decisions in

2021<sup>22</sup>. In our interviews, managers highlighted the importance of communication in addressing issues in early stages as critical to success. Similarly, although the collective routes seemed quite limited, senior managers reported multiple ways used to guide and communicate with staff (Figure 20). Given the reported very low union density, it is probably reasonable to conclude that the majority of organisations in the sample had a culture of employee relations premised more on individual communication and involvement at the 'shop-floor' level. Rather than more traditional mode of employee relations that also utilises collective representation and, therefore, greater input in decision making at higher levels in the organisations. Furthermore, the finding that a sizeable majority felt that they had more or less the right level of autonomy in their job (See previous section) suggests that decision-making above the workplace level is for many less of an issue. Again, these assumptions need to be tested through further investigation.



**Figure 21. Channels used to guide and communicate with staff**

If employee voice captures individuals' capacity to put their viewpoints forward about their work, then appraisals and regular meetings with managers are crucial in empowering employee voice. Our survey found that over 70% of surveyed employees had annual performance reviews and regular supervisory meetings. These findings suggest that employees do enjoy regular discussions with managers, which is particularly important in terms of performance, if appraisals are operated effectively. However, our findings also reinforce the earlier point that employee voice and employment relations are premised on individual communications.

**“Just little things that employers do can make a really big difference to how their workforce feel, rather than just say, ‘yeah’, take it seriously. Do something. You know, have somebody that trains as a Mental Health First Aid, you can do it for free, it might make the world of difference to somebody within your organisation”- Louise, Public Relations**

## Health and wellbeing

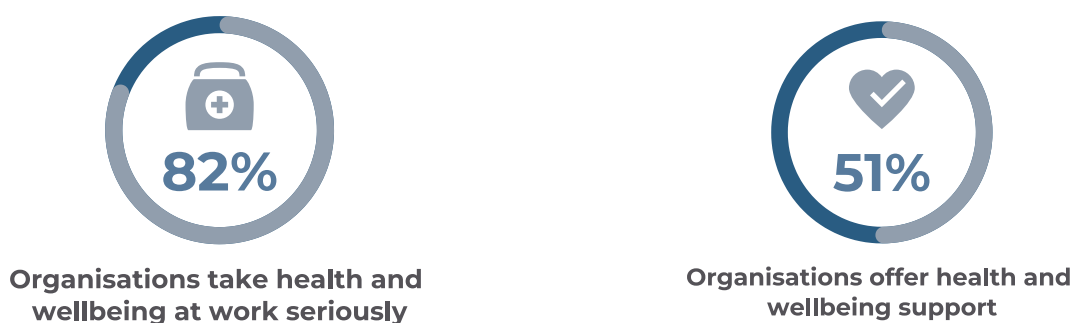
The final dimension of this report seeks to assess positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health, which is often considered as an outcome of job quality. Fundamentally, for this research, it is also impacted by the previous six dimensions of work we have so far considered. It is striking then that the findings indicate over 50% of our respondents experience stress or depression caused or made worse by work, this figure is slightly higher for women. This aligns with national research showing in 2020/21 stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 50% of all work-related ill health cases with women experiencing significantly higher levels of stress at work<sup>23</sup>. Perhaps



**Figure 22. Breakdown by gender of workplace stress**

what is more surprising given the impact of work on health and wellbeing is how it seems at odds with the 82% of employers supporting health and wellbeing and that 51% of organisations offer health and wellbeing support. It may be, as reported elsewhere, a partial answer to this could be due to a reluctance to disclose mental health issues to employers<sup>24</sup>. It is of note that over 50% of respondents have had some form of health support in the last 12 months. This reinforces the overall theme of the study that employee health and wellbeing is something that is recognised by a significant number of employers in the region. However, these findings suggest that organisations need to work harder to consider the impact of work on the health and wellbeing of their employees and consider how organisational practices and policy

are reaching employees at a 'ground level' by offering more interventions to support employee health and wellbeing and to look closely at ways of encouraging workers to disclose on a range of health issues<sup>25</sup>. Encouragingly, in our interviews we found that some employers have taken a concerted effort to look after employee wellbeing. Some



**Figure 23. Organisations viewpoints on workplace health and wellbeing**

interviewees related that health and wellbeing benefits started taking the forefront and being expanded by their company as the pandemic brought issues to the forefront. Conversely, an interviewee related how commitment from upper management to use and test out mental health support services, led to them being used and started an 'open' culture with support from management to prioritise mental health. Our work, therefore highlights a need for more than just benefit packages, but for employers to look at changing the culture in the workplace to be more open, especially in regards to mental health. It does also, by the scale of these numbers, accord with the opinion that as a country we are suffering from a mental health crisis<sup>26</sup>. Usefully, there may be evidence across the other dimensions of our good work model that point to why stress, anxiety and depression is so high at work. Specifically, that many respondents report having to work more hours, often unpaid. Also unsurprisingly, the effects on work patterns coming out of the Covid crisis could also be a reason for ongoing anxiety amongst workers. The main work factors cited by respondents in ONS surveys (2009/10-2011/12) as causing work-related stress, depression or anxiety were workload pressures, including tight deadlines and too much responsibility and a lack of managerial support; other factors identified included organisational changes at work, violence and role uncertainty (lack of clarity about job/uncertain what meant to do)<sup>27</sup>.

# Conclusion

The Work in Lancashire project aimed to capture the views and experiences of a cross-section of managers and employees in Lancashire. The research was conducted through the lens of the CIPD seven dimensions of good work, alongside subjective measures around the management of productivity. This section provides a summary of the findings, highlights what works well in Lancashire, discusses how we can enhance the experiences of those working in the region, and ultimately how we can make work more productive.

Our research highlighted that job security and relationships at work were reported positively by participants. Encouraging statistics around job security, (reflective of relatively high employment and a strong labour market at the time of the research) alongside reassuring data revealing 69% felt supported by colleagues provides an important foundation for work and employment in the region. Reassuringly overall, a sizeable majority of the survey respondents felt supported by their managers. It is also encouraging that 70% of the workforce reported their work as productive and meaningful. However, the data on meaningful and productive work also provides space to examine how we can enhance the meaning we derive from our work, and examine how management teams can look inside the nature of the job to make work more productive.

As the role of management is a catalyst for positive employee job satisfaction <sup>28,29</sup>, this report highlights that attention should be drawn towards a renewed focus on the central facets of management principles and practices to enhance job quality and productivity. Concerning findings around employee voice, work-life balance and staff development and career progression and uncertainty from respondents around understanding job requirements and skills highlight a need to prioritise effective people and line management in the region.

Fairness at work was a considerable theme of the research and is also illustrated in findings related to equality, diversity and inclusion, bullying and harassment, work intensification and long hours, and pay. Our survey found that whilst women reported they were supported by managers, more women work longer than their contracted hours. Furthermore, our survey found that employees were less satisfied with the management of conflict than managers. Ineffective management of conflict is a major detriment to both effective employee relations, staff well-being and productivity<sup>30,31</sup>.

Perhaps the most striking finding of our report is the impact that work has on the health and wellbeing of the workforce. Despite participants reporting that employers take health and wellbeing seriously, over half of our participants reported experiencing stress, anxiety or depression caused by, or made worse by work, with findings amplified for women. This data highlights the relationship between job quality, work conditions and health and wellbeing. As highlighted above, long hours, fair pay, workplace conflict, employee voice and effective management are just some of the key domains concerning health and wellbeing at work that were illustrated in the Work in Lancashire report. To build a happier, healthier, more sustainable and more productive workforce we suggest a renewed focus on enhanced people and line management practices in the region. The result can be better and more productive work, leading to a more sustainable workforce prepared to meet the challenges that lay ahead.



# Recommendations

To support the priorities of Lancashire, including focusing on ensuring a talent pipeline to meet the current and future demands of the labour market and supporting sustainable employment which boosts productivity, this report highlights the following recommendations for employers and policymakers to enhance job quality and productivity in the region;

- Have a renewed focus on the fundamentals of people management and core principles of effective line management. Provide support for line managers to carry out their management tasks effectively prioritising the dimensions of 'good work' such as pay and benefits, job design, nature of work, training and development, and employee voice.
- Pay attention to the formulation, implementation and communication of health and wellbeing policies ensuring there are clear links between policy, procedure and practice. Review existing policies or create new policies to ensure they support staff health and wellbeing (e.g. mental health, grievance and disciplinary).
- Provide support and training to help managers support employees with their health and wellbeing. Encourage managers to check in with their employees, listen to concerns and act. Consider embedding proactive interventions to safeguard the health and well-being of the workforce.
- Consider the needs of employees and the organisation to achieve secure, sustainable and productive work which embraces flexibility, employee needs and the needs of the organisation (such as hours, place and ways of working)
- Engage in regular conversations with employees about their work and working hours to ensure that workloads are achievable within contracted hours.
- Emphasize communication strategies that support the mission and values of the organisation and employee needs. Focus on communication and foster a culture of trust, openness and dialogue which embraces the involvement of employees in decision-making.
- Focus on conflict management policies and practices to ensure effective workplace relationships, fairness at work and productivity.
- Focus on inclusive policies and practices to ensure equitable and fair work. Create an inclusive work environment to ensure all voices are heard.

# References

1. Acas (2019) *Can work be both productive and good?* Acas Publications, London. (Acas Policy paper February 2019),
2. NOMIS. (2022) [Database]. Available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lep/1925185569/printable.aspx>
3. LEP [Lancashire Enterprise Partnership](2021) *Lancashire Skills and Employment Strategic Framework: 2021 Refresh Incorporating the Local Skills Report*. Available at: <https://lancashirelep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Lancashire-Skills-and-employment-strategic-framework-2021-refresh.pdf>
4. Ibid
5. Ibid. pg. 6
6. IPPR [Institute for Public Policy Research] (2022) *Health and prosperity: Introducing the IPPR Commission on health and prosperity*, April 2022. Pg. 5. Available online: <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/health-and-prosperity>
7. CIPD (2020) Good work index 2020, CIPD Publications Page. 2.
8. Taylor, M. (2017) Good work: the Taylor review of modern working practices, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
9. Irvine, G. White, D and Diffley, M. (2018). Measuring Good Work. Carnegie Trust
10. Boxall and Purcell, (2011) 'Strategy and Human Resource Management: Third Edition', pg,5. Palgrave, London.
11. CIPD (2020) Good work index 2020, CIPD Publications
12. NOMIS. (2022) [Database]. Available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lep/1925185569/printable.aspx>
13. Irvine, Gail (2020) "Can Good Work solve the productivity puzzle?" Carnegie Institute can-good-work-solve-the-productivity-puzzle.pdf (thersa.org)
14. CIPD (2020) Good work index 2020, CIPD Publications
15. Aaron De Smet, Bonnie Dowling, Bryan Hancock, and Bill Schaninger (2022) The Great Attrition is making hiring harder. Are you searching the right talent pools?, McKinsey Quarterly
16. Van de Voorde, K., Veld, M. and Van Veldhoven, M. (2016) Connecting empowerment-focused HRM and labour productivity to work engagement: the mediating role of job demands and resources Human Resource Management Journal Vol. 26 Issue 2

17. Huppert, F. A. (2009). Psychological well-being: Evidence regarding its causes and consequences. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-being*, 1, 137–164. doi:10.1111/j.1758-0854.2009.01008.x
18. James Routledge, (2021) 'Mental health at work', Penguin Business Experts.
19. CIPD (2020) Good work index 2020, CIPD Publications
20. LEP [Lancashire Enterprise Partnership](2021) *Lancashire Skills and Employment Strategic Framework: 2021 Refresh Incorporating the Local Skills Report*. Available at: <https://lancashirelep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Lancashire-Skills-and-employment-strategic-framework-2021-refresh.pdf>
21. CIPD (2021) Good Work Index 2021, CIPD Publications
22. Ibid
23. HSE, (2021) Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2021 Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf>
24. Rina Hastutia, and Andrew R. Timming, (2021) An inter-disciplinary review of the literature on mental illness disclosure in the workplace: implications for human resource management THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, VOL. 32, NO. 15, 3302-3338
25. Ibid
26. Layard, Richard and Eugene Farrell (2022) How poor mental health costs the economy billions (newstatesman.com)
27. LEP [Lancashire Enterprise Partnership](2021) *Lancashire Skills and Employment Strategic Framework: 2021 Refresh Incorporating the Local Skills Report*. Available at: <https://lancashirelep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Lancashire-Skills-and-employment-strategic-framework-2021-refresh.pdf>
28. Stephen Bevan and Cary Cooper (2022) *The healthy workforce: Enhancing wellbeing and productivity in the workers of the future*, Emerald Publishing;
29. Bennett, T., Saundry, R. and Fisher, V. (2020) *Managing employment relations*, version 7, Kogan Page Publications, London
30. Saundry, R., Fisher, V. and Kinsey, S. (2020) Disconnected human resource? Proximity and the (mis)management of workplace conflict *Human Resource Management Journal*
31. Saundry, Richard and Urwin, Peter. (2021) *Estimating the costs of workplace conflict*. ACAS . Available at: <https://www.acas.org.uk/estimating-the-costs-of-workplace-conflict-report#executive-summary%C2%A0>

# Appendix

A low-angle photograph of a modern building with large glass windows reflecting a blue sky with clouds. A dark blue diagonal overlay covers the top half of the image, and the word 'Appendix' is written in white text across it.

# Methodology

The research was carried out between September 2021 and May 2022. The project had three main elements. The first was a review of the relevant existing research, and practitioner and academic literature on employee wellbeing and its relationship with effective productivity. To contextualise this, the research design and analysis were also informed by a review of several key labour market regional and national strategic documents. In addition, relevant national statistics questions covering similar topics were reviewed for inclusion. This enabled the development of an online survey that was distributed to a cross-section of employees and managers working in the Lancashire region. The survey explored five main areas, as perceived by senior managers and conversely by employees: issues around and approaches to health and well-being; employers' approach to HR issues (including flexible working and facilitating employee voice); the effectiveness of line managers; employee job satisfaction (including recognition, reward and levels of autonomy); employee contractual terms and conditions (including working hours, job structure and job security). Key themes were then integrated into interviews which explored manager and employee perspectives on work and productivity. Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted online which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and then thematically analysed.

The survey had 216 responses, from these responses 99 identified as managers and 102 as employees. The gender ratio was 46% women and 54% men. With a sample of this size, we cannot definitively conclude as to the overall degree to which findings can be generalised or how representative they are of Lancashire as a whole. However, there was a clear consistency in the views of the survey respondents and the subsequent interviewees on the key issues that emerged from the research. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the findings based on the research offer insight into the relationship between job quality and productivity. Furthermore, the report offers a valuable understanding of the implications for management policy and practice.





**Institute for Research into Organisations,  
Work and Employment (iROWE)**

[irowersearch@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:irowersearch@uclan.ac.uk)



@iROWEUCLAN



@iROWE-UCLAN

University of Central Lancashire,  
Preston, PR1 2HE

The Institute for Research into Organisations, Work and Employment brings together businesses, academics, managers, HR professionals, union representatives and policy makers. To join or find out more about our seminars and our activities, contact: [irowersearch@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:irowersearch@uclan.ac.uk) or visit our website [www.uclan.ac.uk/irowe](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/irowe)

