

Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

Persistent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/144265>

How to cite:

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.

Manifesto for a new Quality of Working Life

Poor quality jobs and their negative consequences for worker wellbeing are frequently associated with Taylorised work and rising non-standard, often precarious, employment. Our Manifesto focuses on a new approach to Quality of Working Life (QWL) in order to improve worker wellbeing. In doing so, it outlines the need for a new measure of job quality that pays due attention to employment as well as work problems, and a new approach to practical reform that involves statutory minimum standards instead of voluntary firm action. Significantly, a receptive political-economic context currently exists to enable the implementation of this Manifesto.

Introduction

On the Embankment in London stands a memorial to Samuel Plimsoll. It was erected by the National Union of Seaman in recognition of his services to seafarers of all nations. In the nineteenth century, Plimsoll campaigned for a science-derived line on the side of ships to mark the legal limit to which they can be safely loaded. In the face of fierce opposition from vested interests, his idea was eventually adopted and enforced. Prior to its introduction ships were frequently overloaded to disastrous outcome with the loss of countless seafarers' lives. A similar moment is now here with the quality of working lives. Too many poor-quality jobs exist to the detriment of worker wellbeing. Intervention is needed to rectify this situation. This paper is a manifesto for a new Quality of Working Life (QWL). It explains why this new QWL is needed and what it would involve.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, when working lives were typified by 'standard' employment, QWL was the focal point of initiatives to improve working life generally. Driven by multi-

disciplinary social science, the QWL movement was influential in helping firms to make voluntary changes to work design and it captured the attention of policymakers worldwide. The movement faded – though did not die – as economic and political circumstances changed from the late 1970s (Guest 2021f).

We are not alone in wanting to see a new QWL. Grote and Guest (2017: 150) too have called for a renewed focus on QWL that puts worker wellbeing at its heart. We agree with much of the content of their revised QWL framework. However, as Grote and Guest recognise, alternative framings of a new QWL might exist.

Our manifesto offers that alternative. It is based on two arguments. First, the need for improved conceptual focus with any new QWL. This focus, we argue, needs to better balance the work and employment that comprise jobs. While the term ‘work’ is often used as a catch-all term that includes ‘employment’, the two are not synonymous. Work is defined as an activity performed by persons to produce goods and services for own or others’ use (ILO 1993). This work can be unpaid or paid. If the latter, it tends to fall within an employment relationship, turning workers into employees. Their employment has terms and conditions, most obviously but not only pay (Murray and Stewart 2015). It is our contention that many of the problems identified with work by the original QWL still exist but that there are new problems arising from employment-related developments. A key concern is non-standard forms of employment that are becoming increasingly prominent and complex (Stanford 2017). Thus, work and employment need to be disentangled and problems with both addressed. Second, the voluntaristic nature of the original QWL undermined its sustainability. Significant scope still exists for firms to voluntarily improve working lives through their human resource management. However not all firms are making these improvements, and some workers need protection to ensure their wellbeing. To this end, we argue for the creation of minimum standards of job quality driven by the state. As such, our Manifesto represents not an

incremental change to the old QWL but a radically different approach to the same ends. Importantly, we indicate how political and economic circumstances are now amenable to the introduction of these standards.

Our Manifesto thus addresses the weaknesses of the original QWL and offers a new approach to improving the quality of working lives while remaining wedded to the principle of applying multi-disciplinary social science to social practice and public policy (see Loveridge et al. 2017). To make our case, we first outline the original QWL and then frame the need for a new QWL. The following section then explains how job quality can be used to establish minimum standards. Finally, we highlight the now favourable political and economic context within which a policy window has emerged that is receptive to our manifesto.

The Original QWL

QWL emerged within a particular historical political-economic context. Over the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of owners and managers led to exploitation of workers, generating insecure employment and unfair wages (Westley 1979). In response, the labour movement agitated for greater employment security and trade unions bargained for more equitable pay. At the same time, the introduction of mass production involved operations characterised by strong internal divisions of labour reliant on a consistent and dependable workforce.¹ Attendance and performance requirements could be achieved more effectively by developing a stable workforce and permanent employment (Stanford 2017). By the 1950s, problems related to security and pay subsided in most industrialised countries as the standard employment relationship (SER) provided permanent full-time employment with a single employer (Bosch 2004).²

Expansion of the SER was also influenced by broader political-economic forces (Kalleberg 2009). Keynesianism promoted full-employment and post-war unemployment was low. Tight labour markets encouraged employers to recruit and retain workers by offering permanent jobs rather than risking supply based on contingent or subcontracted workers (Grantham 1994). Additionally, labour market institutions reinforced the SER, leading it to become the normative benchmark. According to Stanford (2017:389): ‘Labour laws defined rights and responsibilities associated with employment, on the assumption that a ‘job’ entailed certain reciprocal expectations of fairness and stability.’ Moreover, trade union and bargaining laws were based on similar assumptions of a stable, consistent workforce based in a single enterprise. Subsequently, social welfare programmes were shaped around the SER (Vosko et al. 2009).

Whilst the SER addressed employers’ needs, new challenges emerged for their employees. Mass production and Taylorism generated worker dissatisfaction: ‘widespread affluence made people forget about the old problems of security and equity. They now wanted satisfying, interesting and relevant work’ (Westley 1979: 116). In this context QWL emerged. Research informing QWL began in the 1940s, centred on productivity and efficiency problems in the coal industry. The solution, Trist and Bamforth (1951) surmised, was to make workplace technical and social systems fit together better. Socio-technical systems theory suggests that focusing on either the technical system, as per Taylorism, or the social system, as per human relations, yields suboptimal outcomes. Instead, Trish and Bamforth argued, both were necessary.

Early QWL was underpinned by the ‘psychological requirements’ needed *in work*, e.g. through small-group working. However, the list of requirements soon expanded beyond employees’ immediate work to encompass needs provided *from work*, e.g. ‘social relevance’ and ‘a desirable future’ (Emery and Thorsrud 1976). Illustratively, by the 1970s Walton (1973) was listing eight characteristics of QWL: adequate and fair compensation; safe and healthy working

conditions; opportunity to use and develop human capacities; opportunities for continued growth and security; social integration in the work organisation; constitutionalism in the work organisation; work and the total life space; and the social relevance of work life.

Two points are important here. First, whilst the list covered both work and employment, in practice, work design became the primary focus to improve worker satisfaction and organisational efficiency/productivity (e.g. Cherns 1975). In the context of full employment and the SER, secure employment was largely taken for granted. Second, QWL had become a ‘work+’ approach, extending beyond the workplace to address wider societal issues (Walton 1973). Subsequently, the end goal of QWL became ambiguous – was it to provide job satisfaction or workers’ emancipation?

Nevertheless, by the early 1970s, QWL was hugely influential, with numerous studies and work design research centres in Canada, France, Norway and UK (Grote and Guest 2017). However, reflecting on his research (and attendance at a NATO-sponsored QWL conference), Guest (2021f) notes that the conceptual meandering and lack of agreed focus were becoming problems for the QWL movement, particularly effecting its implementation. As research continued, these problems became more apparent and more difficult to resolve. Illustratively, Burchell et al. (2014) note the confusing terminology – often used interchangeably – ranging from ‘quality of working life’, ‘quality of work’ to ‘quality of employment’; all without clear definitional distinction. Such terms reflected the organicism of the concept and different foci taken up by different disciplines as interest and use of QWL migrated from psychology to sociology and industrial relations.

Another problem was that many outcomes of QWL failed to be sustained. Workplace experimentation relied on voluntary employer participation. Involving employers meant that work redesign was slow and resource intensive. Moreover, some managers proved intransigent,

reluctant to cede power and control of work, and trade unions insisted on focusing on the pay outcomes from work redesign, with other potential outcomes sidelined (Guest 2021f).

With the economic slump of the mid-1970s, companies' interest in QWL as the route to efficiency/productivity gains became displaced by interest in other concepts, including transformational leadership (Guest 2021f). Changing economic and political circumstances – the Oil Crisis followed by depression and the emergence of neo-liberal-inspired governments – also affected government interest in QWL. The so-called 'Golden Age' was coming to an end and the SER began to unravel (Stanford 2017). Whilst pockets of interest remained in some countries, as an international movement, QWL fell away. Practical gains in work design proved to be brief and superficial, too dependent upon the voluntarism of now uninterested companies.

Reframing the need for a new QWL

Grote and Guest (2017: 149) recently argued for 'rekindling' QWL to promote employee wellbeing. They argue that Walton's (1973) core characteristics of QWL remain relevant, making just two additions: 'individual proactivity' and 'flexible working'. Proactivity involves having control over work activities without too much employment risk being shifted onto the worker, while flexible working involves control over when and where work is done. Thus, what Grote and Guest add is having the type of control over work that is a key legal test of self-employment – the capacity to decide what work is done, when, where and how³ – while seemingly remaining in employment. This call is laudable but whilst work and employment continue to be offered as constituents of their renewed, as with the old, QWL, it is work that is again the primary focus. Indicatively perhaps, the example provided by Grote and Guest of an application of their new QWL is again work design.

We agree that work design needs to be improved. Too many workplaces in advanced economies remain Taylorist. Approximately 20 per cent of UK workplaces are Taylorised, with a further 21 per cent ‘constrained’ workplaces, with high cognitive expectations of workers but extremely low autonomy. The EU-27 average is 24 per cent and 24 per cent respectively (Mako and Illessy 2015). Whilst lacking national-level quantification, research indicates that Taylorism also persists in Australian workplaces, with some managers ‘habitually run[ning] their outlets using industrial-age factory principles akin to scientific management’ (Gould 2013:325). Similarly, a version of Taylorism, McDonaldization, thrives in many US firms (and beyond, globally) (Ritzer 2010). There is still an important task to be completed therefore in (re)designing work in many organisations in advanced economies. Such workplaces position workers as a disposable asset rather than a resource and thereby intentionally constrain human capabilities and capacities (Bryson 2007). These workplaces also generate political disaffection. In the UK, poor work can be linked, for example, to a propensity to vote for Brexit (Goodwin and Heath 2016) and similar developments in other EU countries have created concerns about the future of the European project (Eurofound 2018b). Similarly, in the US poor work has been linked to the rise of populism/Trump and threats to democracy (Blanchflower 2019). Work still matters therefore as a focus of intervention.

The key issue now, however, is to apply any new QWL more firmly to employment. Whilst most EU workers still have standard forms of employment, the proportion has dropped and non-standard employment (non-SER) has risen. This non-SER has four main types: temporary, part-time and self-employment, and employment with multi-employer arrangements. It includes precarious/contingent work, agency work and independent contracting (Stanford 2016). Recently it has come to include zero-hours contracts, at least in the UK. Huge increases in temporary employment have occurred in some countries, often associated with agency working. Approximately 40 per cent of young people in Europe are ‘trapped’ in low paid,

temporary jobs and only 20 per cent of temporary workers have been able to find full-time jobs since 2012 (Alderman 2017). Similarly, there is a clear rise in some countries of self-employment, often hard to disentangle from ‘bogus’ or ‘fake’ self-employment (Kalleberg 2018). Part-time employment has risen in almost all EU countries, with some being involuntary, strongly associated with low pay and often irregular and undesirable hours (Eurofound 2018a).

Nationally, non-SER ranges from ten per cent in Hungary to more than 40 per cent in the Netherlands. Across Anglo-Saxon countries, around half of the workforce have a SER and half non-SER (Lewchuk et al. 2013). In UK, around 3.7m workers have insecure contracts (TUC 2019), with nearly one million workers on zero-hours contracts, a number which has increased dramatically over the 2010s (ONS 2020). During the last decade, almost all new (around 9m) jobs created in the US were non-standard with no net increase in SER (Katz and Krueger 2016). In Australia, around 33 per cent of employees were temporary in 2015 (Lass and Wooden 2019) and non-SER accounted for almost half the workforce in 2018 (Ai Group 2018). Consequently, Hipp et al. (2015) argue that non-SER has become the new normal. Workers in such fractured employment can experience low pay and poor prospects and are insufficiently covered by labour laws, collective bargaining arrangements and welfare support (Standing 2011).

This non-SER employment has clear negative consequences for employee wellbeing, particularly physical and psychological health. Although variations exist, non-SER is frequently associated with poor mental health for example. A review by de Witte et al. (2016) of longitudinal studies found clear evidence of a causal impact of job insecurity on health and wellbeing. Belgian data show that poor general and mental health are associated with precarious employment and at significantly higher levels than for standard employment (Van Aerden et al. 2017). Swedish data similarly show that perceived job insecurity has adverse general health effects on workers in permanent and temporary employment (Virtanen et al.

2011). Over 80 per cent of the 133 studies in a series of meta-reviews by Quinlan and Bohle (2015) found a negative association between precarious work and worker wellbeing, in this case physical health and safety. They conclude that ‘there is a strong body of scientific evidence on the adverse health effects of job insecurity and precarious work’ (p.69). Moreover, they highlight growing evidence of spillover effects on workers’ non-work lives and families, including high-risk behaviours such as drug use. For their families, low pay and consequent in-work poverty results in more children being raised in poor households, effecting children’s life chances and increasing inter-generational risks of poverty.

The new QWL should not abandon the work redesign aspirations of the old QWL, and those of Grote and Guest, but it must more clearly engage with (re)emergent problems with employment. The challenge for a new QWL is to affect improvements to both work *and* employment, and ensure that previous blockages to making and sustaining improvements are addressed and, moreover, that any gains cannot be easily reversed. This task might usefully draw upon recent developments regarding job quality and from which minimum standards can be derived.

Measuring job quality and establishing minimum standards

The importance of job quality has long been recognised by advanced economies’ inter-governmental bodies (e.g. ILO 1999). Recently however, interest has intensified, partly because of awareness that there is no trade-off between job creation and job quality (Osterman 2012) and also because promoting job quality stimulates competitiveness (EC 2012). In 2015, the new UN Sustainable Development Goal 8 cited the goal of creating decent work and the G20 Ankara Declaration committed the leading advanced economies to creating better jobs for all. In 2017, the European Commission’s new European Pillar of Social Rights included a

commitment to creating fair working conditions.⁴ Some individual member countries have also made their own pledges to improve job quality. For example, in 2018 the UK Government published its *Good Work Plan* (HM Government 2018) in response to its *Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices* (Taylor et al. 2017).

What is striking about these commitments is that they argue for improving job quality without offering a measure of it. A measure is needed to enable improvement to be assessed and for future targets for improvement to be specified. As yet, however, there is no scientific consensus on that measure. There are two related problems. First, there is a conceptual cornucopia, for example, ‘decent work’ and ‘fair work’ as well as ‘QWL’. Whilst these terms overlap, they typically have their own origins and uses. For example, ‘Fair Work’ in Australia centres on provision of minimum standards of employment (and only employment). ‘Fair Work’ in Scotland centres on promotion of social partnership, both as a feature of, and to support progressive workplaces (Fair Work Convention 2016). Second, there is a plethora of measures. Different concepts and disciplines use different indicators: economists favour pay, sociologists favour skill and control at work and, currently, psychologists favour job satisfaction. Moreover, single and multiple indicators are variously used, including by the same governmental bodies; usually driven by data availability (Findlay et al. 2013). This variety disables comparative and longitudinal analyses and hampers effective policy development. A single, agreed measure is needed.

By way of response, Warhurst et al. (2017) have suggested that these terms can be considered a family of concepts, namely ‘job quality’. In terms of developing measures, they note that research illustrates several approaches but the one that has gained consensus involves literature reviews of international, multi-disciplinary research to identify common, job-only-focused

items across work and employment, and which ‘have a clear and direct impact on the wellbeing of workers’ (see Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011: 2). Adopting this approach led to the identification of seven dimensions of job quality: terms of employment; pay and benefits; job design and the nature of work; social support and cohesion; health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing; work-life balance; and voice and representation. Each includes objective and subjective sub-indicators. For example, pay and benefits includes items on actual pay received (objective indicator) and perceived appropriateness of that pay (subjective indicator). These measures have been adopted by the UK’s Chartered Institute for Personnel & Development (CIPD, 2018)⁵ and recommended for UK Government use by the Measuring Job Quality Working Group established to deliver on the recommendation of the *Taylor Review* that the UK Government adopt a standard measure of job quality (MJQWG 2018).

Significantly, these measures emerge out of a wide range of international, multi-disciplinary social science research, capturing common measures across the family of concepts (see Warhurst et al. 2017). Given that range, they are applicable beyond the UK. They also have the acceptance of key stakeholders, including trade unions and employers, and have demonstrable real-world relevance (see MJQWG 2018). Subsequently, they offer a consensual approach to deriving an evidence-based measure of job quality and, in turn, improving employee wellbeing. Covering both work and employment, these measures offer a framework for both conceiving a new QWL and, unlike the past, the possibility of measuring progress to its achievement. Over time, data gathered will enable analysis of job quality trends. This data will help identify aspects of job quality that deteriorate or remain low and require improvement, for example pay or work-life balance or, germane to our manifesto for a new QWL, employment contract statuses.

This measure also enables development of a framework of minimum standards across work and employment to provide a solid floor to protect the most vulnerable workers who currently lack adequate protection (Standing 2011). Bad jobs, we argue, are those that are detrimental to workers' wellbeing. If the tipping point into that detriment can be identified, a baseline can be established for each dimension, much like the Plimsoll Line. Below the baseline job quality is detrimental to wellbeing. Job quality at or above the line is at least neutral to wellbeing or ameliorative of it.

We recognise that the baselines for each dimension need to be established evidentially, requiring another literature review of international, multi-disciplinary research to identify the point at which the quality of each dimension tips into being detrimental to worker wellbeing; aided by bearing in mind that it is easier to discern and agree what makes a bad job than a good job (Findlay et al. 2017). These baselines will establish the minimum standards for each dimension. Whilst this task is beyond the scope of this paper, we can suggest some guiding principles and potential examples. In terms of the principles, we suggest that any minimum standard: is quickly and easily understood; has a clear underpinning rationale; is objectively measurable; is actionable by employers; be presented in an easy-to-read format as a complement to employment contracts; and enables compliance that is easy to discern externally.

In terms of examples, we recognise that, as each dimension comprises multiple sub-indicators, multiple minima may exist for each dimension, though we argue that each minimum standard would need to be based on 'the essential characteristics of jobs that meet workers' needs' (Eurofound 2012:10) rather than their preferences, which can be driven by their individual demographics and circumstances (Knox et al. 2015). The minimum standard for pay, for example, could be based on a living wage. If employers cannot or will not pay a living wage, their business model is unsustainable for both the individual worker and host government.

Either the worker's wellbeing is unmet and immediately or gradually diminished or the state needs to provide a remedial 'social wage' through welfare. The living wage does not disable employers offering or unions bargaining higher wages, it simply provides a wage floor below which no employer can go. Aspects of job design and the nature of work might be trickier. Whilst a statutory right to employer-provided minimum training can be easily quantified and established, determining how much task variety is needed not to 'extinguish the individual', as Davis (1972:427) put it in his exposition of socio-technical systems, is less easy. However, it could presumably be attempted by drawing on an updated version of the psychology research that influenced the QWL pioneers.

Establishing these minimum standards with statutory regulation overcomes the weaknesses and challenges that characterised the original QWL (Guest 2021f). However it does not eliminate employer choice. Some employers are already willing and able to offer good job quality and research can draw out their lessons and subsequent actions for other employers. Others, willing but unable, might want to improve job quality but have worries about its practical business implications or just want advice/guidance, including SMEs that typically possess limited managerial capacity and capabilities (Edwards and Ram 2021f). Nonetheless, we would also suggest that large firms are likely to need some support. This group can be directed to the high road, encouraged by government and supported by action researchers, as happened previously in the US through the National Training Laboratories and in the UK through the Tavistock Institute for example (Burnes and Cooke 2012). For both groups of employers, minimum standards would provide a benchmark above which they can develop better jobs. The third group of employers deliberately premise their business models on poor job quality, failing to meet worker needs and detrimentally impacting worker wellbeing. The shortfall in job quality often requires state-funded remedial actions either through welfare or healthcare support. Market-based approaches to changing this employer behaviour have not worked (Murray and

Stewart 2015). As persistent low roaders, these employers need to have that road closed off (Carré et al. 2012). The imposition of statutory minimum standards of job quality is the obvious roadblock. It would provide an important and necessary solid floor for the wellbeing of workers, below which employers could not drop. In this respect it would ‘correct’ any deficit in current worker wellbeing and employer behaviour, and shape the behaviour of others, whilst enabling employers who currently offer good jobs to continue to do so.

As pointed out by Quinlan and Sheldon (2011), statutory minimum standards include both substantive conditions and procedural rights. Substantive conditions include wages and hours of work, and occupational health and safety (OHS) standards. Procedural rights include worker rights to collectively organise, bargain and take industrial action. It must be noted that statutory minimum standards are not without limitations as regulation is often ‘deficient, eroding and poorly enforced’ note Sheldon and Quinlan (2011: 24). Illustratively, existing standards may fail to address significant changes in work arrangements, including work intensification associated with outsourcing, privatisation, and downsizing, thereby enabling employers to evade or bypass existing standards (e.g. Wahl 2011). Equally, Maconachie and Goodwin (2010: 419) indicate that employer ‘evasion of workers’ entitlements is arguably a calculated business decision prompted or enabled in part by non-unionised workplaces and under-resourced enforcement agencies. To prevent ‘regulatory failure’ involving inadequate minimum standards or inadequate enforcement, Quinlan and Sheldon (2011: 12) assert that there ‘needs to be a refashioning of the scope of labour standards to meet emerging work practices and to ensure that the standards’ critical role in social protection is not circumvented by stealth or omission’. A point to which we return later.

An idea whose time has come?

To be clear, our new QWL is not a new push of the old approach. Given the acknowledged shortcomings of the original QWL, what we suggest is more radical. It is a set of statutory minimum standards across the key dimensions of work and employment that comprise job quality. These dimensions are common across multi-disciplinary social science and have gained stakeholder acceptance. Whilst there are challenges, we believe that history has turned again, with a political economic context that is now favourable to our manifesto.

For ideas to feature in the ‘decision agenda’ of government, Kingdon (1984, 1995) argues that ‘problems’, ‘policies’ and ‘politics’ need to ‘couple’ or align. Events – cyclical and otherwise e.g. elections or crises respectively – can trigger an alignment. At this point a ‘policy window’ opens that allows for an idea to become policy relevant and translate into politicians’ decision-making. Such a window has opened for our manifesto. Job quality is currently considered a problem in the advanced economies and a search for policy solutions exists driven by pressing political developments. Most obviously, the UK Government and European Commission are concerned with a perceived crisis of legitimacy, as workers ‘left behind’ in the process of globalisation and economic recovery after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) are becoming discontented and finding expression at the ballot box. As we have noted, Brexit is a salient example (Goodwin and Heath 2016). In response, successive UK Prime Ministers May and Johnson have responded by demanding a country that ‘works for all’ and ‘level[s] up’ respectively (May 2016; BBC 2019) and, following the *Taylor Review*, the UK Government now accepts that ‘equal importance should be placed on the quality and quantity of work’ (HM Government, 2018: 21). Similarly, as right-wing populism has emerged in a number of Member States, the European Commission has realised that EU economic integration (through the euro) needs to be coupled with social integration. It has established the new European Pillar of Social Rights to provide ‘a compass’ for a renewed push to improve the working conditions of EU citizens to better cohere them to the European project (EC 2018). A key issue is precarious

employment (EC 2019). ‘In the future,’ the EC states clearly, ‘greater attention should be given to the aspect of the quality of work’ (p.7) (‘work’ being, as we noted earlier, a shorthand for jobs). Worried too about the lack of social inclusiveness in member states’ economies, the OECD now argues that its previous call for active labour market policies is insufficient and that member states need to place more policy emphasis on job quality as a solution (OECD 2018).

What is significant about current governmental interest in job quality is that it includes a concern with standards. The Measuring Job Quality Working Group (2018) established following the UK’s *Taylor Review* highlighted value in exploring a minimum job quality standard. Moreover, the European Commission is introducing a new Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive that will require all EU employees to receive written information about their jobs, and which might be a precursor to the emergence of minimum standards (Kiss, 2018). In the US, Osterman and Shulman’s (2011) analysis of new green or, in US parlance, ‘weatherisation’ jobs involving home energy efficiency improvements reveals how failure to develop adequate wages, working conditions and career structures is linked to the absence of statutory minima. They conclude that ‘the bottom line is that without a clear federal government position and a strong set of federal standards, the pace of progress is slow and very uneven and unlikely to have a broad national impact’ (p.117-118). Similarly, employment law experts and international advisors assert that the state should intervene to set minimum standards that ‘set the outer limit to exploitation’ and thereby prevent the ‘higgling of the market’ that leads to ‘socially undesirable and unjust outcomes’ (Murray and Stewart 2015: 41). These developments reflect a political-economic context in which state intervention to improve job quality is, for the first time in many years, possible and within which there exists recognition that statutory minima would be useful.

Such interventions have precedent. As Quinlan and Bohle (2015) point out, identification of job-induced health problems in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to regulatory interventions by the state. Cast as ‘wellbeing’, we would argue that the same needs and responses hold today in relation to the problems with work and employment. As the same authors point out, precarious employment – and Taylorist work organisation we would add – are not economically determined, inevitable or irreversible. Indeed, they note, ‘the decline of precarious employment and growth of permanent employment in industrialised societies during the 20th century ... was not an inevitable result of market forces or technology. Rather, it was a historically contingent outcome shaped by regulatory and institutional pressures’ (Quinlan et al. 2001: 516). History also shows that such interventions can work (Murray and Stewart 2015). For example, a strongly regulated, centralised system operated during most of the 20th century in Australia, providing legally binding industrial awards that prescribed minimum wages, other entitlements, and employment conditions including hours of work. It privileged the SER (and the male breadwinner model), reflecting the political-economic context at the time, and imposed restrictions on the use of the non-SER by employers. Accordingly, Murray and Stewart argue that awards limited managerial controls over the labour process, reducing potential worker alienation, work intensity and health and safety concerns, and ensuring a measure of employee autonomy, control and dignity. This system was largely dismantled by successive Federal governments from the early 1990s in Australia (Knox 2009).

Of course some statutory minima currently exist in the advanced economies, the most obvious being those for the minimum wage and occupational health and safety. However, whilst important, they are insufficient for current needs, we suggest. First, these minima are uneven and fragmented: they exist for some dimensions of job quality but not others and take-up varies by country. For example, many but not all countries have statutory minimum wages: the UK does, and in the EU so does Germany but not Italy for example. Where they exist, it is important

to note their effect on firms: encouraging employers to adjust their behaviour to make productivity improvements, which in turn raise firm performance (Riley and Bondibene 2015). As such, they can be mutually beneficial for employees and employers. In other countries, such as Australia, minimum standards exist for wages as well as working hours and leave entitlements, for example. However, these employment (but not work) minima can vary between awards, enterprise agreements and the National Employment Standards (see Fair Work 2020). Fragmentation is further compounded by responsibility for enforcement being distributed across different government departments/agencies. In the UK at least seven enforcement bodies exist, including three different, siloed, central government departments (BEIS/Home Office 2019). In the EU, existing laws and Directives about work and employment have developed ad hoc and piecemeal and with responsibility likewise dispersed across different agencies (Auböck and Prammer 2020).

Second, for those minimum standards that do exist there can be compliance issues. Thus, measuring job quality and creating minimum standards are important, but not sufficient. Monitoring, enforcement and sanctions are necessary to ensure compliance. Current practice is not always good. Monitoring would be achieved best through comprehensive, periodic analyses involving employee surveys. However no dedicated, large-scale job quality survey exists within the UK or elsewhere that covers the seven dimensions. Options would include revising existing surveys such as the internationally adopted Labour Force Survey or developing new bespoke national surveys (MJQWG 2018); the latter option is now being pursued in the UK by the CIPD, though is still developing (CIPD 2018). Enforcement with sanctions is likewise limited. For example, as a result of budget restrictions and limited resourcing, US employers face a low probability (0.008) of being investigated. Even if an employer is investigated, the consequences of non-compliance have been minimal for most US employers; less than two per cent of all investigations over 1998-2008 incurred financial

penalties, averaging US\$9218 (Weil 2011). In 2018, the UK's Employment Agency Standards Authority had nine inspectors covering 18,000 employment agencies. Only 14 prosecutions had been made for non-payment of the minimum wage in almost 20 years. Moreover, until recently fines for non-payment were, as with the US, paltry and did little to incentivise compliance (Roberts 2018). While, from 2019, the EU has a Labour Authority, its remit is narrow: to monitor only cross-border working and its efficacy in that task untested as yet⁶.

However as Fine and Gordon (2012: 205) opine, 'Just as there is nothing inevitable about bad jobs, there is nothing inevitable about faulty regulation.' We believe that establishing an adequately resourced and empowered single agency with regulatory responsibility for all of the dimensions of job quality and their minimum standards is necessary. Having a single agency will enable co-ordination of the minima across the dimensions of job quality, provide economies of scale that might address the resourcing problem and provide a 'one-stop' shop for workers looking for information or redress. Part of the remit of this agency should extend to monitoring and adjusting for unintended consequences in employer behaviour following the introduction of the minimum standards. In the EU there are suggestions that the monitoring and enforcement remit of the new European Labour Authority should be expanded to encompass all work within the EU (see Warhurst et al. 2020). In this respect, we need to be clear that whilst our new QWL seeks to improve worker wellbeing within firms, the state has to be the guarantor of minimum standards, measuring and monitoring job quality, and ensuring compliance and making any necessary adjustments to the minima. If the state acts as guarantor but has too few resources to adequately monitor job quality, other actors can support the state and make good the resource shortfall. Fine and Gordon (2012) suggest a partnership approach involving employer representative organisations and unions where they exist, and civil society organisation where they do not. Interestingly, employer representative organisations often champion minimum standards in specific sectors in order to ensure a level playing field for

their members (Murray and Stewart 2015). For these partnerships to work, we suggest that they must be formalised, sustained and active and, again, having a single agency to coordinate these potential partners will be helpful.

Concluding remarks

Conceptually, our manifesto for a new QWL maintains a focus on work while concomitantly, and more substantively, enveloping employment. It is necessary because, despite past QWL interventions involving management and trade unions, wellbeing problems with work persist and new problems with employment have emerged. Where other means have failed, intervention falls to the state, most obviously through legislation (see also Findlay et al. 2017). By tightening conceptualisation of QWL and shifting responsibility for its implementation and continuance to the state, we redress problems with the original QWL and, through it, provide an approach to improving work *and* employment that is more likely to be sustained. We acknowledge that this approach does not explicitly address wider social change. However, following Quinlan and Bohle's (2015) point about precarious work having spill-over effects into non-work and family life, it is an approach that will likely have wider, if indirect, societal impact. Importantly, as we noted, putting these rights and responsibilities on a statutory footing has successful precedent. Moreover, we believe that the political economic context is now favourable to our new QWL.

Our new QWL has a clear purpose: to support worker wellbeing in the workplace. The statutory measures that we advocate would provide a solid floor of objective job quality. Work and employment practices that drop below the minima would have a detrimental effect on employee wellbeing. By the same token we also suggest that job quality dropping below this floor would also have a detrimental impact on organisational performance, so employers too can benefit

(Barling et al. 2003). Such an outcome would help develop a business case for the introduction and maintenance of the new statutory minimum standards.

Additionally, our new QWL will need to be capable of absorbing and/or withstanding political and economic challenges, including unforeseen challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. If there is no trade-off between job quality and job quantity (Davoine et al. 2008) and job quality offers a route to economic recovery and growth (OECD 2018) not just general competitiveness (EC 2012), it will be vital not just to maintain current levels of job quality but improve them following the economic shock wrought by COVID-19. Minimum standards will ensure the first task and provide a springboard to the second, as we noted earlier regarding employer choice and union negotiation. Other, structural, challenges include the impact of new digital technology, not just on job destruction but also job quality, particularly in relation to so-called gig work in which some companies take advantage of current regulatory loopholes (Healy et al. 2017). This technology also enables employers to connect with the global oversupply of labour in relatively unregulated, lower cost destinations dominated by substandard jobs (Wood et al. 2019). Consequently, whilst it is individual countries that would agree to minimum standards (even in the EU), these standards will need to be internationally transferable in order to be truly meaningful. In this respect, inter-governmental bodies, including the ILO, would be needed as active participants.

We believe that our manifesto will help shape and accelerate the direction of travel for policymakers in the advanced economies. Similar policy momentum is gathering for the developing economies out of similar concern for growing employment ‘casualisation’ in the wake of the GFC (see Cazes and Verick 2013) and likely post-COVID-19. For this reason, for advocates of QWL who stepped into the shadows in the 1970s because history seemed to be against them and who are now re-emerging, there is new hope. But, as we have argued in this paper, the scope and type of intervention has to change. Samuel Plimsoll had to fight hard and

long but time also came for his idea. These days it is a non-issue, simply a common-sense application of science that helps save seafarers' lives. The introduction of minimum standards of job quality should be viewed the same way – a simple idea, supported by social science that, on reflection, could one day also be regarded as just plain common sense. If the introduction of the Plimsoll Line saved lives, our manifesto will hopefully improve working lives.

Endnotes

1. Hence Ford's introduction of the \$5 day to recruit and retain workers (Beynon 1973).
2. At least for men. Such jobs tended to be male dominated, leading to suggestions that perceptions of what comprises good jobs is gendered (Wright 2015).
3. See <https://www.gov.uk/employment-status/selfemployed-contractor>
4. See respectively: <http://g20.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Declaration-G20-Labour-and-Employment-Ministers-Meeting-Ankara.pdf>;
<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-8-decent-work-and-economic-growth.html>
5. Featured in the CIPD's new annual *UK Working Lives Survey* (CIPD 2018).
6. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1414&langId=en>

References

- Ai Group (2018) Casual work and part-time work in Australia in 2018.
https://cdn.aigroup.com.au/Economic_Indicators/Research_Notes/2018/Ai_Group_casual_work_June_2018.pdf

Alderman L (2017) Feeling pressure all the time' on Europe's treadmill of temporary work. *New York Times*, February 9, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/business/europe-jobs-economy-youth-unemployment-millennials.html>

Auböck M. and Prammer D (2020) 'EU Economic Policy Coordination, Recommendations and their Implementation Score', 25 years of EU Northern Enlargement event, Oesterreichische Nationalbank/European Money & Finance Forum, Vienna.

Barling J, Kelloway E and Iverson R (2003) High quality work, job satisfaction, and occupational injuries. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88(1):276–283.

BBC (2019) 'General election: Boris Johnson – “We are going to unite and level up”', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/election-2019-50787601>

Beynon H (1973) *Working for Ford*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Blanchflower D (2019) *Not Working: Where Have All the Good Jobs Gone?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bohle P, Knox A, Noone J, McNamara M, Rafalski J & Quinlan M (2017) Work organization, bullying and intention to leave in the hospitality industry. *Employee Relations* 39 (4):446-458.

Bosch G (2004) Towards a New Standard Employment Relationship in Western Europe? *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 42(4): 617-36.

Bryson J (2007) 'Human resource development of developing human capacity', in Bolton S and Houlihan M (Eds) *Searching for the Human in Human Resource Management*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Burchell B, Sehnbruch K, Piasna A and Agloni N (2014) The quality of employment and decent work: Definitions, methodologies and ongoing debates. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 38(2): 459-477.
- Burnes B and Cooke B (2012) The past, present and future of organisational development: Taking the long view. *Human Relations* 65(11): 1395-1429.
- Carré F, Findlay P, Tilly C, and Warhurst C (2012) Job quality: Scenarios, analysis and interventions. In C Warhurst, F Carré P, Findlay & C Tilly (Eds), *Are bad jobs inevitable?* London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cazes S and Verick S (2013) *The Labour Markets of Emerging Economies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chartered Institute for Personnel & Development (CIPD) (2018) *UK Working Lives: The CIPD Job Quality Index*. London: CIPD.
- Cherns A (1975) Perspectives on The Quality of Working Life. *Journal of Occupational Psychology* 48(3):155-167.
- Davis L (1972) The coming crisis of production management: technology and organisations. In L Davis and J Taylor (Eds) *Design of Jobs*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Davoine, L Erhel C and Guergoat-Lariviere M (2008) Monitoring quality in work: European employment strategy indicators and beyond. *International Labour Review* 147(2–3): 185-210.
- De Witte H, Pienaar J and De Cuyper N (2016) Review of 30 Years of Longitudinal Studies on the Association Between Job Insecurity and Health and Well-Being: Is There Causal Evidence? *Australian Psychologist* 51(1): 18-31.

Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)/Home Office (2019) *Good Work Plan*. London: BEIS.

Edwards P and Ram M (2021f) Job Quality and the Small Firm. In Warhurst C, Mathieu C and Dwyer R (Eds) *Oxford Handbook of Job Quality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Emery F and Thorsrud E (1976) *Democracy at Work*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff.

Eurofound (2012) *Trends in job quality in Europe*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

Eurofound (2018a) *Does employment status matter for job quality?* Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

Eurofound (2018b) *Upward convergence in the EU: Concepts, measurements and indicators*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

European Commission (2002) *Employment in Europe 2002*. Brussels: DG Employment and Social Affairs.

European Commission (2012) *Europe 2020*, <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/>

European Commission (2019) *Assessment of the Europe 2020 Strategy Joint Report of the Employment Committee (EMCO) And Social Protection Committee (SPC)*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission (EC) (2018). *Monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights*, COM (2018) 130 final. Brussels: European Commission.

Fair Work (2020) <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/employee-entitlements/national-employment-standards>

Fair Work Convention (2016) *Fair Work Framework*. Glasgow: FWC.

Findlay P, Kalleberg A and Warhurst C (2013) The challenge of job quality. *Human Relations* 66(4): 441-451.

Findlay P, Warhurst C, Keep E, Lloyd C (2017) Opportunity Knocks? The Possibilities and Levers for Improving Job Quality. *Work and Occupations* 44(1): 3-22.

Fine, J and Gordon, J (2012) Unpacking the logics of labour standards enforcement: An alternative approach. In C Warhurst, P Findlay, C Tilly and F Carré (eds) *Are bad jobs inevitable?* London: Palgrave.

Goodwin M and Heath O (2016) Brexit vote explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Gould A (2013) Employer policy and manager practice in the fast food industry: a match made in heaven or a loveless marriage. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 51(2): 307-329.

Grantham G (1994) Economic history and the history of labour markets. In: Grantham G and MacKinnon M (eds) *Labour Market Evolution*. London: Routledge.

Grote G and Guest D (2017) The case for reinvigorating quality of working life research. *Human Relations* 70(2):149-167.

Guest D (2021f) 'The Quality of Working Life' in Warhurst C, Mathieu C and Dwyer R (Eds) *Oxford Handbook of Job Quality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Healy J, Nicholson D and Pekarek A (2017) Should we take the gig economy seriously? *Labour and Industry* 27(3):232-248.

Hipp L, Bernhardt J and Allmendinger J (2015) Institutions and the prevalence of nonstandard employment. *Socio-Economic Review* 13(2):351-377.

HM Government (2018) *Good Work: A response to the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*. London: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

International Labour Organization (ILO) (1993) Fifteenth international conference of labour statisticians, report of the conference. ICLS/15/D.6. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization (ILO) (1999) *Report of the Director-General: Decent Work*. Geneva: ILO.

Kalleberg A (2009) Precarious work, insecure workers: employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review* 74(1):1–22.

Kalleberg A (2018) *Precarious Lives*. Cambridge: Polity.

Katz L and Krueger A (2016) ‘The Rise of Alternative Work Arrangements and the “Gig” Economy’. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/306279776/Katz-and-Krueger-Alt-Work-Deck> (accessed 2 May 2019).

Kingdon J (1984/1995) *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. London: Little Brown/Longman

Kiss M (2018) [Ensuring more transparent and predictable working conditions](#). European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing. Members’ Research Service PE 628.269. Brussels: EPRS.

Knox A (2009) Better the devil you know? An analysis of employers’ bargaining preferences in the Australian hotel industry. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 51(1): 25-44.

Knox A, Warhurst C, Nickson D and Dutton E (2015) More than a feeling: using hotel room attendants to improve understanding of job quality. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 26(12): 1547-67.

Lass I and Wooden M (2019) The structure of the wage gap for temporary workers: Evidence from Australian panel data. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 57(3): 453-478.

Lewchuk W, Lafleche M and Dyson D (2013) It's More Than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-being. Toronto: United Way.

Loveridge R Willman P and Deery S (2017) 60 years of Human Relations'. *Human Relations* 60(2): 1873-1888.

Maconachie G and Goodwin M (2010) Employer evasion of workers' entitlements 1986–1995: Why, what and whose? *Journal of Industrial Relations* 52(4):419–437.

Mako C and Illesy M (2015) Coexistence of high-quality human resources and poor organisational capabilities: Why do Post-socialist countries lag behind the EU-15 in public sector innovation?

http://real.mtak.hu/39394/1/Mak%C3%B3_CEE_eDem_and_eGov_Days_2015.pdf

May T (2016) 'Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May',

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may>

Measuring Job Quality Working Group (MJQWG) (2018) *Measuring Good Work*.

Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust.

Muñoz de bustillo R, Fernández-Macías E, Esteve F and Antón, J (2011) *Measuring more than money*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Murray J and Stewart A (2015) Regulating for job quality? Wages and working time under Australian labour law. In, A Knox and C Warhurst (Eds) *Job quality in Australia*. Sydney: Federation Press.

OECD (2018) *Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work: The OECD Jobs Strategy*, Paris: OECD.

ONS (2020) Labour market overview, UK: February 2020.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/latest>

Osterman P and Shulman B (2011) *Good Jobs America*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Osterman, P (2012) Job quality in the US: The myths that block action. In C Warhurst, P Findlay, C Tilly and F Carré (eds) *Are bad jobs inevitable?* London: Palgrave.

PPMi-CSES (2017) [Study to support impact assessment on the review of the Written Statement Directive 91/533/EEC/LOT 2](#), Final Report, Vilnius & Oxford: PPMi-CSES.

Quinlan M and Bohle P (2015) Job quality: the impact of work organisation on health. In Knox A and Warhurst C (Eds) *Job Quality in Australia*. Sydney: Federation Press.

Quinlan M, Mayhew C, Bohle P (2001) The global expansion of precarious employment, work disorganization and consequences for occupational health: a review of recent research. *International Journal of Health Services* 31(2):335–414.

Quinlan M and Sheldon P (2011) The enforcement of minimum labour standards in an era of neo-liberal globalisation: an overview. *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 22(2): 5–31.

Riley R and Bondibene C (2015) Raising the standard: minimum wages and firm productivity. NIESR Discussion Paper 449, National Institute for Economic and Social Research, London.

Ritzer G (2010) *McDonaldization*. California: Sage.

Roberts Y (2018) How one tiny union is beating the giants of the gig economy. *Observer*, 1 July, 17-19.

Sheldon P and Quinlan M (2011). Minimum Labour Standards and Their Enforcement. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 22(2): 1-4.

Standing G (2011) *The Precariat*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Stanford J (2016) A portrait of employment insecurity in Australia. *Centre for Future Work*. http://www.futurework.org.au/a_portrait_of_employment_insecurity_in_australia_infographic (accessed 29 August 2018).

Stanford J (2017) The resurgence of gig work: Historical and theoretical perspectives. *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 28(3):382-401.

Taylor M, Marsh G, Nicole D and Broadbent P (2017) *Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-work-the-taylor-review-of-modern-working-practices> (accessed 1 March 2018).

Trist E and Bamforth K (1951) Some social and psychological consequences of the longwall method of coal-getting. *Human Relations* 4(1): 3-38.

TUC (2019) *Insecure work*. London: TUC.

Van Aerden K, Gadeyne S, and Vanroelen C (2017) Is Any Job Better Than No Job at All? Studying the Relations Between Employment Types, Unemployment and Subjective Health in Belgium. *Archives of Public Health* 75(1): 55-75.

Virtanen M, Ferrie J, Singh-Manoux A, Shipley M, Stansfeld S, Marmot MG and Kivimaki M (2011) Long working hours and symptoms of anxiety and depressions: A 5-year follow-up of the White hall II study. *Psychological Medicine* 41: 2485-2494.

Vosko L, MacDonald M and Campbell I (eds) (2009) *Gender and the Contours of Precarious Employment*. London: Routledge.

Wahl A (2011) *The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State*. London: Pluto Press

Walton R (1973) Quality of working life: What is it? *Sloan Management Review* 15(1): 11-21.

Warhurst C, Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente R, Antón Pérez J-I, Grande, R, Hernández F.P, and Wright S (2020) Upward convergence in working conditions. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Warhurst C, Wright and Lyonette C (2017) Understanding and measuring job quality: Part 1 – Thematic Literature Review. London: CIPD.

Weil D (2011) Enforcing labour standards in fissured workplaces: The US experience. *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 22(2): 33-54.

Westley W (1979) Problems and solutions in the quality of working life. *Human Relations* 32(2): 113-123.

Wood A, Graham M, Lehdonvirta V and Hjorth I (2019) Networked but commodified: the (dis)embeddedness of digital labour in the gig economy. *Sociology* 53(5):931-950.

Wright S (2015) Challenges in Researching Job Quality. In A Knox and C Warhurst (Eds) *Job quality in Australia*. Sydney: Federation Press.