

# Work

## Attitudes and experiences of work in a changing labour market

The labour market has seen various changes since the 1980s, with greater numbers now in employment, and a higher proportion of graduates in the population as a whole. The UK is still recovering from the financial crisis of 2008 and the recession that followed. Against this backdrop of a shifting labour market, our chapter asks how attitudes to work, and experiences of it, have changed.

### More have good quality jobs, though job security remains elusive for some

71% of workers have a 'good' job (one with at least 4 positive attributes such as being interesting, helping others and/or society, and offering chances for advancement), compared with 62% in 2005 and 57% in 1989.



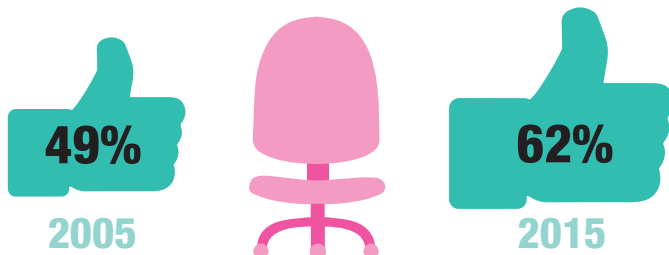
Think job security is important



Think they have job security

While 92% of people think that job security is either important, or very important, only around two-thirds of workers (65%) agree they actually have this in their job.

### Jobs are valued beyond their financial benefits



62% of respondents say they would enjoy having a job even if they didn't need the money, up from 49% in 2005.

Social class and education make a difference to financial motivations to work; 63% of those in professional or managerial occupations disagree a job is solely about the money earned, while the same is true for only 34% of those in routine or semi-routine occupations.

### Stress at work has increased

37% of workers experience stress "always" or "often", compared with 28% in 1989. Professional and managerial workers, and those aged 35-44 are most likely to feel stressed.



## Author

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**Stephen McKay**, University of Lincoln

**Ian Simpson**, Senior Researcher, NatCen Social Research

## Introduction

For many people under the age of 65, work is a central feature of life. The quality of a person's job can have an important bearing on their health and life chances (Coats and Lehki, 2008). Jobs associated with better health and wellbeing include those with more autonomy, security and good financial rewards (Bryson et al., 2011). In recent years, academic and popular attention has focused on two changes in the labour market that have raised concerns about the prevalence of poor quality jobs and the negative impact of the changing nature of some jobs. First is the possibility that the labour market is 'polarising', meaning that there are more good jobs, and more bad jobs, with a hollowing out of middling jobs in between (Goos and Manning, 2007). Second is the notion of 'work intensification' – the idea that, despite higher living standards, more is now demanded of workers in terms of shorter deadlines, a faster pace of work, potentially greater monitoring of individuals, and overall a higher level of stress (Green, 2007). This may overlap with issues of polarisation if only some groups of workers are facing such harsher working conditions.

Questions and concerns about the quality of a person's job may seem less vital at a time when the real pressure is on having a job at all. As we write, the UK continues to slowly emerge from a deep and prolonged period of recession. Many jobs were lost at the start of that recession, but fewer than would have been expected given the reduction in the overall level of economic activity (McKay and Smith, 2015). A longer-term perspective reveals that employment levels are actually higher now than in the 1980s. But the recession has a broader impact than employment rates alone. Wage growth has remained very slow, trailing behind changes in prices in many years after the recession. By 2015 (when the latest survey took place), wages had started to rise, and employment continued on a strong upward path. Despite this, levels of optimism about the recovery and any growth in living standards have, if anything, tended to stall.

How do these theories about the changing nature of work and labour market trends relate to people's attitudes to and experiences of work? This chapter uses long-term data on work orientation and perceptions of job quality to explore a number of related questions. We begin by asking how attitudes to work have changed over the longer-term, and whether there's any evidence of the impact of the recession. We then examine the extent to which people have the type of jobs that they want, and assess whether jobs are polarising (with evidence of both more good jobs *and* more bad jobs over time). Finally we look at how stressed workers are feeling and how much control or autonomy they have in their jobs, to shed light on whether work has intensified over time. Throughout, we consider whether different subgroups (using a range of socio-demographic background characteristics) have particular work attitudes and experiences.

Our chapter draws on data from a module of questions on Work Orientation, included in the survey as part of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). The questions have been fielded four times, in 1989, 1997, 2005 and 2015, allowing us to examine long-term trends in people's attitudes towards, and experiences of, work. The timing of the two most recent readings limits the potential of the data to reveal *short-term* responses to the recession - 2005 being before it occurred, and 2015 being a relatively optimistic moment of the recovery from the recession. We will however reflect on whether there are any signs of a *lasting* impact of the recession on attitudes to work.

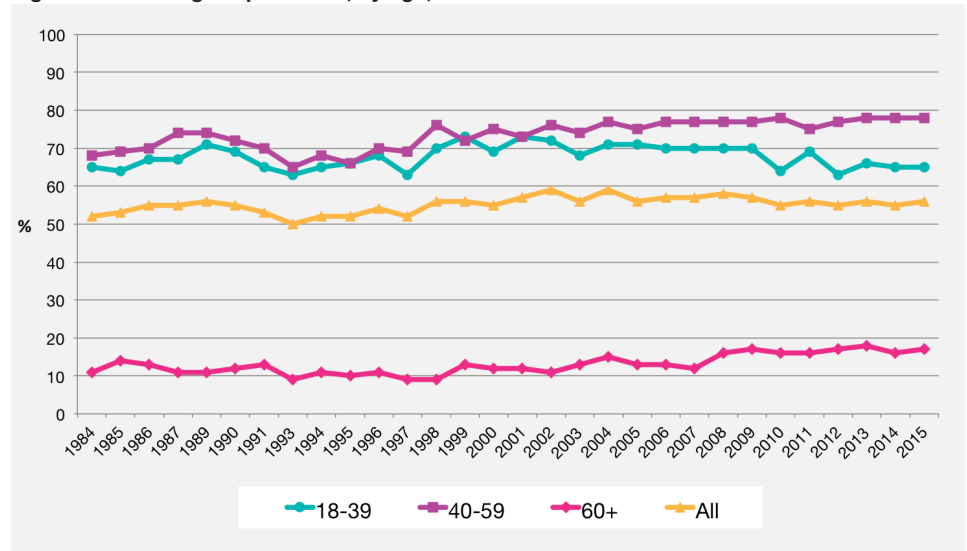
## Setting the scene: labour market trends

We start by reviewing some overarching trends in the labour market. In 2015, 56% of people overall are in work - a rather higher proportion than in the early 1980s and mid-1990s (see Figure 1), with actual numbers in work reaching record levels (ONS, 2016). While the recession of the early 1990s was rather less severe than that of the most recent global financial crash (Faccini and Hackworth, 2010), its effect on rates of employment was rather greater. In contrast, since 2008/09, the overall proportion in work has been fairly consistent, with rates stable for those aged 40-59, and increasing somewhat for those aged 60 or older (rates are now around four percentage points higher than the years prior to the crisis).

It is younger people who have faced the greatest challenges in remaining in, or securing, paid work. In 2015, 65% of people aged under 40 were in paid work, compared with 78% of those aged 40-59. For the under 40s, this is a level similar to most years since 2010, lower than the 70% figure seen in most years in the preceding decade. The figure also illustrates the differential experiences of younger and older workers. The employment rates of these groups had been converging in the early 2000s, but since then a gap has opened up which shows no sign of closing. This may be due to employers restricting recruitment during the recession and the subsequent slow recovery, particularly affecting those new to the labour market.

**It is younger people who have faced the greatest challenges in remaining in, or securing, paid work**

Figure 1 Percentage in paid work, by age, 1984-2015



Base: all

The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

**The proportion of people with a degree-level qualification has risen sharply from 10% in 1984 to 24% now**

One of the other notable changes in the available workforce in recent decades is the rising number of graduates, following the continued expansion of higher education. During the three decades covered by the British Social Attitudes survey series, the proportion of people with a degree-level qualification has risen sharply from 10% in 1984 to 24% now. This change has affected all age groups, though the pace of growth has understandably been slower among those aged 60 or older, but even for this age group the proportion of graduates has risen from 5% to 15% over the same period. For those aged 18-39, the proportion of graduates has increased from 14% to 30%, while for those aged 40-59 the equivalent figures are 10% increasing to 26%. This change has a bearing on the nature of the labour market, as graduates tend to command higher wages, a premium maintained despite the growth in their numbers. They are also more likely to have professional careers: in 2015, 72% of working graduates have a professional or managerial occupation, compared with 45% of all in work.

Over time, participation rates of women have increased relative to men. So, looking at those aged from 18 to 59 in 1984 some 74% of men were in paid work compared with 60% of women. By 2015 the rates were 77% for men and 67% for women. The pay gap between men and women has also reduced over time but remains significant, with the difference in median full-time hourly earnings still 9.4% in the latest data (from the 2015 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings) compared with 17.4% in 1997. So, there has been a degree of convergence but large differences still remain.

The distribution of objective social class (a measure of occupational status, based on the type of job someone has – or their last job if not currently working) has also changed over time. This transformation is well documented, and associated with the decline in employment in

the British manufacturing industry over the last few decades (Lindsay, 2003). Latest data from ONS show that in 2016, 22% of people in work are in semi-routine or routine jobs.<sup>1</sup>

These four key socio-demographic variables - age, sex, education and social class - are themselves associated with people's experience of, or relationship with, the labour market. They are related not just to employment rates, but also the types of jobs, level of pay, hours worked and so on, that people have (see ONS, 2016 for recent labour market analyses). In the rest of the chapter, we therefore note where these characteristics are related to attitudes towards, and experiences of, paid work.

Figure 2 shows some other key trends in the labour market over time (using other data sources). First, the proportion that are members of a trade union is in long-term decline. In 1984 close to 11 million workers were members of trade unions, but this has dropped to a little over 6 million by 2015. This trend may help to explain changes in income inequality, which in turn is driven by changes in wages (and in social security benefits). Conditions in the lower half of the income distribution seem to be strongly linked to the decline of unionisation for lower-skilled jobs (Holmes and Mayhew, 2012). However the declines in union coverage were most marked during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when inequality was increasing, and since the late 1980s reductions in coverage have occurred but at a more gradual rate.

Conversely, the proportion working in the public sector increased between 1999 (when consistent data was first available) and 2009, rising from 5.4 million jobs to 6.3 million. Since then numbers have decreased to 5.4 million, the lowest since 1999.<sup>2</sup>

Last, we note that self-employment has been rising over the last 15 or so years, and now represents 4.5 million workers. While employment did not fall proportionately in the years after the 2008 financial crisis, many of the new jobs created (at least for a time) tended to be part-time or self-employed (Rowlingson and McKay, 2015). Self-employment may be portrayed positively as a sign of flexibility and an entrepreneurial spirit. However, some people may feel compelled to enter self-employment if more standard employment is not available, and often the self-employed find it harder to access pensions and other key benefits of employment. In a detailed analysis, D'Arcy and Gardiner (2014) tended to find more

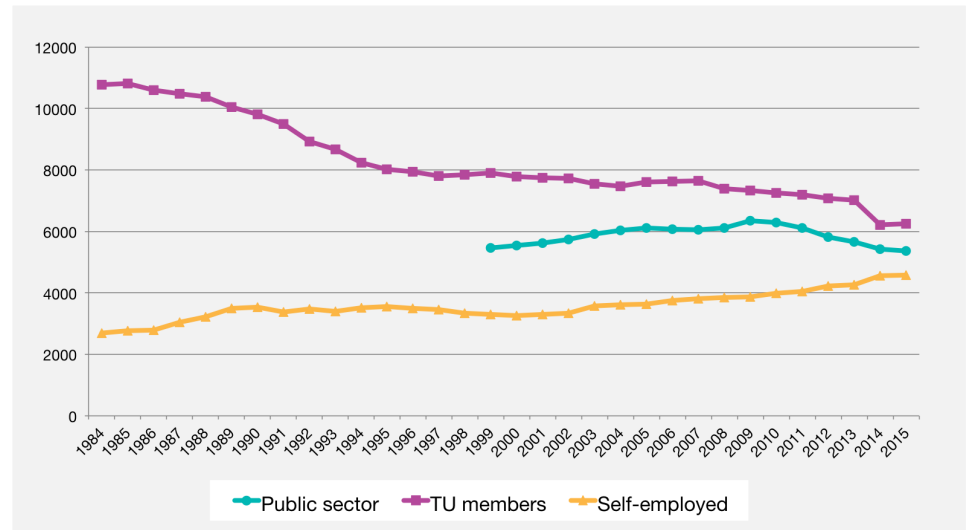
<sup>1</sup> This figure is based on NS-SEC (Socio-Economic Classification) and the data are available at [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/](http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/). This is backed up by analysis of BSA data over time: in the 1989 survey, 25% were in the highest social class, while 37% were in the lowest social class. By 2015 the proportions have reversed: 43% are now in the highest social class while 22% are in the lowest class. Percentages are based on all those who have ever had a paid job. This excludes a small proportion of respondents who have never worked. The 1989 figures are based on a recoding of the Goldthorpe-Heath 5-category class scheme, while 2015 figures are based on a 5 category version of SEG (Socio-Economic Group) (as this results in categories which are conceptually similar over time). See footnote 5 for more detail on social class analysis in the rest of the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> This ONS series allows for changes in the treatment of different groups as being in the public sector, for details see: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/december2015>

**Self-employment now represents 4.5 million workers**

reasons for concern than for celebration at this rising tide of self-employment, in particular owing to reduced earnings compared with employees.

**Figure 2 Labour market trends - self-employment, trade unions and the public sector, 1984-2015 (thousands)**



Source: Labour Force Survey (self-employment data), ONS Public Sector Employment series, BIS (trade union membership)<sup>3</sup>

The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

## Attitudes to work

We start our examination of the ISSP data by looking at overall attitudes to work, including job satisfaction and financial motivations. In the years after a recession one might expect job satisfaction to increase, as people are grateful to be in any job (see trends in Donegani et al., 2012). In terms of work orientation, the extrinsic rewards of work may become more central when there is pressure on public and private finances.

At regular intervals we have asked workers “How satisfied are you with your main job?” In 2015, 14% are “completely satisfied” with their jobs, while 29% are “very satisfied” and 38% “fairly”. There is no evidence of a sustained increase in satisfaction during the last recession. Overall job satisfaction is at the same level as in 2005, when the recession was still some way off (and largely unanticipated), when 15% were “completely satisfied”, 27% “very satisfied” and 38% “fairly satisfied”. There has been a small increase over the longer-term, with satisfaction somewhat higher now than in 1997, when the economy had been growing for some years, (when 13% were “completely satisfied” and 22% “very satisfied”).

The gap between our two most recent data points means we cannot

<sup>3</sup> Relevant sources are: for LFS self-employment data: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/dyzn>; for public sector employment: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/march2016>; and, for trades union membership: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2015>

Overall job satisfaction is at the same level as in 2005

rule out a (short-lived) increase in the years immediately following the 2008 financial crisis. Indeed there is evidence of that from other sources; McManus and Perry writing in our 29<sup>th</sup> Report (2012) found job satisfaction had increased in the first few years after the crisis, albeit using a different measure.

What of our assumption that the experience of recession might have strengthened financial motivations to work? We asked all respondents (not just those in work) how far they agree or disagree with the following statements:

***I would enjoy having a paid job even if I did not need the money***

***A job is just a way of earning money - no more***

Is work all about the money? It seems not. A majority say they would enjoy working even if they didn't need the money - and this proportion has been slowly increasing over time (see Table 1). In 2015, 62% of people say they would enjoy having a job even if they didn't need the money, up from 49% in each of 2005 and 1997, and 54% in 1989. Twice as many in 2015, compared with 1989, *strongly* agree that they would enjoy having employment even if their financial circumstances did not require it.

Similarly, around half disagree that "a job is just a way of earning money", and nothing more (with smaller proportions agreeing), and on this measure there has been little change over time. Taken together, this somewhat weak financial motivation to work is reinforced by findings later in the chapter which show that people in work do not rate having a high income as being especially important, particularly when compared with greater job security and having an interesting job.

**62% of people say they would enjoy having a job even if they didn't need the money**

**Table 1 Financial motivation to work, 1989-2015**

	1989	1997	2005	2015
<b>Would enjoy having a job even if didn't need the money</b>				
% Strongly agree	7	6	9	14
% Agree	47	42	40	48
<b>A job is just a way of earning money - no more</b>				
% Disagree	39	35	35	34
% Strongly disagree	13	11	12	15
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1516	1080	913	1793

*Base: all*

Slightly more of those in professional occupations, and graduates, say they would work even if they did not need the income, but differences are relatively small. However, on the second question

**65% of graduates disagree that a job is only about earning money, compared with just 35% of those with no qualifications**

(which is the far stronger statement about a job being solely about money) there are large differences by social class and education. In 2015, 63% of those in professional or managerial occupations disagree that a job is solely about the money earned compared with only 34% of those in routine or semi-routine occupations (and 49% overall). There has been little change on this since 2005. A similar pattern is evident for education, with 65% of graduates disagreeing that a job is only about earning money, compared with 48% of those with O level/GCSE qualifications and just 35% of those with no qualifications. There are only small, or no differences in financial motivation by age and by sex.

## What people want - and get - from their jobs

We turn now to look at people's views about which different attributes they think are important in a job, and - for those in work - which of these they have in their employment. A number of these questions have been consistently asked since our survey began, which permits analysis of changes in the nature of people's relationship with the labour market over time. First, we gave respondents a list of different job attributes, and asked them to say how important they personally thought each one was:

***Job security***

***High income***

***Good opportunities for advancement***

***An interesting job***

***A job that allows someone to work independently***

***A job that allows someone to help other people***

***A job that is useful to society***

***A job that allows someone to decide their times or days of work***

***A job that involves personal contact with other people***

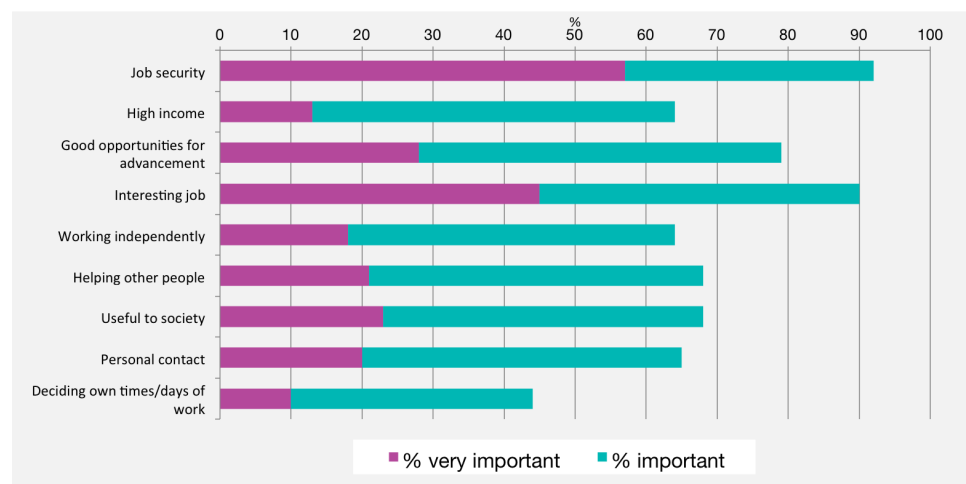
**Job security is regarded as important by almost all (92%)**

Figure 3 shows features of jobs regarded as important to varying degrees by respondents, ranked in order of importance. Clearly people regard many features of jobs as being "important", or indeed "very important". Job security is regarded as important by almost all (92%), while a majority say it is "very important" (57%), the only attribute for which this was true. Next most highly rated in terms of significance is having an interesting job, which 45% regard as "very important", while a further 45% say that it is "important". Other features rated particularly important are: having good opportunities for advancement, and having a job that is helpful to others and/or useful to society. One feature that relatively few (13%) see as "very important" is having a high income, although half (51%) do think this is at least "important".



There are some modest differences between men and women in the kinds of attributes they think are important in any job. Women are more likely to emphasise a job that involves helping other people (25% say that is “very important”, compared with 17% of men), and involves personal contact with others (23% of women rate that “very important”, 16% of men). Women also place a little more emphasis on being able to decide which days were worked, or which times (12% see that as “very important”, compared with 8% of men), perhaps reflecting the fact that women are more likely than men to be working ‘flexibly’.

**Figure 3 Perceived importance of different job attributes**



*Base: all*

*The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter*

We then asked those currently in work whether or not they felt their jobs actually had these characteristics, regardless of whether they felt they were important or not. In Figure 4 we plot the different job characteristics showing how people assessed them both in terms of whether they think they are important facets of a job (i.e. “important” or “very important”), and whether they actually have them (either agreeing or strongly agreeing that these statements apply to their job).<sup>4</sup> For this chart, the analysis is restricted only to those in paid work.

This chart enables us to see directly which attributes are important but not achieved, or which are generally achieved but seen as being of less importance. Those plotted below the  $x=y$  line are regarded as important, but workers are less likely to say that their jobs have these characteristics. Prominent among these are job security, good opportunities for advancement, and having an interesting job. Having a high income is also regarded as important by many workers, but fewer say their incomes are high - though this is quite a common feature of self-reporting incomes and not specific to labour market

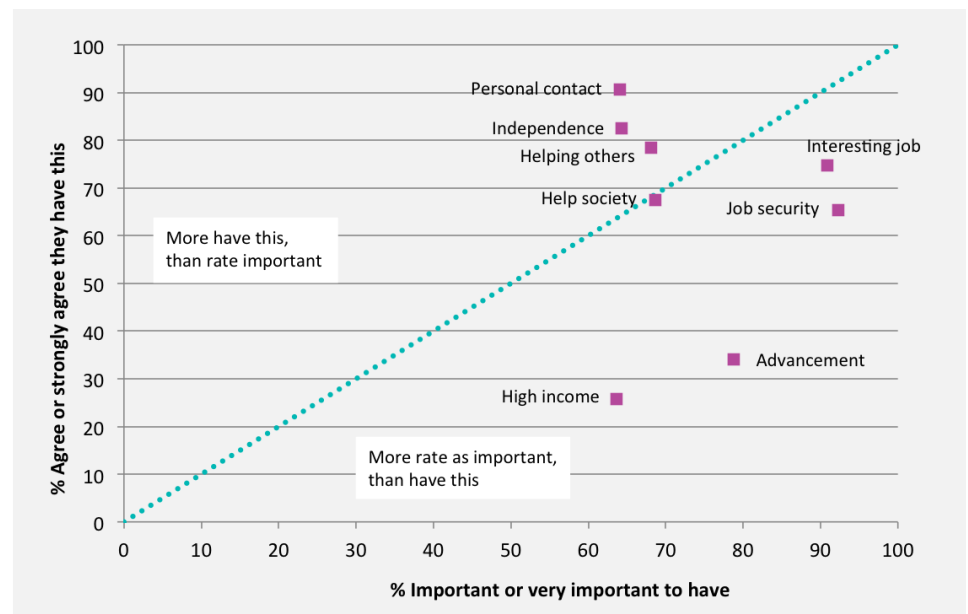
<sup>4</sup> The questions about whether jobs have these features very closely mirror the questions asked about the importance of those features, though not the question regarding how working times are decided (so this is excluded).

**Improvements in the area of job security would probably be most appreciated by those in paid work**

issues. This chart implies that improvements in the area of job security would probably be most appreciated by those in paid work, while changes to generate more interesting jobs - or make jobs more interesting - would also be beneficial. Workers are also unlikely to say that they have good opportunities for advancement in their current roles, despite regarding this as an important feature of a job.

Turning to the upper left half of the chart, many people have jobs that permit a high degree of contact with others, and independence about working practices - somewhat higher than the proportions saying that such features are important. Having jobs that are capable of helping others directly, or being of help to wider society, are also quite commonly attained in practice, and mirror the proportions rating these as important facets of any job.

**Figure 4 Perceived importance of different job attributes, and whether workers have these in their jobs**



Base: all in work  
 The data on which Figure 4 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

**Are jobs polarising?**

Proponents of this theory say that the labour market has been ‘polarising’ since the 1980s, resulting in more good jobs, and more bad jobs, with a hollowing out of middling jobs in between (Goos and Manning, 2007). Supporting evidence is often produced that looks at skill levels or occupational grades, with the expectation that these are associated with terms and conditions of employment. It is suggested that technological changes and globalisation have removed many middle-rank jobs within manufacturing and more routine service functions. As a result work has been moved to lower-cost countries, or workers have been replaced by robots and/or IT. At the same time, higher skilled workers have been in greater demand, and more people have graduate level qualifications and are looking for

such roles. Meanwhile, there seems to have been a growth in lower level service jobs, partly to meet the needs of the more highly paid. However, this view is not universally accepted (Anderson, 2009), or is accepted with regard to occupations perhaps but not to other labour market features (Plunkett and Paulo Pessoa, 2013). Our data provide an opportunity to investigate some longer-term evidence on this point, especially the lived experience of jobs of different kinds.

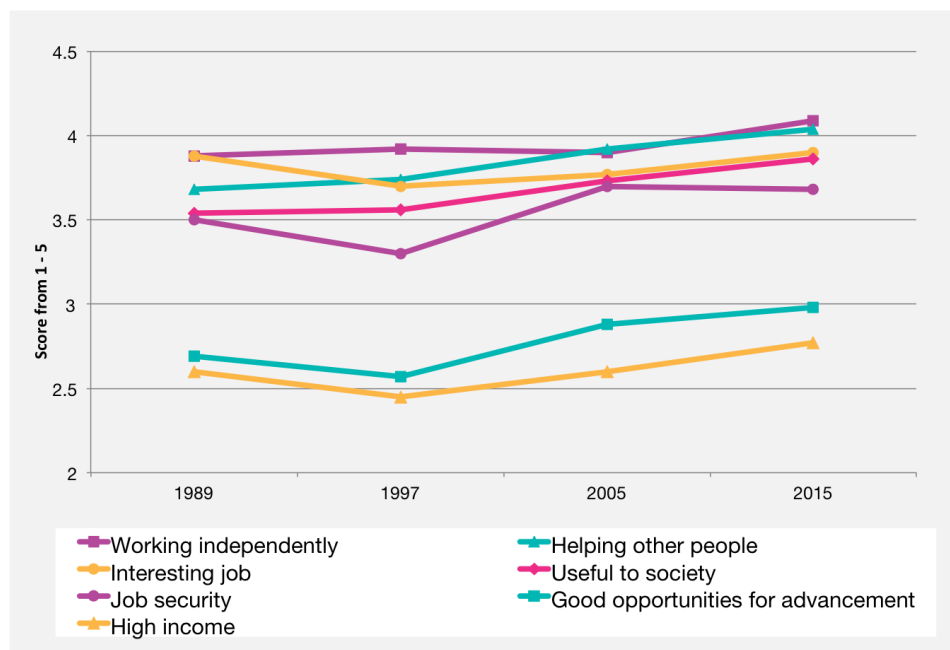
In order to assess whether jobs are polarising, we need to consider how the quality of jobs has changed over time. We measure the quality of jobs using the same seven characteristics reported above. These questions were included in a number of surveys separated by almost thirty years, and cover job security, high incomes, opportunities for advancement, whether jobs help people, or are useful to society, whether they are interesting, and allow for independence. We want to see to what extent the responses change over time - and for which groups they have changed the most.

We present these data in two different ways. First, we created an 'average' score for each attribute. To do this we recoded the responses so that those who agree they have the attribute are given a higher value, while those who disagree have a lower value, on a scale of one to five. This approach takes into account changes across all response categories: positive, neutral and negative. This is useful because in order to look for evidence of more bad jobs (as well as more good), if we focus only on the proportion who say they have a particular job attribute, it could give a misleading implication about the proportion who do not. For example, if the proportion who say they have a high income has increased, that does not necessarily imply a decrease in the proportion who do not (it could be that both have increased, with a reduction in the neutral middle category).

We plot how these aspects have changed over time in Figure 5. After taking account of positive, negative and neutral responses to the questions (by using our score), it is clear that for most individual job attributes, workers are more likely now than in previous years to report having them. They are more likely to say that their jobs are interesting, or useful to society, or have a high income, and so on, in 2015 compared with previous survey years. The one exception is job security, where there has been no increase in the last decade, but even so, those in work are more likely to say that their job is secure in 2015 than they were in either 1997 or 1989.

**For most individual job attributes, workers are more likely now than in previous years to report having them**

**Figure 5 Whether workers have different job attributes (on a score from 1-5), 1989, 1997, 2005 and 2015**



Note left-hand axis starts at value 2

Scores coded from 1-5, based on agree/neither/disagree response categories (don't knows excluded)

Base: all in work

The data on which Figure 5 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

There are some limitations to this analysis however. First, the polarisation view relates to the distribution of good and bad jobs, meaning that the overall average (presented above for different attributes) may not reveal any increase in the proportion with 'bad' jobs. Second, it is possible that the aggregate level findings may 'hide' increases in poor quality jobs for particular groups of workers, especially if good jobs outnumber bad, or if the former have also been increasing.

For that reason, we present two further analyses of these data. First, we look specifically at changes in job security, as this is the one attribute that has not increased in the last decade, and is highly valued. Have particular groups seen their jobs become less secure, as predicted by the 'job polarisation' view of the labour market? In Table 2 we show levels of job security, by age group and social class. Comparing the data for 2015 with 2005, we can see there is some indication that certain groups have fared disproportionately badly. The proportion with a secure job has fallen for those in the lowest social class, and for older workers - while younger workers have seen increases (though small sample sizes mean that changes are not significant for all age groups). This might be evidence of polarisation, as some groups have experienced an increase (or little change) in job security while other groups have had a decrease. Despite these changes over time, in 2015 social class is not significantly related to job security. What is clear is that while age was not significantly related to job security in 2005, the changes since have resulted in

**Younger workers are now considerably more likely feel they have job security than their older counterparts**

large gaps for workers of different ages. Younger workers are now considerably more likely feel they have job security than their older counterparts (this is true for 77% of 18-34 year olds versus 53% of 55-64 year olds).

**Table 2 Job security at work, by age and social class, 2005 and 2015**

% agree have job security	2005	2015	Change	Unweighted base 2005	Unweighted base 2015
<b>All</b>	66	65	-1	502	942
<b>Age</b>					
18-34	73	77	+4	152	256
35-44	62	70	+8	133	223
45-54	59	54	-5	117	260
55-64	67	53	-14	86	164
<b>Social class</b>					
Professional & managerial	65	67	+2	221	444
Semi-routine & routine	71	60	-11	116	195

*Base: all in work*

However the polarisation thesis is about the number of good and bad jobs overall, rather than changes on any one particular characteristic. To test this theory explicitly, we need to look at overall job quality, and to compare this for different subgroups, to see whether there are some groups of workers who have seen a decrease in job quality, even if overall there has been an increase. To do this, we look at a broader measure of job quality, which combines these different attributes into a score (from 0 to 7), based on the number of attributes the respondent reports having in their job. A low score implies a poor quality job, while a high score suggests a good quality job. For our analysis we have used a cut off of 4 attributes or more to mean a 'good' job, while 3 or less equates to a 'bad' job.

**The overall proportion of workers with a good job has increased, from 57% in 1989 to 71% now**

As Table 3 shows, the overall proportion of workers with a good job has increased, from 57% in 1989 to 71% now. When we look across a number of different socio-demographic characteristics, we find no evidence of polarisation; none of these subgroups have seen a decrease in job quality over the same period: younger and older workers, those in the highest and lowest social classes, and both men and women. True, there are still gaps between different groups, most notably when it comes to social class, where only just over 6 in 10 in the lowest social class have a 'good' job (using this definition), compared with a little under 8 in 10 in the highest social class. But even here, the gap has reduced over time, meaning that - on this measure and for these groups - there is no evidence of the labour market polarising in terms of jobs with desirable features.

**Table 3 Proportion with 4 or more positive job attributes, by age and social class, 1989 and 2015**

% with 4+ good job attributes	1989	2015	Change	Unweighted base 1989	Unweighted base 2015
<b>All</b>	57	71	+14	720	942
<b>Age</b>					
18-34	58	69	+14	260	256
35-44	55	79	+24	200	223
45-54	62	70	+8	191	260
55-64	48	63	+16	75	164
<b>Social class<sup>5</sup></b>					
Highest social class (salaried)	72	77	+5	224	465
Lowest social class (working class)	42	62	+20	216	160

Base: all in work

**In 2015, 69% of male workers and 73% of female workers have a 'good' job**

Finally it is worth noting that using this definition there is no gap in job quality between male and female workers. In 2015, 69% of male workers and 73% of female workers have a 'good' job (the apparent small gap is not significant), an increase since 1989, when the proportion for both groups was around 57%.

## Is work becoming more intensive?

We saw in the previous section that there have been various changes (mainly improvements) in the proportion who have 'good' jobs, and that there is no evidence in our data of jobs polarising. But there are other aspects of work that can have detrimental impacts on workers, even if other positive attributes are in place. We turn now to look at some of these other features of work, in order to assess the theory that work has become harder, or more intensive. To do this we look at changes over time in a range of different features of working life, including perceptions of stress, working hard, and the degree of autonomy and control that workers feel they have. If there has been work intensification we would expect to find more negative responses over time (more stress, working harder, less autonomy and control), with the latter two linked to debates about the extent to which employees are routinely monitored in terms of their work performance.

**In 2015, 37% say that they find their work stressful**

First, we asked "how often do you find your work stressful?" There has been something of an increase in levels of stress experienced by workers. In 2015, 37% say that they find their work stressful, either "always" or "often". This is a rise on both 1997 and 2005, when only 32% said the same, and compared with 1989 when the equivalent figure was 28%. These findings could be reflecting a degree of work intensification.

<sup>5</sup> In Table 3, social class analysis for 1989 is based on a recoding of the Goldthorpe-Heath 5-category class scheme, while 2015 is based on a 5-category version of SEG (Socio-Economic Group) (as this results in categories which are conceptually similar over time). Elsewhere in the chapter, social class analyses for 2005 and 2015 use a five category version of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NSSEC) unless stated otherwise.

The image of better paid occupations facing more stress appears to be confirmed by the first two columns of Table 4. Four in ten of those in professional or managerial occupations say that they find work stressful either “always” or “often”, compared with 3 in 10 of those in semi-routine or routine occupations. However there is no linear effect of social class across all the occupational categories, and the two groups shown in Table 4 are equally likely to report that their job is *always* stressful. Moreover, those in the lowest social class saw the greatest increase in constant stress between 2005 and 2015. A similar, though less marked pattern is seen for education.

Stress at work (at least “often”) is more common in the middle age groups, peaking at 43% for 35-44 year olds, while it is less frequently reported by the youngest and oldest groups (though there are small sample sizes for the youngest group). Men and women are equally likely to face stress at work (38% and 36% respectively saying this happens at least often).

Those in the lowest social class saw the greatest increase in constant stress between 2005 and 2015

Table 4 How often work is stressful, by social class, 2005 and 2015

	Social Class				All	
	Managerial & professional occupations		Semi-routine & routine occupations		2005	2015
	2005	2015	2005	2015		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Always	8	10	1	10	7	8
Often	31	32	18	19	25	29
<i>Unweighted base</i>	230	470	122	217	502	942

Base: all in work

We went on to ask whether workers are prepared to ‘go the extra mile’ in helping their organisation to succeed:

***I am willing to work harder than I have to in order to help the firm or organisation I work for succeed***

Seven in ten (69%) agree they are willing to work harder than they have to - up from 61% in 2005 and 57% in 1997. It is possible that the recession and concerns over retaining jobs could be affecting this seemingly ‘altruistic’ intention towards hard work, especially as most of the increase has occurred since 2005. The subgroups most likely to agree with this statement are also those most likely to be experiencing stress, which may be no coincidence. Thus it is those working in professional occupations who are the most likely to agree (77%) while the least likely are those in routine and semi-routine occupations (44%). Similarly, 75% of the 35-44 age group agree with this approach, while younger people (those aged 18-24), at 58%, are among the groups least likely to do so (though there is a small sample size for this group). Again, there is no difference by sex, or education. Perhaps this willingness to work harder than necessary is another indication of work intensification, if workplaces are now more

Seven in ten (69%) agree they are willing to work harder than they have to

likely to have a culture of harder work and, being present for long hours.

If the signs are that work is intensifying, might that imply that workers' conditions have worsened when it comes to questions of control and flexibility in the work environment and over the working day? These are both elements that some have linked to the intensification debate. Or do perceptions of legal rights pertaining to flexible working patterns and other working conditions mean that this area is relatively protected?

We posed three different questions on this subject, the first of which asked workers to say which of the following three statements "best describes how your working hours are decided":

***Starting and finishing times are decided by my employer and I cannot change them on my own***

***I can decide the time I start and finish work within certain limits***

***I am entirely free to decide when I start and finish work***

In 2015, a slight majority (54%) have no control over their working hours, with start and finish times decided by the employer. Around a third (35%) choose the second statement (meaning they have control within limits), with only 9% having complete freedom to decide their working times. There has been no improvement in workers' ability to determine their starting and finishing times - these figures are little different to findings from 2005 and 1997.

The second question asks about more occasional flexibility - how difficult it would be "to take an hour or two off during working hours, to take care of personal or family matters?" For most workers, this is something they can do without too much difficulty. Two-thirds (65%) say it would be "not too difficult" or "not difficult at all" to take an hour or two off work. However, while only a small minority - close to 1 in 6 (16%) - say it would be "very difficult" to take off an hour or two, this is up slightly from 1 in 10 (10%) in 2005.

Our third question is about the level of control workers feel they have over organising their daily work. The right-hand column in Table 5 reveals that most workers feel they have a say in this. Three in ten report being completely free to decide how to organise their daily work, while a further 4 in 10 can do so within certain limits. Taking both categories together there has been little change since 2005, but there has been an increase in the first (having complete day-to-day autonomy).

**Two-thirds (65%) say it would be "not too difficult" or "not difficult at all" to take an hour or two off work**



Table 5 Deciding the organisation of daily work, by social class, 2005 and 2015

Which best describes how your daily work is organised?	Social class				All	
	Managerial & professional occupations		Semi-routine & routine occupations		2005	2015
	2005	2015	2005	2015		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I am free to decide how my daily work is organised	28	39	13	9	24	30
I can decide how my daily work is organised within certain limits	53	47	37	27	48	40
I am not free to decide how my daily work is organised	16	12	42	57	23	25
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>221</i>	<i>444</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>217</i>	<i>502</i>	<i>942</i>

Base: all in work

**There are some important social class differences in whether people have freedom over how to organise their work**

Again there are some important social class differences in whether people have freedom over how to organise their work (see the first four columns of Table 5), while there is a less marked relationship (but in a similar direction) with education. Only 12% of professional/managerial workers say they have no freedom to decide the organisation of their work, compared with 57% of workers in semi-routine and routine occupations. In comparing 2005 and 2012, those in semi-routine and routine occupations have experienced an increase in employer control, from 42% having no freedom to decide the organisation of daily work in 2005 to 57% in 2015. Conversely, professionals have not experienced this encroaching employer authority. They are more likely now to have freedom over organising their daily work.

So, while only a minority of workers can choose *when* to work, two-thirds have more occasional flexibility and 7 in 10 have at least some freedom about *how* they work day-to-day. Any changes over time have been small, and not all in the same direction, suggesting that these aspects of working conditions may not be related to the intensification of work that our findings on stress indicated. However, the growth in the number of better jobs may perhaps be driving the increase in stress and in autonomy for some groups.

## Conclusions

Our findings suggest a fairly healthy picture in terms of public attitudes to work and experiences of work in Britain, with little sign of any lasting negative impact of the recession. Over the longer-term, we have found improvements (or stability) in many key measures relating to job satisfaction, non-financial motivations to work and perceived job quality. This isn't to say that everyone has the job attributes that they desire. For some, job security remains an elusive concept, yet it is that (along with an interesting job) that people

**For some, job security remains an elusive concept, yet it is that (along with an interesting job) that people most value**

most value. In many cases workers are also unable to access their desired levels of opportunity for advancement, or to have the kind of interesting job they would like.

The idea that jobs are polarising is not supported by our data. Indeed, the findings refute the view that the proportion with ‘bad’ jobs are growing at all, while it is clear that the percentage with ‘good’ jobs is rising. This is true across each of the socio-demographic subgroups we examined, with improvements (or at least stability) for workers regardless of their age, sex or social class. Even so, certain subgroups are faring worse than others. In particular, those in the lowest social class are much less likely to have a job with 4 or more positive attributes than their counterparts in the highest social class, and we have seen that this group are encountering worse terms and conditions in other areas, such as the organisation of the day-to-day content of their jobs. Older workers are another group who have poorer experiences in some areas of working life, such as having less job security than younger workers. So while there is not evidence of polarisation, there are some clues that lower status workers and older workers are not enjoying all the favourable employment terms that other groups are experiencing.

**People are now facing more stress at work**

Lastly, and fitting the discourses around intensification of work, people are now facing more stress at work. More are also now prepared to work beyond what is strictly necessary - a trend that may be linked to concerns about retaining their jobs in an environment where it is getting tougher to move to better or even just comparable jobs. Moreover, while many of these patterns are common to both men and women, some outcomes (such as experiencing stress) are quite strongly correlated with social class and age.

Indeed throughout much of the chapter two themes have emerged. On the one hand, the importance of social class, education and age in understanding people’s working experiences, and on the other, the weaker relationship (if any) with sex. This isn’t to say that there are no differences in men and women’s relationship with the labour market - women still earn less than men, and significantly fewer are in paid work. But our evidence suggests that sex isn’t central to these particular attitudes and experiences of work, and how they have been changing in recent years. This perhaps chimes with findings from our 29<sup>th</sup> Report chapter which found evidence that “the employment experiences of men and women have been converging in recent years” (McManus and Perry, 2012).

We end with a thought about policy implications. On the basis of our analysis, one area that remains of particular concern is that of job insecurity. There has been no perceived increase in job security between 2005 and 2015, and yet this is one of the most desired features of jobs. Some particular policy reforms relating to this (such as to zero-hours contracts) were indeed debated between the political parties during the 2015 General Election campaign, but insecurity goes much beyond that relatively small element of the labour market. This therefore represents a potential area for action for our representatives at Westminster.

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## Appendix

The data on which Figure 1 is based are shown below.

**Table A.1 Percentage in paid work, by age, 1984-2015**

<b>% in paid work</b>	<b>18-39</b>	<b>40-59</b>	<b>60+</b>	<b>All</b>	<i>Unweighted base (18-39)</i>	<i>Unweighted base (40-59)</i>	<i>Unweighted base (60+)</i>	<i>Unweighted base (All)</i>
1984	65	68	11	52	1373	1042	1040	3455
1985	64	69	14	53	820	548	431	1799
1986	67	70	13	55	1318	1048	731	3097
1987	67	74	11	55	1155	976	711	2842
1989	71	74	11	56	1213	1023	783	3019
1990	69	72	12	55	1117	927	739	2783
1991	65	70	13	53	1105	935	865	2905
1993	63	65	9	50	1172	904	855	2931
1994	65	68	11	52	1373	1042	1040	3455
1995	66	66	10	52	1428	1119	1076	3623
1996	68	70	11	54	1405	1121	1079	3605
1997	63	69	9	52	536	423	396	1355
1998	70	76	9	56	1183	991	962	3136
1999	73	72	13	56	1162	962	1017	3141
2000	69	75	12	55	1288	1061	1070	3419
2001	73	73	12	57	1199	1100	983	3282
2002	72	76	11	59	1281	1142	1008	3431
2003	68	74	13	56	1559	1545	1327	4431
2004	71	77	15	59	1099	1140	954	3193
2005	71	75	13	56	1391	1526	1349	4266
2006	70	77	13	57	1454	1500	1331	4285
2007	70	77	12	57	1362	1391	1368	4121
2008	70	77	16	58	1405	1563	1496	4464
2009	70	77	17	57	1084	1245	1087	3416
2010	64	78	16	55	1007	1125	1157	3289
2011	69	75	16	56	1030	1114	1161	3305
2012	63	77	17	55	905	1081	1256	3242
2013	66	78	18	56	952	1092	1194	3238
2014	65	78	16	55	782	1015	1073	2870
2015	65	78	17	56	1255	1506	1560	4321

*Base: all*

The data on which Figure 2 is based are shown below.

**Table A.2 Labour market trends - self-employment, trade unions and the public sector, 1984-2015 (in thousands)**

Year	N in public sector	N TU members	N Self-employed
1984	+	10774	2695
1985	+	10819	2778
1986	+	10598	2789
1987	+	10480	3044
1988	+	10387	3216
1989	+	10044	3504
1990	+	9810	3542
1991	+	9489	3384
1992	+	8929	3469
1993	+	8666	3404
1994	+	8231	3516
1995	+	8031	3549
1996	+	7938	3506
1997	+	7801	3451
1998	+	7852	3346
1999	5461	7898	3305
2000	5538	7779	3254
2001	5627	7751	3294
2002	5749	7736	3338
2003	5909	7559	3568
2004	6035	7473	3624
2005	6109	7603	3644
2006	6076	7628	3749
2007	6045	7656	3822
2008	6115	7388	3846
2009	6350	7329	3870
2010	6289	7261	3990
2011	6106	7197	4057
2012	5811	7086	4224
2013	5668	7011	4262
2014	5416	6217	4558
2015	5358	6253	4574

Source: LFS (self-employed), ONS Public Sector Employment series, BIS (trade union members)

+ Consistent data not available until 1999

The data on which Figure 3 is based are shown below.

**Table A.3 Perceived importance of different job attributes**

Job attributes	% very important	% important
Job security	57	35
High income	13	51
Good opportunities for advancement	28	51
Interesting job	45	45
Working independently	18	46
Helping other people	21	47
Useful to society	23	45
Personal contact	20	45
Deciding own times/days of work	10	34

*Unweighted base: 1793*

*Base: all*

The data on which Figure 4 is based are shown below.

**Table A.4 Perceived importance of different job attributes, and whether workers have these in their jobs**

	% say important in a job	% say have this
Job security	93	65
High income	66	26
Good opportunities for advancement	81	34
Interesting job	93	75
Working independently	68	82
Helping other people	70	79
Useful to society	70	68
Personal contact	66	91

*Unweighted base: 942*

*Base: all in work*

The data on which Figure 5 is based are shown below.

**Table A.5 Whether workers have different job attributes (score from 1-5), 1989, 1997, 2005 and 2015**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2015</b>
Working independently	3.88	3.92	3.9	4.09
Helping other people	3.68	3.74	3.92	4.04
Interesting job	3.88	3.7	3.77	3.9
Useful to society	3.54	3.56	3.73	3.86
Job security	3.5	3.3	3.7	3.68
Good opportunities for advancement	2.69	2.57	2.88	2.98
High income	2.6	2.45	2.6	2.77
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>720</i>	<i>580</i>	<i>502</i>	<i>942</i>

*Base: all in work*