Yorkshire and Humber Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP)

Good Work:
Evidence and Policy Review

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1. Introduction and contents

YPIP is a regional partnership to provide evidence, learning and coordination to address social and economic challenges

Good work and business

- Build evidence base
- Understand opportunities and constraints for good work in key sectors
- Shape good work agenda through voice of lived experience
- Promote good work through business support and investment

1. Introduction and contents

2. What is Good Work?

3. Why is Good Work important?

4. How Good is Work in Yorkshire & Humber?

2. What is Good Work?

Good Work: An evolving concept

- **Definitions vary across authors and institutions**: As the notion of Good Work (GW) has evolved, multiple overlapping definitions have emerged.

- **Operational measurement has proven very challenging** because of the range of definitions, lack of quantifiable evidence sources and quality issues with the data that is available, especially at sector, firm and local levels (Green, 2021).

- **Terms related to Good Work**:

  - **Job Quality**: A narrower concept focusing on job characteristics that meet workers' needs (earnings, working time, skills, social environment, physical conditions) (Green, 2021; Eurofound, 2012).

  - **Decent Work**: A broad framework, adopted by the International Labour Office and incorporated in the Sustainable Development Goals , that operates at the societal level (jobs, workers, labour markets, and social protection). It relates to the social purpose of employment (Green, 2021). There are seven core components of Decent Work (see later in the presentation).

Defining and Measuring Good Work

- Often includes pay, job security, working conditions, employee voice.

- **Objective** components are 'unbiased' measures (e.g. earnings, hours, contract).

- **Subjective** components consider personal views and experiences (e.g. worker satisfaction, relationships), which can take into account gender, race, and class (Warhurst, Wright & Lyonette, 2017). Both dimensions are essential for understanding and improving job quality (Irvine *et al.*, 2018).

- **Capability Approach:** how job quality affects well-being. Job quality is not only about pay, but also about workers' ability to determine their work and lives (Green, 2006; Stephens, 2023). It emphasises **workers' autonomy** and opportunities to shape their work and achieve personal well-being (Green, 2006).

- Some frameworks register the importance of **'fit'** between individual circumstances and job (e.g. ETUI, Leschke & Watt, 2008 and UNECE, 2015).

- **Challenges**: No universal definition or measurement tool; complexities in comparing across industries and regions; employer-worker tensions on what constitutes 'good' in GW.

The Dimensions of Good Work

ILO *Decent Work*
- Employment opportunities
- Adequate earnings and productive work
- Decent working time
- Combining work, family and personal life
- Work that should be abolished
- Stability and security of work
- Equal opportunity and treatment in employment
- Safe work environment
- Social security
- Social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation

Fair Work
- Effective voice
- Opportunity
- Security
- Fulfilment
- Respect

RSA-Carnegie UK *Good Work*
- Terms of employment
- Pay and benefits
- Job design and nature of work
- Social support and cohesion
- Health, safety and wellbeing
- Work-life balance
- Voice and representation

CIPD
- Pay and benefits
- Employment contracts
- Work-life balance
- Job design and nature of work
- Relationships at work
- Employee voice
- Health and wellbeing

Widely shared components
- Terms of employment
- Pay and benefits
- Health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing
- Job design and nature of work
- Social support and cohesion
- Voice and representation
- Work-life balance

Measuring Good Work

- Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices called for government to place equal importance on job quality as quantity through new job quality metrics.

- Carnegie UK Trust and RSA (2018) published 18 job quality metrics based on the seven dimensions of CIPD's job quality framework (right).

- But significant **measurement challenges** remain (Green 2021, Warhurst *et al*. 2017) with no agreed measurement approach.

- **Employer vs Worker Interests:** Data collection often focuses on worker-centred factors like wages and working conditions, which employers may see as costs. Employers are more supportive when data includes aspects like productivity (Green, 2021).

- **Context-specific measurement difficulties:** Translating the broad concept of GW into specific, contextually relevant markers and evaluating interventions is challenging (Warhurst, Wright, and Lyonette, 2017).

Terms of employment
Job security
Minimum guaranteed hours
Underemployment

Pay and benefits
Pay (actual)
Satisfaction with pay

Health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing
Physical injury
Mental health

Job design and nature of work
Use of skills
Control
Opportunities for progression
Sense of purpose

Social support and cohesion
Peer support
Line manager relationship

Voice and Representation
Trade union membership
Employee information
Employee involvement

**Work-life balance**
Over-employment
Overtime (paid and unpaid)

3. Why is Good Work important?

Good Work creates positive social outcomes

Strong evidence that **poor-quality work**, even if secure, can **negatively impact physical and psychological health** (CIPD, 2023).

- GW directly enhances **individual work-related subjective wellbeing** (Green, 2021).

- GW can help **address poor health, reliance on welfare, and economic insecurity** (Dobbins, 2022)

- **GW can be a driver of social cohesion and justice** through poverty alleviation and inclusion (ILO, 2013).

- Work that guarantees security, representation, and fair conditions empowers workers to engage in decision-making, which in turn contribute to broader democratic dialogue within society (Green, 2021).

- GW promotes lifelong learning, skills development, and career progression, **enhancing both individual employability and workforce adaptability** (NEF, 2024).

- Employers are increasingly seen as **'anchor institutions'** that support local economic & social wellbeing. (NEF, 2024)
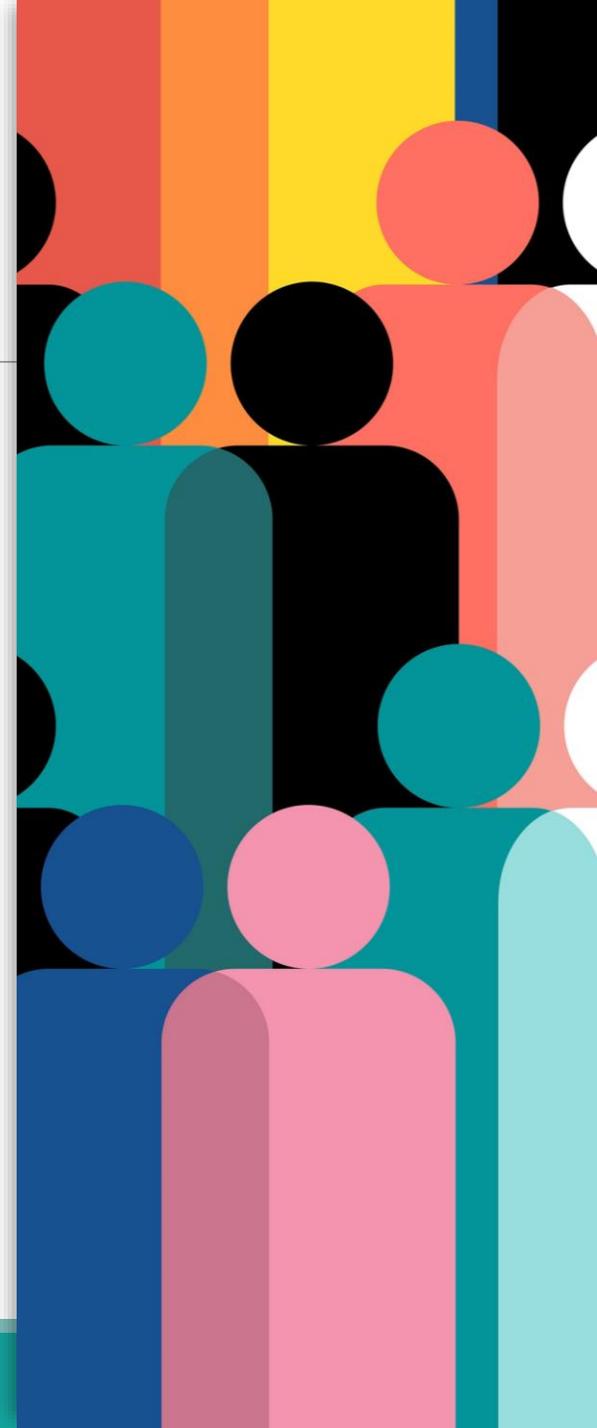
Good work is linked to higher productivity

Some evidence of positive relationship between GW (objective and subjective dimensions) and productivity (with a few caveats):

- **Higher pay** boosts productivity but only up to a point (Kenny, 1999). Performance-Related Pay and Employee Stock Ownership Plans have mixed results, with increased impact when employees are more involved (Pendleton & Robinson, 2017).

- Job design approaches that involve **High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS)** can raise productivity. (Combs *et al.*, 2006). HPWS are a collection of HR practices which improve employee voice, autonomy , motivation and skills utilisation. Employer-funded training helps, but effects vary outside manufacturing (CEDEFOP, 2012).

- Purpose in business enhances productivity by promoting meaningful work, sustainable resource use, and strong workplace relations (Wessels, 2025).

- **Wellbeing and job satisfaction** generally increase productivity (Barth *et al.*, 2017), though HR-led wellbeing initiatives may benefit employers more than employees (Ho *et al.*, 2020**).**

- **Worker voice** improves managerial responsiveness and productivity (Bryson *et al.*, 2006; ReWAGE, 2024). UK productivity gains from unions were positive (Haskel, 2005), but have declined over time (Özlem *et al.*, 2015).
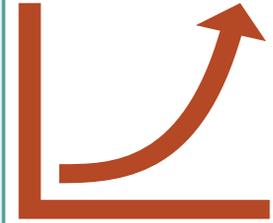
Conversely, '**poor' work is negatively associated with productivity**:

- **Long hours and rigid schedules** reduce productivity (Shephard & Clifton, 2000). Flexible working can help but depends on management practices (Felsted & Reuschke, 2021).

- **Temporary contracts** largely reduce productivity, especially in skilled sectors (Lisi, 2023). They may encourage risk-taking and innovation but can also lead to low-productivity jobs (Blanchard & Landier, 2002).

Good work can support innovation

Innovation includes both technological and non-technological forms (OECD, 2005). While it often supports good work, it can also have negative effects, creating a vicious cycle ([Duhautois et al., 2022](#)).

Virtuous circle dynamics around features of GW observed in some studies (with a few caveats):

- **Group incentives**, like profit-sharing, encourage innovation more than individual pay or fixed salaries ([Curran and Walsworth, 2014](#)), with moderate pay dispersion within organisations promoting participation and innovation ([Yanadori and Cui, 2013](#); [Wang et al., 2015](#)).

- Workplaces that **manage stress and support good health promote creativity** and problem-solving (Kesselring et al., 2016), though stress can either promote or hinder innovation, depending on its nature ([Dou et al., 2022](#)).

- **Jobs with autonomy, task variety, and low demands** are conducive to innovative behaviour ([De Spiegelaere et al., 2012](#)). Organisational culture shifting from hierarchical to flexible, team-based structures is crucial ([Martins and Terblanche, 2003](#); [Beblavý et al., 2012](#)).

- **Peer and managerial support, teamwork, and leadership** that empowers employees enhances innovation as it promotes trust and a sense of involvement ([Bono and Judge, 2003](#); [Davis, 2009](#)).

- **Employee engagement** supported by participation and trust, drives innovation and productivity ([Bélanger and Edwards, 2007](#); [Dobbins et al., 2024](#) ; [McLean, 2005](#)), with trade unions also reducing resistance to change and promoting knowledge-sharing ([Dediu et al., 2018](#)).

- **Flexible working arrangements**, such as teleworking and reduced hours, boost autonomy, job satisfaction, and innovation ([Almahamid and Ayoub, 2022](#); [Malhotra et al., 2016](#)), but remote working may reduce spontaneous idea generation ([McAlpine, 2018](#)).

- **Mental health support and good job quality** appear to be correlated with increased innovation outcomes, by creating an environment where all employees, including those from underrepresented groups, can contribute to innovation ([Bourke & Roper, 2024](#)).

But innovation is not always driven by types of employment associated with GW. **Temporary employment** can bring skills and external knowledge that boost innovation ([Ferreras-Méndez et al., 2016](#)), but may also deter collaboration due to weak employee ties ([Wheeler and Buckley, 2001](#)).

Good Work has other benefits for individual businesses

Employee Retention

Employee loyalty increases with GW practices, reducing turnover and saving costs (Gallup, 2025).

Workplaces with higher levels of worker participation show a 20% reduction in turnover in Sweden (NUTEK, 1996) and across Europe (Totterdill, 2015).

Well designed jobs with autonomy, task variety, and supportive management promote retention (Poncet *et al.*, 2007; p. 19).

Work-life balance policies and flexible arrangements also support retention and diversity (Bourke and Roper, 2024).

Customer Satisfaction

When employees feel valued and supported, customer satisfaction often improves. Workers reporting better job satisfaction are more likely to form meaningful customer interactions, driving loyalty and client retention (Totterdill, 2020).

Mental health support and inclusive workplaces allow all employees, including those from underrepresented groups, to contribute effectively to customer-facing roles (Bourke and Roper, 2024).

Brand Reputation

Inclusive recruitment policies, supportive working conditions, and visible commitments to GW contribute positively to brand image (Carnegie UK Trust, 2018).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives focusing on human rights and working conditions further strengthen brand trust and public perception (UNRISD, 2010).

But there are significant barriers to implementing Good Work

Barrier category	Key issues
Employer Practices	Low awareness, weak HR, exploitative contracts, limited worker voice (Findlay *et al.*, 2019; Campbell *et al.*, 2021)
Economic Constraints	Cost pressures, sector instability, external shocks (Culture Radar, 2022; Scottish Government, 2022)
Legal and Regulatory Gaps	Weak enforcement, low awareness of rights, limited devolved powers (Judge and Slaughter, 2023; Fair Work Convention, 2016)
Inequality and Exclusion	Disproportionate impact on marginalised groups, low union coverage (Coleman *et al.*, 2013; Findlay *et al.*, 2019)
Information Gaps	Lack of HR support in SMEs, stigma around poverty (Culture Radar, 2022)
Weak Business Case	Limited evidence linking good work to productivity (Findlay *et al.*, 2019; Judge and Slaughter, 2023)

4. How Good is Work in Yorkshire & Humber?

ONS Quality of Work Indicators I

Good Work Positive Indicators
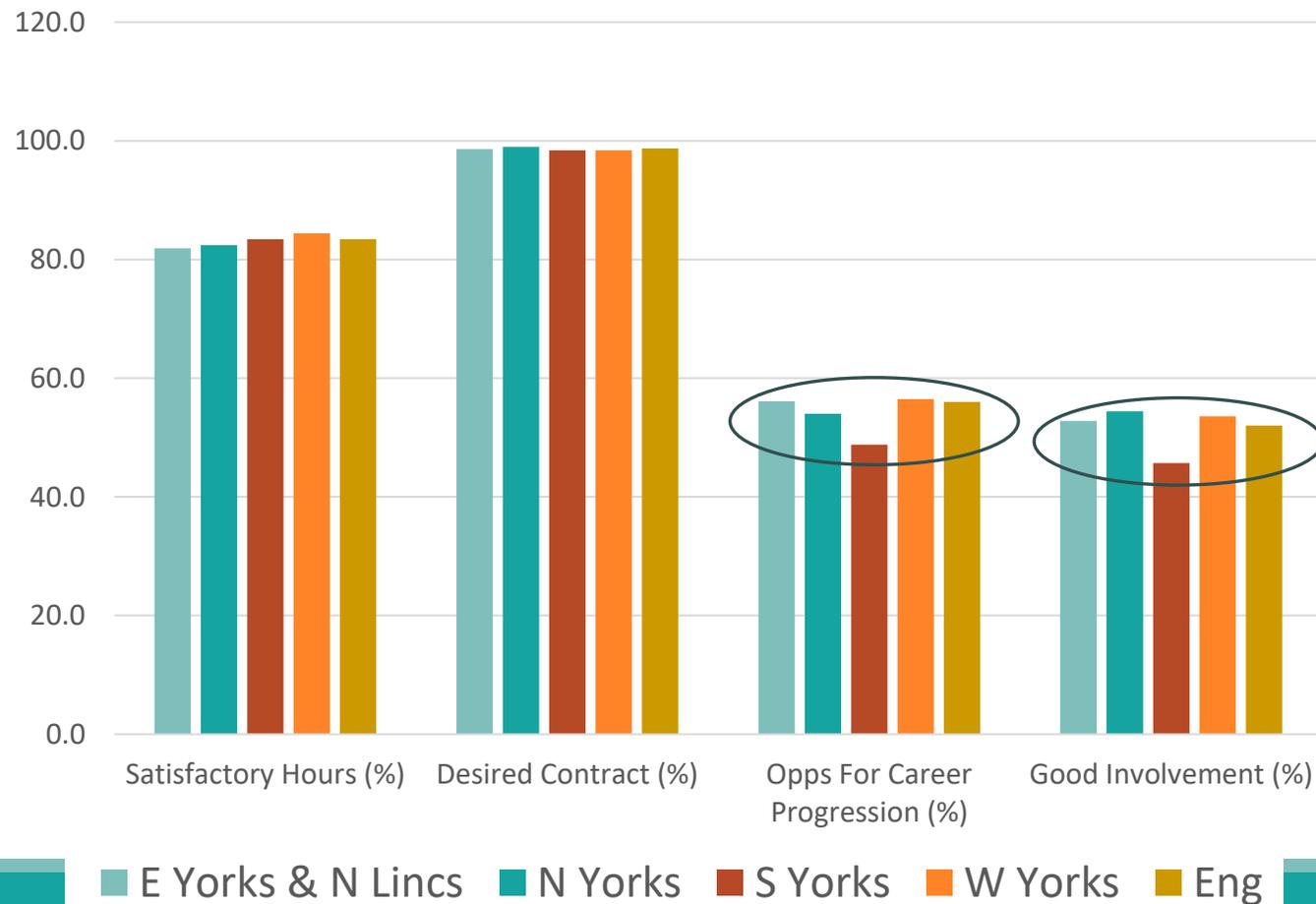
Most variation on these indicators is not statistically significant.

Opportunities for career progression & employee involvement is low in S. Yorks.

ONS (2025) Job quality indicator tables 2023, UK

ONS Quality of Work Indicators: The Bad

Good Work Negative Indicators

Legend: E Yorks & N Lincs | N Yorks | S Yorks | W Yorks | Eng

Unpaid overtime is less of an issue in the region than in England as a whole (this is statistically significant in S Yorks & E Yorks and N Lincs)

Low pay is very sensitive to localised context but variation is statistically significant from the England average in all sub-regions.

Zero hours contracts may be a (absolute and relative) cause for concern & are significantly more prominent across the region than in England as a whole.

The balance between demand and supply is mixed, but inactivity is an issue across most of the region outside of North Yorks, partly because of inadequate demand

Unemployment, Inactivity and Jobs Density (jobs per resident)

Legend:
- Unemployment Rate 16 + (%)
- Inactivity Rate 16-64 (%)
- Jobs Density (RH Scale)

Lines represent England Average
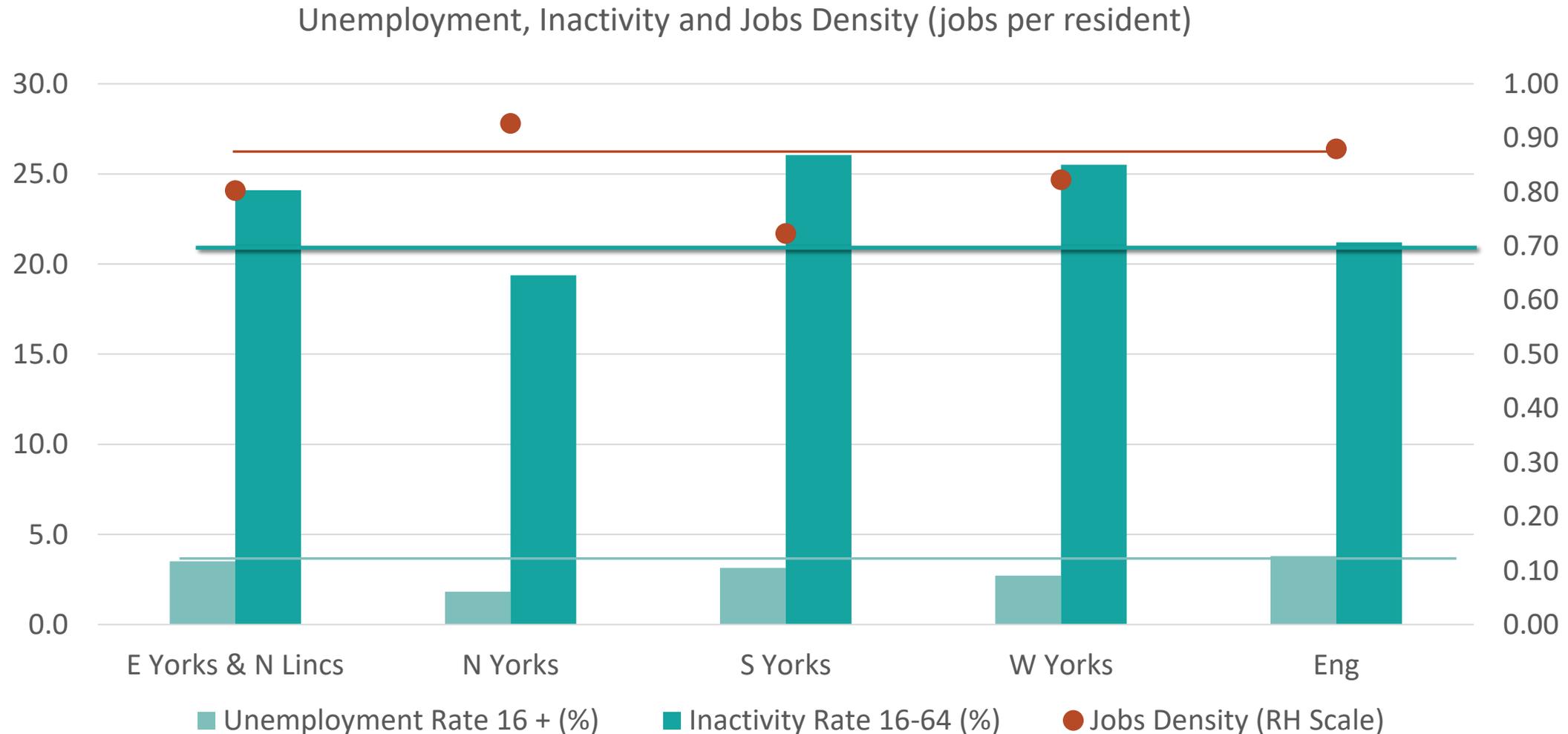
Median pay lags the England average in every part of the region, especially in Hull…

Median Gross Weekly Pay £
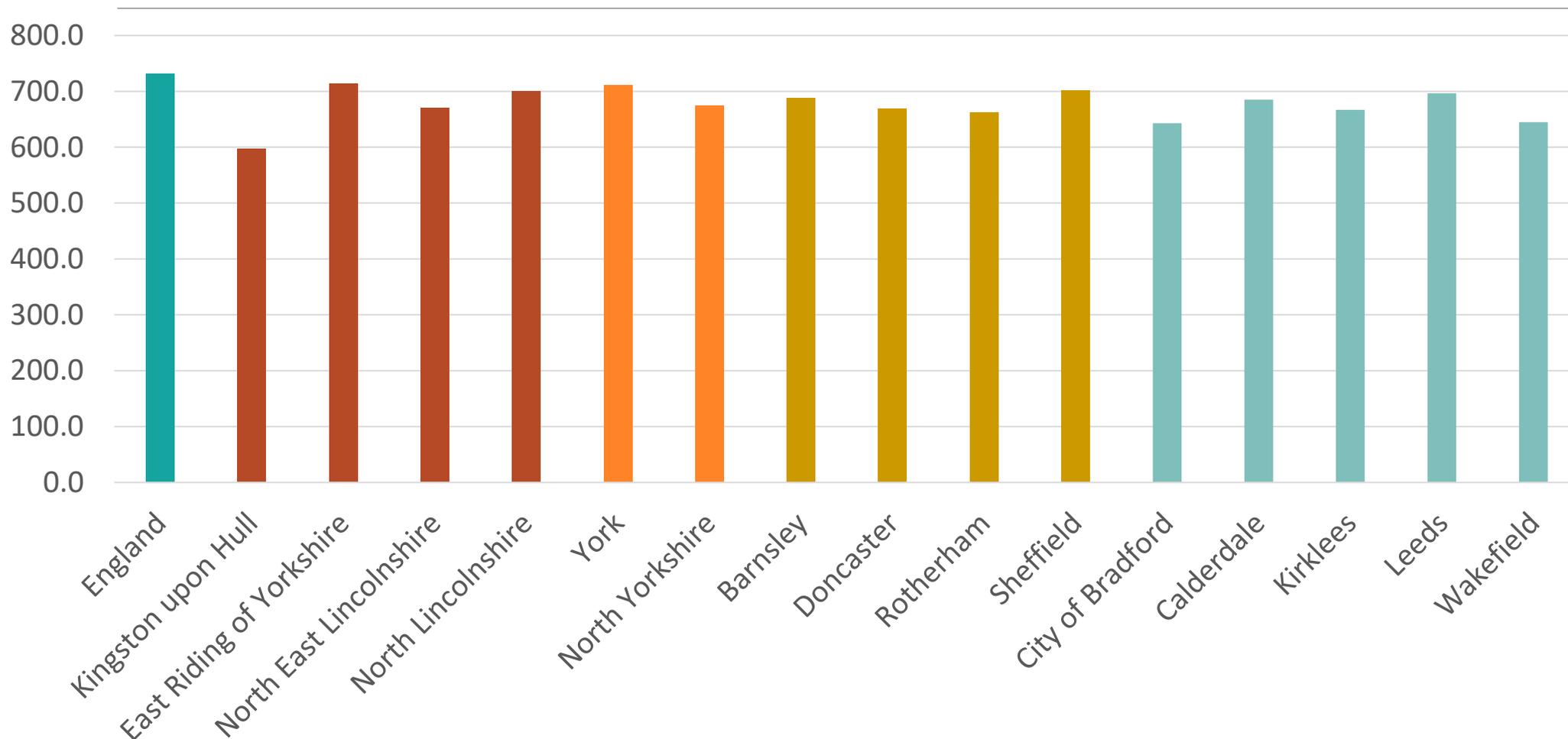
5. How can policy and practice promote Good Work?

Broad support for Good Work internationally and across the political spectrum and at different scales in the UK ...

Decent Work

SDG 8: Decent work and Growth

More and Better Jobs

Taylor Review and Good Work Plan

Build Back Better

...great jobs in every town and city

Employment Rights Bill

Fair Work Charter

Employers crucial to promoting good work

Business environment

- Existing ownership structure (e.g. family run vs private shareholders) and other firm-level factors (e.g. size, HR capacity)
- Costs/overheads (e.g. business rates, energy etc)
- Sector dynamics (e.g. norms, seasonal demand)
- Peer support and influence (e.g. role modelling good/poor practice)

Labour market conditions and enablers

- Supply/demand of appropriately skilled labour
- Skills and training provision
- Transport infrastructure
- Child care provision
- Attractiveness of place to live and work

Choices and practices of employers:
Product markets
Wage setting
Working environment
Term and conditions
HR/recruitment and workforce diversity
Skills, training and progression
Technology and innovation
Management
Governance
CSR policies
Business culture

Policy, regulation and institutions

- Employment rights
- Minimum wages (NLW)
- Taxes, incentives and subsidies
- Regulation and enforcement regimes (e.g. modern slavery)
- Sector wage agreements
- Industrial strategy and innovation policies
- Interaction with welfare benefits, employment, skills and health systems

Stakeholder influence or pressure

- Trade union strength and density
- Wider advocacy and campaigns (e.g. London Living Wage)
- Good work initiatives (e.g. employment charters)
- Procurement policies
- Customer choice (e.g. preference for ethical practices)
- Accreditation (e.g. Disability Confident)

Employer choices and practices shaped by wider operating context

Many places already promoting good work through employment charters, including in Yorkshire & Humber...

The Good Work Standard (London)

- Fair pay and conditions
- Workplace wellbeing
- Skills and progression
- Diversity and recruitment

Good Employment Charter (Greater Manchester)

- Secure Work
- Flexible Work
- Pay
- Engagement & Voice
- Recruitment
- People Management
- Health & Wellbeing

Fair Employment Charter (Liverpool City Region)

- Healthy Pillar
- Fair Pillar
- Inclusive Pillar
- Just Pillar

Good Work Pledge (North of Tyne)

- Valuing and Rewarding your workforce
- Promoting Health and Wellbeing
- Effective Communications and representation
- Developing a Balanced Workforce
- A Social Responsibility

Fair Employment Charter (West Yorkshire)

- Opportunity
- Wellbeing
- Employee Voice
- Fulfilment
- Security

But other local levers exist...

Lever	Description	Local examples
Awareness Campaigns	Targeted campaigns to improve understanding of fair work and its benefits.	✔
Employability Services	Embedding fair work principles in government-supported employability programs.	✔
Real Living Hours (RLH)	Encouraging fairer work hours and pay security alongside the Real Living Wage.	✔
Fair Work Champions	Appointing individuals in government and public bodies to advocate for fair work.	✔
Conditionality in Public Spending	Tying government procurement and funding to fair work criteria.	✔
Joint Capacity Investments	Government and employer co-investment in fair work initiatives.	✔
Fair Work Education & Training	Developing accredited training programs on fair work principles.	✔
Voluntary Charters	Encouraging industries and regions to commit to fair work pledges.	✔
Formal Fair Work Accreditation	Certifying businesses that meet fair work standards.	✔
Communities of Practice	Networks of employers, unions, and policymakers sharing fair work insights.	✔
Business Support Tools	Providing tools and resources for businesses to assess and improve fair work practices.	✔
Fair Work Evidence Hub	A central repository for fair work research, case studies, and best practices.	✔

Findley *et al.* (2024)

6. How will the project build on existing knowledge to support policy innovation?

Developing the Good Work agenda: gaps and opportunities

Limited evidence on how business practices can drive inclusive growth.

- Literature concentrates on national or local policy levers
- Corporate Social Responsibility evidence base is large but less focussed on good work

Growing awareness of the importance of Good Work and Better Business

- Recognition among businesses of their role as anchor institutions in their communities
- Business representative bodies increasingly engaged e.g. BITC's Opening Doors campaign
- But 'business case' of potential benefits to employers remains limited (Findley *et al.*, 2019)

Significant variations in practice:

- Some exemplar larger firms and SMEs but still widespread poor practice
- Scope for peer learning and influence among businesses not well understood

Opportunities for YPIP to develop the Good Work agenda:

- Enhance understanding of barriers and opportunities for businesses toengage with the GW agenda
- Test new approaches to scaling good practice
- Support policy partners to embed good work objectives in strategies and build a GW 'ecosystem'

Delivering good work requires a whole system approach that...

...addresses dimensions of good work
- Terms of employment
- Pay and benefits
- Job design
- Social support and cohesion
- Health, safety and wellbeing
- Work-life balance
- Voice and representation

...engages a range of stakeholders
- National/local government
- Employers and employees
- Business support (public or private)
- Business bodies (e.g. Chambers, CIPD)
- Trade unions
- Advocacy/campaigning organisations
- Communities
- Customers
- Supply chains

...works across policy scales
- **Transnational**: SDGs
- **National**: Employment Rights Bill
- **Sector**: Collective Agreements
- **City-Region/Local**: WY Fair Work Charter
- **Workplace**: Trade Union representation

...deploys a range of policy types
- **Hard**: Mandatory regulations e.g. minimum wage laws. Typically preferred by employees
- **Soft**: Voluntary standards and incentives e.g. employment charters. Typically preferred by employers

A whole system approach requires policy innovation in Y&H to:

- Understand, combine, coordinate and target policy types at different challenges and at different scales.

- Overcome institutional fragmentation (policy competence) e.g. between national/city-region/local.

Next steps for YPIP

Key questions

1. How can more inclusive recruitment enable more people to benefit from GW?

2. How can local business support help employers focus on GW in challenging times?

3. What are the opportunities and challenges for promoting GW in key 'foundational economy' sectors?

4. What impact are existing GW initiatives having in the Y&H region?

5. How does business size, sector and firm level factors shape ability to provide and promote GW?

Activities

1. Map out business support offer and its potential to lever good work benefits.

2. Explore inclusive recruitment programmes and processes.

3. Examine opportunities for improving good work in the adult social care sector.

Thanks for your interest

We appreciate your time and interest in our review of *Good Work*.

If you'd like to learn more, share feedback, or explore collaboration, please get in touch.

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