



**CIPD**

Survey report  
June 2023

**CIPD Good**  
**Work Index 2023**

The CIPD has been championing better work and working lives for over 100 years. It helps organisations thrive by focusing on their people, supporting our economies and societies. It's the professional body for HR, L&D, OD and all people professionals – experts in people, work and change. With almost 160,000 members globally – and a growing community using its research, insights and learning – it gives trusted advice and offers independent thought leadership. It's a leading voice in the call for good work that creates value for everyone.

## Survey report

# CIPD Good Work Index 2023

## Contents

<b>1</b>	Introduction	2
<b>2</b>	What is good work?	2
<b>3</b>	At a glance: Good work in 2023	3
<b>4</b>	The cost-of-living crisis	5
<b>5</b>	Discontent in the public sector	7
<b>6</b>	Job design and the nature of work	10
<b>7</b>	Skills, qualifications and knowledge	15
<b>8</b>	Work–life balance	18
<b>9</b>	Flexible working	19
<b>10</b>	Job insecurity	22
<b>11</b>	Job mobility	23
<b>12</b>	Relations in the workplace	25
<b>13</b>	Voice in the workplace	28
<b>14</b>	Conclusion	33
<b>15</b>	Recommendations for policy-makers	34
<b>16</b>	Recommendations for practice	35
<b>17</b>	Endnotes	35

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# 1 Introduction

The CIPD Good Work Index is an annual benchmark of good work or job quality in the UK. It measures a wide range of aspects of job quality, including employment essentials, such as contractual arrangements, the day-to-day realities of work as experienced by workers themselves, and the impacts on people's health and wellbeing.

This survey report is based on the sixth annual *UK Working Lives* survey. The report's central purpose is to set out how people work, what they think about it, and how that has changed over the past five years. It achieves this by capturing data on seven dimensions of work to define what good work looks like.

The 2023 survey was conducted in January and February 2023 and provides a total sample of 5,139 (unweighted figure) workers. To make the samples representative of the UK as a whole, quotas are used to target the sample, and subsequent weights based on ONS figures are applied to the dataset. The sample is representative of the UK workforce in: the intersection of gender by full- or part-time work status; organisation size within sector; industry; and age.

A subsample of approximately 1,000 of the 2019 respondents have since been resurveyed in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, allowing us to observe how the quality of work evolves within jobs.

## Breakdown of sample, by country and region

Country/region	Count
North England	952
Midlands	635
East England	370
London	530
South England	1,023
Wales	545
Scotland	1,010
Northern Ireland	74

# 2 What is good work?

## Definition

The CIPD believes that good work is fundamental to individual wellbeing, supports a strong, fair society, and creates motivated workers, productive organisations and a strong economy.

We define 'good work' as work that:

- is fairly rewarded
- gives people the means to securely make a living
- provides opportunities to develop skills and a career and gives a sense of fulfilment

- delivers a supportive environment with constructive relationships
- allows for work–life balance
- is physically and mentally healthy for people
- gives people the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives
- is accessible to all
- is affected by a range of factors, including HR practices, the quality of people management and by workers themselves.

### Seven dimensions of good work

Our definition of ‘good work’ is based on seven dimensions of good work that we capture data on. This data forms the basis for the CIPD Good Work Index itself, which uses both objective and subjective measures.

Objective measures capture aspects that in principle should be unbiased: for example, data on contract type and union membership.

Subjective measures reflect an opinion, preference or feeling, for example, how meaningful people find their work, the quality of relationships at work, and measures of satisfaction with job or life.

Our seven dimensions of good work are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Dimensions of good work**

Dimension	Areas included
1 Pay and benefits	Subjective feelings regarding pay, employer pension contributions, and other employee benefits
2 Contracts	Contract type, underemployment, and job security
3 Work–life balance	Overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and HR provision for flexible working
4 Job design and the nature of work	Workload or work intensity, autonomy or how empowered people are in their jobs, how well resourced they are to carry out their work, job complexity and how well this matches the person’s skills and qualifications, how meaningful people find their work, and development opportunities provided
5 Relationships at work	Social support and cohesion, the quality of relationships at work, psychological safety, and the quality of people management
6 Employee voice	Channels and opportunities for feeding views to one’s employer and managers’ openness to employee views
7 Health and wellbeing	Positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health, often considered as an outcome of job quality

# 3

## At a glance: Good work in 2023

### A mixed picture for UK workers

Notions of ‘good work’ in 2023 have been shaped by the events of the last five years, including Brexit, COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, which have seen inflation hit record levels. Businesses and institutions have had to try and find a way forward in a world where uncertainty has become endemic.

Yet despite all the disruption, the UK labour market has remained resilient. Unemployment has remained historically low. Overall, the structure of the labour market has changed little, with the share of people in less secure forms of employment slightly increasing over the past five years.

This stability reflects longer underlying trends in the structure of employment. The share of insecure work – defined as self-employment, temporary work and unpaid family work – remained virtually unchanged in the 30-year period running from 1992 to 2022. Although the impression is sometimes given that jobs are no longer lasting as long as they did, the time people spend in a job on average has not significantly changed over a similar period. Zero hours and the gig economy both remain marginal.<sup>1</sup> The extent of this mismatch has also not changed greatly. For example, the shares of people who say they work more hours or fewer hours than they want have not greatly changed, nor have the shares of people in part-time work who would like a full-time job, or the share of people in temporary work who would like a permanent job.

The past five years has, nonetheless, seen two significant changes. The first is the emergence of large-scale labour shortages, reflected in a 40% increase in unfilled vacancies since 2018 and a fall in employment levels compared with pre-pandemic. The second is the shift towards working at home, initially triggered by the pandemic.

Resilience and continuity are also recurrent features of the workplace experience for people. Despite the disruption of recent years, there has been only a limited impact on what people think about their job and employment relationships. The *2023 UK Working Lives* survey shows that most people continue to have a good experience of work, with high levels of job satisfaction and good relationships with both line managers and colleagues. Most people like their work and find it fulfilling.

However, there are large minorities who have a very different experience, with between 20% and 30% reporting negatively on some major aspects of work. This translates into large numbers out of a workforce of 32 million people. Taking our sample of 5,000+ workers as representative of the UK population, our data suggests that between 6 and 9 million people have poor-quality work in some important respects. It would be unrealistic to think that all aspects of all jobs can be transformed, but it is reasonable to think that significant improvement can be made in some features of almost all jobs and in workplace relations.

### **Job quality in decline for many**

Many of our *UK Working Lives* survey indicators show there has been no significant improvement over the past four years<sup>2</sup> and, in some aspects, job quality has gone backwards. UK workers are now more likely to think that work is purely transactional – just for the money and nothing else – than they were four years ago. They are less willing to work harder than they need to help their employer or organisation. They are also less likely to say that work has a positive impact on their mental health. They are less enthused about work and less likely to say they think their work is useful (an important aspect of meaningful work).

Where there are signs of decline, we typically see a slide towards mediocrity rather than a large increase in negative views. For example, the marked decline in those who think work has a positive impact on mental health has not seen much change in those who think work has a negative impact. The shift has been towards those who think work has neither a positive nor negative impact.

The 2023 survey also shows significant differences on some indicators between the private and public sector. Public sector workers are much more likely to think they are not paid appropriately for the job and more likely to report negative mental health, excessive workloads and constant pressure at work than their private sector counterparts. Many of these differences were there before the pandemic. Others, such as a decline in discretionary effort, seem more recent.

### **Visible improvements to some aspects of work**

It is not all doom and gloom. There have been improvements, notably in human capital development, with more people reporting that opportunities for both skills and career development have improved. Relations at work with managers and colleagues remain highly positive. People have become more confident they could find another job as good as their current one. The share of employees working flexibly has increased, albeit almost entirely driven by the shift towards homeworking: we suggest this change is likely irreversible.

Many of these findings for 2023 are reflected in other evidence from the US and Europe. Analysis of the 2021 European Working Conditions Survey<sup>3</sup> and the US suggests that the UK does reasonably well against other large labour markets, but seldom excels. [US survey data](#) also shows little improvement and some back-sliding over the past five years, though over a 20-year period there is still an underlying improvement on most indicators.

## 4 The cost-of-living crisis

We begin this report with a look at the cost-of-living crisis, which has impacted not only living standards, but job quality.

Our 2023 *UK Working Lives* survey included a question on whether people in work were coping with paying their bills and meeting their existing commitments. Just under half (48%) said they were meeting bills and commitments without any difficulties. Another third (33%) said they were doing so, but that it was a struggle from time to time.

However, 16% were signalling severe social distress, with 12% saying it was a constant struggle. Three per cent of workers said they were falling behind with some bills and commitments, and 1% said they were having real financial problems. Nearly one in six in serious difficulties translates into more than 5 million people in work.

As expected, these figures were significantly worse for those in lower-income households and those in less skilled work. For example, only 21% of those who said their household income was £20,000 or less said they could meet bills and commitments without difficulty. In contrast, 39% said they were experiencing constant struggles or were falling behind. Those who reported a disability were also more likely to be in distress, with 28% reporting either constant struggle or falling behind.

The same question was asked in 2022. The share who said they were coping without difficulties fell from 55% in 2022 to 48% in 2023, and the share who said they were keeping up but with a struggle from time to time increased from 29% to 33%. Table 2 summarises the main findings from the 2023 survey and how these have changed since 2022.

A significant increase in hardship for many groups in society has been well documented and points to a much greater rise in social distress than these survey results might suggest. There are a number of reasons why the survey will not fully reflect what is happening across society as a whole. First, it is a survey of those in work and so will exclude some of the most vulnerable groups. Second, the question asks about meeting bills and existing commitments and so will not pick up changes in discretionary spending and cutting back on energy use, which will affect far more people. Some people will have also drawn on savings and credit to get by. Third, the government's large-scale support packages will have mitigated the worst of the rise for some.

**Table 2: Cost-of-living crisis for those in work in 2022–2023 (%)**

Dimension	All in work (n=6,262)	All in work (n=5,139)	Household income £20k or less (n=339)	C2DE (n=1,197)	Disability (n=855)
	2022	2023	2023	2023	2023
I am keeping up with all bills and commitments without any difficulties	55	48	21	39	33
I am keeping up with all bills and commitments, but it is a struggle from time to time	29	33	39	34	38
I am keeping up with all bills and commitments, but it is a constant struggle	11	12	25	17	20
I am falling behind with some bills or credit commitments	2	3	9	5	6
I am having real financial problems and have fallen behind with many bills or credit commitments	1	1	4	2	2
NA/Don't know	3	2	3	3	2

Notes: NA are those who said they had no bills or commitments. C2DE are semi-skilled and less skilled manual and non-manual workers.

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.



# 5 Discontent in the public sector

The discontent we've been seeing in the public sector has important consequences for job quality in the UK. Winter 2022/23 and the early spring of 2023 were dominated by an escalating series of disputes in the UK public sector, triggered by an offer from the Pay Review Boards for pay rises well below the then current rate of inflation, following several years where public sector pay had fallen behind that in the private sector. Many of these disputes were unresolved at the time of writing. There were also other grievances related to the strains on public services in recent years. The *2023 UK Working Lives* survey allowed us to look at a number of indicators where significant public and private sector differences exist.

## Attitudes to pay

It is clear that at the time of the survey, many workers in the public sector felt that their pay did not reflect the responsibilities of the job, a view endorsed by 45% in the public sector compared with 32% of those in the private sector. This understates the gap, as public sector workers were much more likely to say they strongly disagreed with the proposition that their pay did not match job responsibilities (17%, compared with 8% in the private sector). There were no significant differences in these results across the three public-based sectors of public administration and defence, education, and health and social work. The results for the voluntary sector were similar to the private sector.

**Table 3: Views on pay: The public and private sectors compared, 2023 (%)**

Considering my responsibilities and achievements in my job, I feel I get paid appropriately				
	All in work	Private	Public	Voluntary
Agree	46	48	40	48
Neither agree nor disagree	19	20	15	17
Disagree	34	32	45	34

Base: all (n=5,139); private sector (n=4,010); public sector (n=809); voluntary sector (n=289).

Source: *UK Working Lives* survey 2023.

## Non-pay issues

A series of questions on some non-pay issues also shows significant differences. Public sector workers were more likely to report that their work impacted negatively on their mental health (35%, compared with 25% in the private sector). They were also much more likely to report that they felt exhausted most or all of the time (30% in the public sector, 29% in the private sector). They were also more likely to say that they felt under excessive pressure (25% against 21%).

Unsurprisingly, workload was a big issue, with 42% of public sector workers reporting that in a normal week they thought their workload was either far too much or too much, compared with 29% of private sector workers. Public

sector workers were also more likely to disagree with the proposition that they usually had enough time to get work done within their allocated hours (26% versus 18% in the private sector).

Only 12% of public sector workers felt they had strong bargaining power,<sup>4</sup> compared with 24% in the private sector. The question asks about individual rather than collective bargaining power, so we have to be cautious in inferring too much from these answers. It is, however, consistent with pay in the public sector falling behind that in the private sector for some years and with other answers in the survey that signal discontent over work in the public sector.

One further area of interest is discretionary effort. In 2023, just over half of all workers (51%) said that they would be willing to work harder than they had to in order to help their employer or organisation. Workers in the public sector were less likely to say they would do so (44%) than workers in the private sector (52%).

**Table 4: Views on non-pay issues: Public and private sectors compared (%)**

	All in work	Private	Public	Voluntary
I have strong bargaining power (disagree)	45	42	58	48
In a normal week workload is too much	31	29	42	36
Negative impact of work on mental health	27	25	35	25
Negative impact of work on physical health	26	25	30	22
At work I feel exhausted (always/often)	24	23	30	20
Under excessive pressure (always/often)	21	21	25	17
Enough time to do work (disagree)	19	18	26	23
I am willing to work harder than I need (agree)*	51	52	44	57

Base: all (n=5,139); private sector (n=4,010); public sector (n=809); voluntary sector (n=289); \* all who are employed (n=4,566).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

### Have things got worse or better since 2019?

Comparisons with the same survey questions from 2019 suggest a mixed picture, with some indicators getting worse, some much the same, and some better.

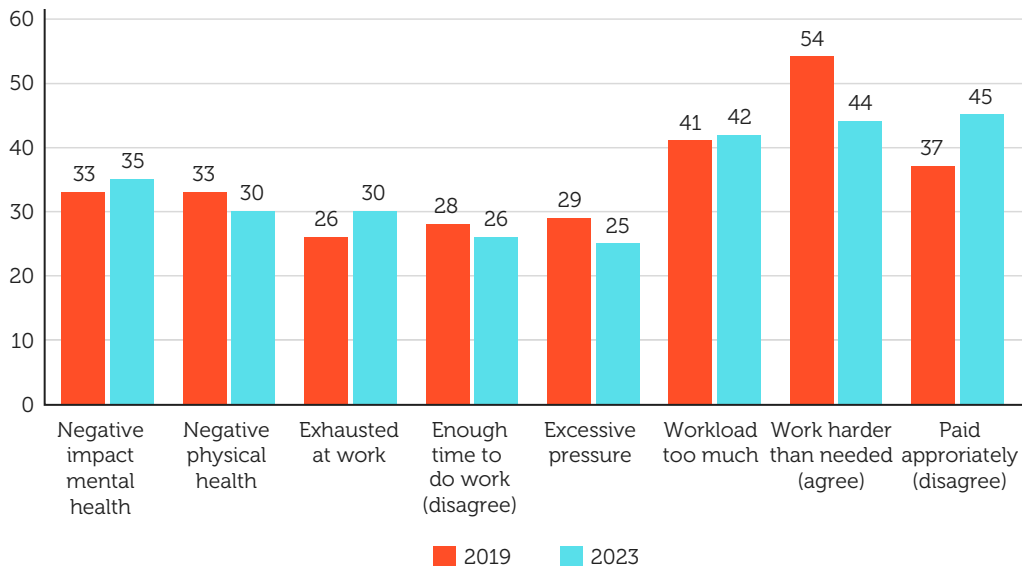
The share of workers who disagreed with the proposition that pay matched job responsibilities increased from 37% to 45% between 2019 and 2023 in the public sector, but showed little change in the private and voluntary sectors.

The share of public sector workers who reported adverse impacts on mental health showed no significant change (33% in 2019; 35% in 2023). The share of workers in the public sector who said they always/often felt under excessive pressure has fallen somewhat, from 29% to 25%, with little change in the private sector. The number of public sector workers who don't have enough time to do their work has edged down from 28% to 26%, while those whose workload was too much remained unchanged.

Taken as a whole, it does not suggest much easing of workload-related pressures in the public sector, but neither does it entirely fit with the widely reported and credible view that pressures have significantly increased in places such as the NHS. It may well be that while some areas and occupations have improved, others have worsened, especially in some 'frontline' services.

In addition, there has been a significant withdrawal of discretionary effort in the public sector, with the share saying they would work harder than they needed to in order to help their employer or organisation down from 54% to 44%. There were also falls in the private sector (from 57% to 52%) and the voluntary sector (from 65% to 57%). More public sector workers either feel they are working hard enough already and are unwilling to do more, or are sufficiently discontented not to make the extra effort.

**Figure 1: Indicators of public sector discontent, 2019 to 2023 (%)**



Base: public sector 2023 (n=809); public sector 2019 (n=718).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2019 and 2023.

### The positive side of public sector work

So far we have concentrated on indicators that might help explain the high levels of discontent in much of the public sector in 2023. There is not space in this report to do full justice to a public–private comparison or track all aspects of work in the public sector over time. However, the 2023 survey also shows that many public sector workers are just as likely to be positive about other aspects of their jobs as private sector workers – and on some indicators, more so. Unsurprisingly, public sector workers were far more likely to feel they did useful work for society (69% against 41% in the private sector). They were also more likely to agree they were highly motivated by the core purpose of the organisation (55% against 42% in the private sector). The public sector clearly faces some major challenges in some areas, but it would not be safe to conclude that overall work in the public sector is worse than in the private sector or vice versa.

# 6 Job design and the nature of work

This section looks at a range of quality-of-work indicators which focus on how people feel about work and the job itself. By and large, most people feel positively about their work on most indicators, but there is also a great deal of indifference, and for some measures significant minorities have adverse views.

## Centrality of work and discretionary effort

Most people see work as more than just a means of earning money, but many do not. Fifty-five per cent agreed with the statement that they would enjoy having a paid job even if they did not need the money, while 43% agreed with the proposition that a job is just a way of earning a living and no more. Fifty-one per cent also agreed that they would work harder than they had to in order to help the employer or organisation, with only 20% disagreeing.

The 2023 survey also asked whether people were willing to volunteer to do things not formally required by the job, with 55% of people agreeing that they did and 18% disagreeing. Slightly more agreed that they made innovative suggestions to improve the quality of their team or department (57%), with 13% disagreeing. Many people were willing to help others when workload increased, with 69% agreeing and 8% disagreeing. These questions were not asked in 2019.

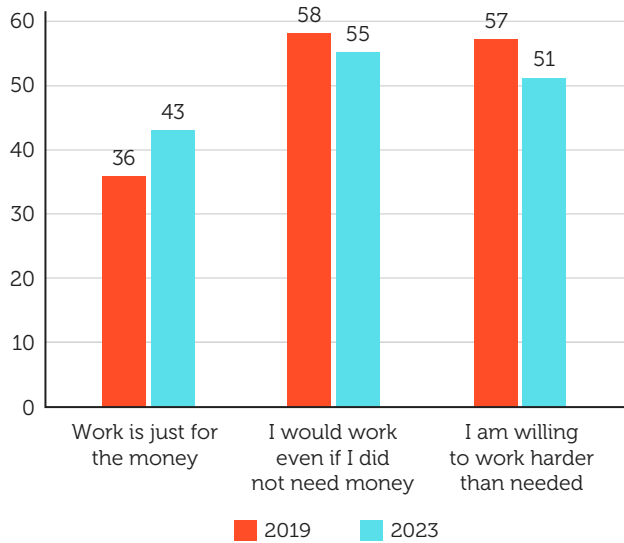
**Table 5: Centrality of work and discretionary effort (%)**

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
A job is just a way of earning money – no more	43	20	37	–
I would enjoy having a paid job even if I did not need the money	55	18	24	3
I am willing to work harder than I need to help my employer or organisation*	51	29	20	–
I volunteer to do things not formally required in the job	55	25	18	2
I make innovative suggestions to improve the quality of my team or department	57	13	13	4
I help others when workload increases	69	19	8	4

Base: all (n=5,139); \* all who are employed (n=4,566).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

Over the past four years there has been a significant shift in some attitudes towards work, measured by three questions also asked in 2019. In 2019, 36% of respondents said that a job was just a means of making money, compared with 43% in 2023. The share who said they would still work even if they did not need the money declined from 58% to 55%. The share who said they were willing to work harder than they needed to help their employer or organisation fell from 57% to 51%. Taken together, there has been a significant adverse shift in work attitudes, with fewer people willing to put in discretionary effort and more people seeing work just as a means of making money and nothing more.

**Figure 2: Work attitudes 2019–2023 (% agreeing)**

Base: all 2023 (n=5,139); all 2019 (n=5,136); all except those who are self-employed, 2023 (n=4,566); all except those who are self-employed, 2019 (n=4,465).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

### Do people find their work meaningful?

Most people thought their work was useful for their organisation (69% agreed, 12% disagreed) and almost as many thought their work was important (61% agreed, 17% disagreed). Forty-five per cent agreed they were motivated by the core purpose of the organisation, with 24% disagreeing.

There was unsurprisingly less support for the proposition of doing useful work for society (48% agreed, 26% disagreed), although, as reported earlier in this report, the share was much higher in the public than the private sector. A similar question asked whether people agreed their work made the world a better place, with 40% agreeing and 27% disagreeing.

Significant majorities thought their work served a satisfying purpose (59% agreed, 17% disagreed). Just under half agreed that their work contributed to their personal growth (46% agreed, 25% disagreed) and around 40% agreed their current job felt like their niche in life (41% agreed, 28% disagreed). Fewer people felt inspired by their work – 37% agreed they were and 30% disagreed.

### Work engagement and motivation

Another set of questions tested statements in a somewhat different way but with similar results. Around half of respondents said that time flies at work (50% said always/often, 12% rarely/never); were enthusiastic about their job (49% always/often, 17% rarely/never); and felt immersed in their job (49% always/often, 14% rarely/never). Respondents were much less enthusiastic about a further proposition that they felt full of energy at work, with 28% saying always or often, 26% never or rarely, and 45% said sometimes.

Questions on some of the more negative aspects of work found that relatively few respondents felt bored (16%), lonely (13%) or miserable (13%) at work always or most of the time. However, larger shares said they sometimes felt

these things (33% said they sometimes felt bored, 21% said they sometimes felt lonely, and 26% said they sometimes felt miserable). Between a fifth and a quarter reported they were always or often exhausted (24%) and that they were under excessive pressure (21%).

Overall, these indicators tell us that most people have a good experience at work and feel positively about their job, both in terms of the personal feelings and experience and its wider impact on organisations and beyond. But it is also the case that there is a significant minority of roughly a quarter of the workforce who have a very different experience on at least some of these indicators.

There was not much change in the answers to most of those questions, which were also asked in 2019. However, there was a decline in the share who said they thought they did useful work for their organisation, from 74% to 69%, and among those who said they felt enthusiastic about their job always or often, from 54% to 49%. There is therefore some limited evidence that people's experience at work is slightly worse than it was in 2019.

**Table 6: Experiences at work in 2023 (%)**

	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Job satisfaction	66	18	16
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I do useful work for my organisation	69	18	12
The work I do is important*	61	21	17
The work I do serves a satisfying purpose	59	22	17
I do useful work for society	48	25	26
My work contributes to my personal growth	46	27	25
I'm highly motivated by my organisation's core purpose	45	29	24
My current job feels like my niche in life	41	27	28
The work I do makes the world a better place	40	31	27
I feel inspired by work*	37	31	30
	Always/often	Sometimes	Rarely/never
Time flies when I am working	50	38	12
I am enthusiastic about my job	49	35	17
I am immersed in my job*	49	37	14
At my work I feel full of energy	28	45	26
At my work I feel exhausted	24	41	34
At my work I feel under excessive pressure	21	39	40
At my work I feel bored	16	33	50
At my work I feel lonely	13	21	61
At my work I feel miserable	13	26	59

\* not asked in 2019.

Base: all (n=5,139); all excluding freelance workers (n=4,914).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

## Job content

Sixty-one per cent said the job involved solving complex problems on their own often or rarely, and only 8% said they rarely/never did. Between 40% and 50% said their job always or often involved complex tasks, that it involved learning new things, and that it involved interesting tasks, and just under 20% said their job rarely or never had these characteristics. However, 47% also agreed that their job involves monotonous tasks always or often, and 13% said it rarely or never did. Since 2019 there has been little significant change, but the share who said their job involved interesting tasks fell from 48% to 43%.

**Table 7: Job content in 2023 (%)**

	Always/often	Sometimes	Rarely/never
My job involves solving unforeseen problems	61	30	8
My job involves monotonous tasks	47	40	13
My job involves complex tasks	47	34	19
My job involves interesting tasks	43	39	18
My job involves learning new things	42	39	19

Base: n=5,139 (all in work).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

## Autonomy and influence

This section looks at how much autonomy and influence people felt they had over their work and job.

Large majorities of people said that they agreed with the propositions that their job gave them a chance to use personal initiative or judgement (76%), that they were allowed to make decisions on what methods they used (71%), that they were allowed to decide on how to go about doing their work (70%), that their job allowed them to make decisions on their own (69%), and that they had considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how they did their work (65%). Majorities also reported that their job provided them with significant autonomy in making decisions (59%). Between 14% and 17% of workers disagreed with these propositions.

**Table 8: Specific discretion, autonomy and influence over how jobs are done (%)**

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
My job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgement in carrying out work	76	14	8
I am allowed to make decisions about what methods I use to complete the work	71	16	11
I am allowed to decide on my own how to go about doing my work	70	17	10
My job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own	69	17	9
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I work	65	20	6
My job provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions	59	23	15

Base: n=5,148 (all in work).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

Another set of questions looks at the same sort of indicators but asked people to grade how much influence they had over some aspects of the job. Twenty-four per cent said they had a lot of influence over their job tasks and 36% said they had some, but 39% said they had little or none. Thirty-three per cent said they had a lot of influence over the pace at which they worked, but nearly as many (31%) said they had little or none, while another 34% said they had some. More people said they had a lot of influence over how they did their work (42%), with 33% saying they had some. However, 23% said they had none. Twenty-five per cent said they had a lot of influence over when they started and ended the day, but 47% said they had only a little influence or none.

These questions were also asked in 2019. The main change was that those who said they had a lot of influence on the pace of work fell from 37% to 33%, while those who said they had little or no influence on the start or end of the day dropped from 52% to 47%. Overall, the indicators do not suggest much change in autonomy over this period.

**Table 9: Influence over how jobs are done and at what pace (%)**

In general, how much influence do you have over...	A lot		Some		Little or none	
	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023
How you do your work	45	42	31	33	23	24
The pace at which you work	37	33	31	34	31	31
The tasks you do in your job	25	24	34	36	39	39
Start and end of day	25	26	22	26	52	47

Base: all except those who are self-employed in 2023 (n=4,634); all except those who are self-employed in 2019 (n=4,546).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

### Influence over performance objectives

A majority said they had some control over performance objectives (56% agreed, 15% disagreed). However, 42% said they could modify their performance objectives to emphasise some aspects of the job, with 15% disagreeing; and 40% said they could influence how they were evaluated, with 20% disagreeing. These questions were not asked in 2019.

**Table 10: Influence over performance objectives and evaluation (%)**

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I have some control over what my performance objectives are (what I am supposed to achieve)	56	22	17
I can modify my performance objectives	42	29	15
I can influence how I am evaluated against my performance objectives	40	30	20

Base: n=5,148 (all in work).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.



# 7 Skills, qualifications and knowledge

The 2023 survey asks questions on how far people think they have the skills and qualifications to do their job and how far their job allows them to acquire new skills and knowledge. It should be noted that skills, qualifications and knowledge are not the same. This section focuses mostly on skills and knowledge.

Respondents were asked whether they thought they were overqualified, underqualified or had the right level of qualifications for their current job. Thirty-one per cent thought they were overqualified and only 5% thought they were underqualified. Respondents were also asked about skills with a differently worded question. Thirty-one per cent agreed they could cope with more demanding duties and just 13% said they lacked skills. Both questions suggest the bigger problem is that jobs do not make full use of the qualifications and skills that people have, rather than a lack of skills and qualifications in the first place. Lack of skills also appears to be a bigger problem than lack of qualifications.

**Table 11: Underqualification and overqualification, and underskilling and overskilling in 2023 (%)**

Overqualified or underqualified or right level for your job?		Which best describes your skills in your own work?	
Underqualified	5	Lack some skills	13
Right level	60	Correspond well with duty	53
Overqualified	31	Can cope with more demanding duties	31
Don't know	4	Don't know	3

Base: n=5,148 (all in work).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

Some caution is needed in interpreting these results, as previous research<sup>5</sup> has suggested that in such surveys people tend to overstate overqualification and overskilling and understate underqualification and underskilling. It is, however, likely that even when this is taken into account, a significant challenge remains in people being in jobs that fail to take full advantage of their skills and qualifications. Moreover, when scaled up, the share of people who said they lacked skills represented more than 4 million people in a workforce of more than 32 million.

Some further support for both overskilling and underskilling affecting significant shares of the workforce comes from questions asking about whether people get the skills and training they need. Twenty per cent disagreed that they got the training and information they needed to do the job well, with 56% agreeing. The same question was also asked of managers about whether they had the information and training they needed

to manage colleagues well, with similar results – 21% disagreed and 52% agreed. A second question asked if the job offered good prospects for skills development. Twenty-three per cent disagreed that their job offered good opportunities to develop their skills and 53% agreed.

A broader question looked at career advancement. Thirty-six per cent disagreed with the statement that their job offered good opportunities for career advancement, and only 35% agreed that it did. In the previous section on voice in the workplace, development of long-term careers also received the lowest ranking from respondents when asked about their manager or supervisor. This suggests that while in many cases people get the skills they need, it does not always translate into career advancement.

**Table 12: Training access, skills development and career prospects in 2023 (%)**

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I receive the training and information I need to do my job well	56	24	20
I receive the training and information to manage my colleagues well	52	26	21
My job offers good opportunities for skills development	53	23	23
My job offers good prospects for career advancement	35	27	36

Base: n=5,148 (all in work).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

There has been no significant change in the shares reporting underqualification and overqualification since 2019, though the share who reported their qualifications were about right for the job fell from 62% to 60%. However, the share who said they had the skills to cope with more demanding work has fallen from 37% to 31%, and the share agreeing they had the right skills went up from 50% to 53%. There was, however, also a rise in those who said they lacked some skills, from 12% to 13%.

There were also improvements in response to the question whether they agreed the job provided good opportunity for developing skills, from 49% to 53% (mostly driven by improvements in the public sector), and a fall in those who disagreed from 25% to 23%. There was an even bigger shift towards those who agreed their job offered good career opportunities, from 29% to 35%. The share who disagreed fell from 41% to 36%.

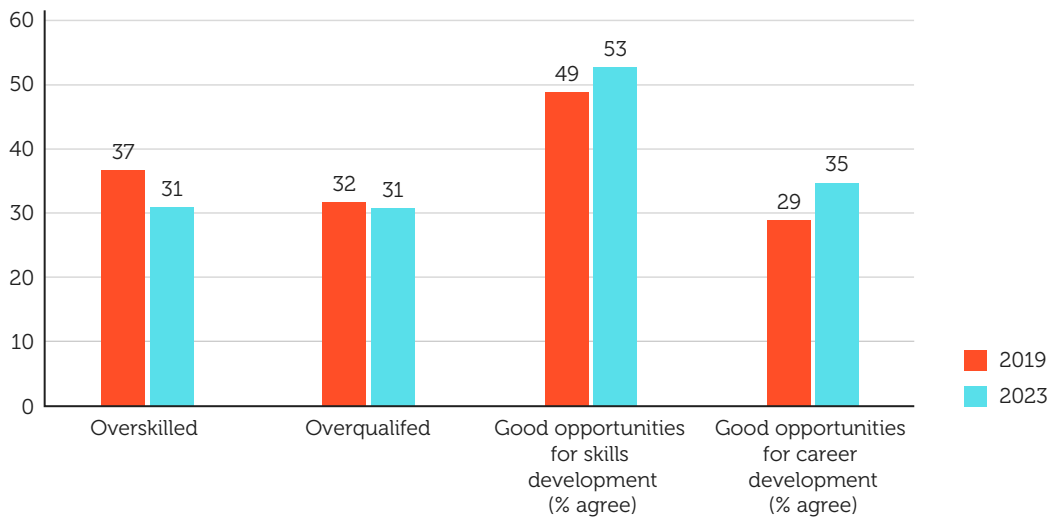
There is some support for the survey findings from the aggregate data produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). These show that the number of working-age employees who said they had some form of job-related training or education in the last four weeks went up by 24% between 2018 Q4 and 2022 Q4, with the share increasing from 14% to 17%.

These figures have some drawbacks, as we know nothing from these answers about the quality of the training offered or the reason for it. Some of the increase may be due to increasing statutory requirements following the 2018 Data Protection Act and greater regulatory compliance for trade and travel with the EU. This measure is nonetheless moving in the right direction. The

2022 Employer Skills Survey produced for the Department for Education is expected later this year and will tell us much more about changes in employer provision since the last survey was undertaken in 2019.

It may be that the tight labour market and surge in unfilled vacancies has encouraged some employers to invest more in skill development and open career paths more than they previously had to retain and recruit staff. It may also be one factor in helping explain why the voluntary quit rate seems unresponsive to tighter conditions. It may be that more people who might otherwise have left now think they have better prospects for advancement if they stay put.

**Figure 3: Skills and career development, 2019 to 2023 (%)**



Base: 2019 (n=5,136); 2023 (n=5,139).

### Job resources

The 2023 survey asked people about whether they had the right resources to do their job properly. The results show that most people do – with 73% agreeing they had the right equipment and just 10% disagreeing, and 75% agreeing they had a suitable space and just 10% disagreeing. There were also strongly positive responses to the question on whether people had the right digital tools to communicate with their team effectively, with 69% agreeing they did and just 9% disagreeing.

**Table 13: Resources in the workplace, 2019 to 2023 (%)**

	Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree	
	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023
Right equipment to get work done	75	73	13	15	12	10
Suitable space at work	75	75	14	14	10	9
Digital tools for teamwork*	–	68	–	19	–	9

\*Not asked in 2019.

Base: 2019 (n=5,136); 2023 (n=5,139).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

# 8 Work–life balance

## Work–life balance

Most people seem to have a reasonable work–life balance – but significant minorities do not. The survey asked whether people found it difficult to meet commitments in their personal life because of the time they spend at work. Twenty-five per cent of workers agreed that they did and 54% disagreed, with another 20% saying they neither agreed nor disagreed. The survey also asked whether the opposite was true, with commitments outside work making it hard to do the job. This is rare, with only 9% of workers agreeing and 76% disagreeing. There has been no significant change. A related question asked whether people were able to relax in their personal time due to pressures from their job. Twenty-six per cent of people agreed that work did not make it hard to relax and 54% disagreed, while another 20% neither agreed nor disagreed.

## Caring responsibilities and work–life balance

Those with caring responsibilities make up a large share of the workforce – just over 40% in our sample, with 24% caring for children, 16% for related adults, and 2% for other adults. Most of those with caring responsibilities did not find that outside commitments impacted on their job or that their job impacted on their commitments. But carers were nonetheless more likely to indicate difficulties than non-carers, with 28% of those caring for children and 29% of those caring for adult relatives saying work made it difficult to fulfil outside commitments, compared with 24% of non-carers. Similarly, 15% of those who looked after children and 13% of those who looked after adult relatives reported commitments made it difficult to do the job, compared with 9% of non-carers.

**Table 14: Balancing outside commitments and work in 2023 (%)**

	Difficult to fulfil outside commitments due to job		Difficult to do job because of outside commitments	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
All in work	25	54	9	76
Non-carers	24	57	5	82
Carers for children	28	50	15	67
Carers for adult relatives	29	50	13	69

Base: all (n=5,139); non-carers (n=3,176); carers for children (n=1,246); carers for adult relatives (n=790).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

# 9 Flexible working

This section looks at the incidence and take-up of different forms of flexible working in the 12 months prior to the survey. However, a significant amount of flexibility at work is both ad hoc and informal.

## Informal flexibility

The survey asked how easy or difficult it would be to take an hour or two from work to deal with personal or care matters. In 2023 some 66% of workers said it would be easy, 22% said it would be difficult, and 13% said neither easy nor difficult. These answers have not changed significantly since the 2019 survey.

The 2023 survey allowed us to look at differences between carers and non-carers. Those looking after children have no advantage over those who are non-carers, and those who looked after adult relatives were significantly worse off. For example, while 19% of non-carers said it would be difficult to take time off, the share was 23% for those who looked after adult relatives.

**Table 15: Informal flexibility, by caring responsibilities in 2023 (%)**

	Easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Difficult	Don't know
All in work	66	13	19	3
Non-carers	66	12	19	3
Caring for children	68	13	18	1
Caring for adult relatives	61	15	23	2

Base: all (n=5,139); non-carers (n=3,176); carers for children (n=1,246); carers for adult relatives (n=790).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

## Formal flexible working

In 2023, the most common form of formal flexible working was working at home, cited by 49% of workers, followed by flexitime at 37%. Other forms were relatively uncommon or rare. Twelve per cent said they had worked compressed hours (normal hours worked over four days rather than five days), and 11% said they had cut their hours from full-time to part-time. Term-time working was reported by only 4% and job-share by just 3%.

Both flexitime and working at home had high rates of take-up. Only 5% said that while working at home was available, they had not taken it up, and 12% said that while flexitime was available, they had not used it. The reverse was true for all other forms of flexible working, where the share who said it was available but not used was much greater than the share who said they had taken it up.

Large shares of the workforce said that flexible working was not available at their workplace. Forty-four per cent said that working at home was not available, 46% said flexitime was not available, and 47% said the same for reducing hours from full-time to part-time. Other forms were even less common, with compressed hours not available to 62% of workers, working in term time not available to 74%, and job-sharing not available to 75% of workers.

For the most popular forms of flexible working with high take-up, such as flexitime and working at home, it looks more like a supply-side problem in that a significant expansion will require more firms and organisations to make them available. For all other forms of flexibility, lack of take-up when it is made available looks to be at least as big a problem as non-availability. This confirms previous findings from the 2019 survey.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 16: Availability and use of formal flexible working arrangements in 2023 (%)**

Last 12 months	Available and used	Available but not used	Not available
Working at home	49	5	44
Flexitime	37	13	46
Compressed hours	12	20	60
Reduced hours	11	29	50
Term-time working	4	12	74
Job-shares	2	13	75

Base: n=4,634.

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

### Flexible working and size of organisation

It is sometimes said that small organisations may be less able or willing to offer formal flexible working but are more likely to offer informal flexible suggestions. The survey suggests there is only limited evidence to support this proposition, at least when comparing SMEs<sup>7</sup> with large firms. People working in SMEs were somewhat more likely to say it was easy to take time off (67%) than those in large organisations (63%). Large firms were more likely to offer formal flexible working, largely because homeworking is more available (57% for large firms and 51% for SMEs). Otherwise there is no strong association between firm size and flexible working at the aggregate level.

### How and when do workers take up flexible working?

In 2023, 31% of those who said they had taken up at least one form of flexible working in the past 12 months said they were either offered or requested it when they accepted the job. Another 15% said they had requested when they started the job and 19% said they did not have to ask and adopted it anyway. Six per cent said it was imposed by their employer. However, the pandemic was one of the biggest single reasons, with 20% saying they had adopted flexible working in response to COVID restrictions.

**Table 17: How and when flexible working started in last 12 months in 2023 (%)**

Which of the following best describes how you started flexible working?	
It was openly offered when I accepted the job	27
It was not openly offered but I requested it when I accepted the job	4
I requested it at some point after starting the job	15
I just work this way; I didn't have to ask	19
My employer gave me no option; it's how the job is	6
I started working this way due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions	20
Another reason	6
Don't know	3

Base: n=3,102.

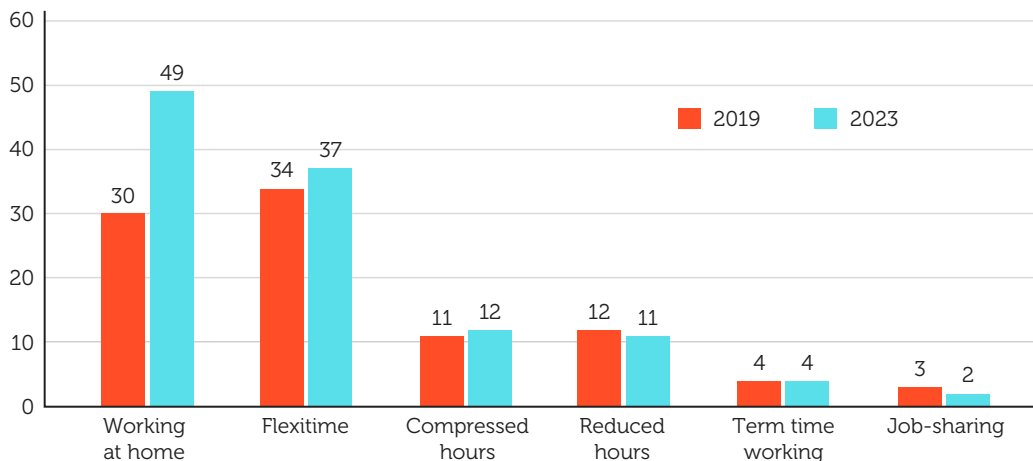
Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

Apart from a modest increase in the use of flexitime, the only form of flexible working that shows greater use is working at home. In 2019 only 30% reported working at home over the past 12 months, but by 2023 that had increased to 49%. The incidence of flexitime had increased from 34% to 37%. All other forms of flexible working show no significant change.

There is little sign that working at home is in retreat post-pandemic despite media reports of some employers trying to turn the clock back. The 2021 survey showed that 50% of workers said they worked at home, very similar to the 2023 figure. Although we do not have many years of observation, the genie looks as if it is well and truly out of the bottle and organisations will have to manage both the pros and cons of much higher levels of working at home for the foreseeable future.

However, it took a huge shock to normal working arrangements to shift the dial on a form of working arrangement that was already popular, had high take-up, and for which there was some unmet demand. Without that highly selective shock, it is doubtful we would have seen more than modest movement towards greater adoption of some forms of flexible working. That also implies that working at home will stabilise at the new, higher level.

**Figure 4: Flexible working share in 2019 vs flexible working share in 2023 (%)**



Base: 2019 (n=4,546); 2023 (n=4,636).

# 10 Job insecurity

The survey asked two questions about job insecurity. The first asks whether people think they will lose their job in the next 12 months – only 12% said that it was likely, with 20% saying neither likely nor unlikely, and 60% saying it was unlikely.

The second question asks how confident people are about finding another job as good. Thirty-two per cent said they would find it easy, slightly lower than the 37% who said it would be difficult. Another 22% said it would be neither easy nor difficult.

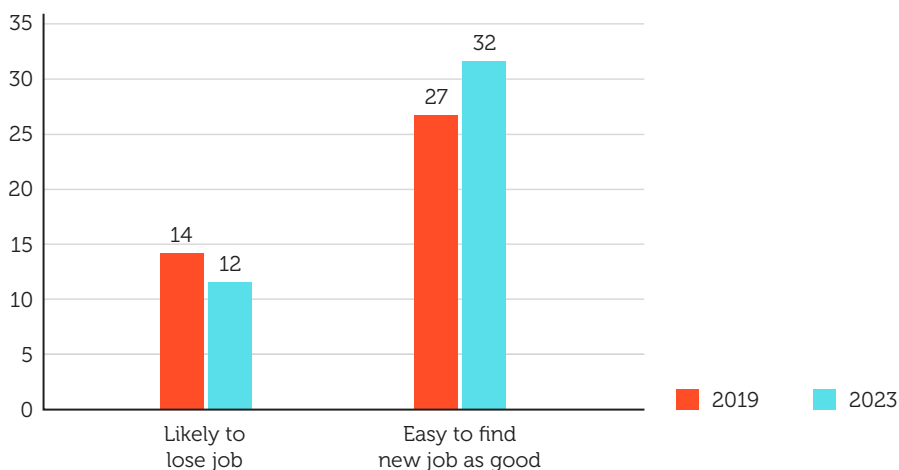
The second indicator is sometimes associated with policies that suggest that flexible labour markets can still provide high levels of job security, provided people are confident they can find a similar job. However, it is an ambiguous indicator, as it is those in long-tenure jobs who are most likely to say it is difficult to find another job. For example, 23% of those in jobs with more than 10 years' tenure reported that they would find it easy to find another job as good and 42% said it would be difficult, compared with 44% and 30%, respectively, for those who had held a job for up to two years.

This is most likely because people in jobs for a long time will have accrued benefits that are hard to find elsewhere, such as access to defined benefit pensions, or have acquired firm-specific skills that are not easily transferable or are in sectors and jobs where new openings are few and far between.

Since 2019, both indicators have improved, with fewer people saying they thought it likely that they would lose their job (from 14% to 12%). More people said it would be easy to find another job (up from 27% to 32%) and the share saying it would be difficult has fallen from 48% to 37%.

These changes are consistent with some aggregate labour market data. The unemployment rate has fallen between the 2019 and 2023 surveys. More significantly, the number of unfilled vacancies increased by nearly 40% over the same period.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 5: Job security and confidence improves, 2019–2023 (%)**



Base: 2019 (n=5,136); 2023 (n=5,139).



## 11

# Job mobility

The vast majority of job moves are normally prompted by voluntary quits, and the survey asked whether people thought they were likely to quit their job over the next 12 months. Eighteen per cent said it was likely, but 60% said it was unlikely, with 20% saying neither likely nor unlikely. These sorts of questions can overstate actual movements, and only 3% said that it was very likely that they would move over the next 12 months. This is close to actual quit rates for those moving from job to job, which in 2022 Q4 was 2.8% of the workforce.<sup>9</sup>

The 2023 survey asked those who indicated they might leave their job why they were doing so. The most important reason was to get better pay and benefits (34%), followed by better job satisfaction (27%), a better work–life balance (23%) and to do a different type of work (22%). However, also significant was discontent with the leadership of senior management, at 21%. Discontent with line managers and work colleagues was, in contrast, a much less important reason (cited by 9%).

Other reasons for moving included opportunities for promotion (13%), more flexible working (10%), opportunities for remote working (9%), better training and development (8%), and greater job security (8%). Few moves were prompted by a desire to work for a green and ethical employer or discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and very few cited COVID promoting a change in career path.

The survey also asked people who had been employed directly before joining their current organisation why they had left their previous organisation. There is a great deal of agreement with the reasons given by those thinking of quitting. For people who had moved, the survey also included redundancy (cited by 15% of respondents) and more remote working (cited by 2%). It did not, however, ask about whether people wanted to move to a green or ethical employer.

**Table 18: Why people are likely to quit and why they did quit (%)**

Reasons people likely to quit		Reasons why people did quit	
Better pay and conditions	34	Better pay and conditions	29
Increased job satisfaction	27	Better work–life balance	22
Better work–life balance	23	Senior management	21
Different type of work	22	Different type of work	18
Senior management	21	Increased job satisfaction	18
Opportunities for promotion	13	Made redundant	15
More flexible working hours	10	More flexible hours	12
Dislike line manager or colleagues	9	Conflict with managers or colleagues	10
Increased job security	8	Opportunities for promotion	9
Better training and development	8	Increased job security	7
Discrimination/harassment/bullying	3	Discrimination/harassment/bullying	6
Ethical or green employer	3	Better training and development	6
COVID has changed my career path	2	More remote working	3
Some other reason	25	Pandemic changed career path	2
Don't know	1	Other	15
		Don't know	2

Base: all likely to quit in next 12 months (n=922); all who were employed by a different organisation directly before starting their current job (n=3,272).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

About half of all those who moved said their job was better paid, offered more responsibility, was more fulfilling, and offered better work–life balance. Relatively few said their new job was less well paid (17%) or less responsibility (16%), less work–life balance (15%) or less fulfilling (13%). Some of those who reported positively on at least one aspect of their new job might not have got what they were really after, and some of those who reported negatively on at least one aspect of their new job may have made a conscious trade-off (for example, accepting less pay for better work–life balance). Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that most people get at least some of what they want from their job move.

However, those may just be the tip of the iceberg. The 2023 survey also shows a much larger share of the workforce would like to move but feel they cannot. Thirty-nine per cent agreed they would find it difficult to leave the organisation even if they wanted to, and 31% agreed that, while they would like to leave the organisation, their options were too limited. The latter is strongly associated with job satisfaction. Sixty-seven per cent of those who were dissatisfied with their job said they would like to leave but lacked options, compared with 19% of those who said they were satisfied. It appears that many organisations have large numbers of somewhat discontented workers who feel they cannot easily move elsewhere.

**Table 19: Quitting and job satisfaction in 2023 (%)**

How likely are you to quit your job in the next 12 months	All	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Likely	18	11	51
Neither	17	14	31
Unlikely	60	72	27
Don't know	5	3	6
Difficult to quit even if I wanted to	All	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Agree	39	36	51
Neither	21	20	16
Disagree	38	41	32
Don't know	3	3	2
I'd like to quit but I have too few options to leave	All	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Agree	31	19	67
Neither	20	18	16
Disagree	47	62	17
Don't know	2	2	2

Base: n=5,139 (all in work, likely to quit job in next 12 months); n=4,566 (all except self-employed, difficult to quit even if I wanted to and like to quit but too few options to leave).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

As reported in 2022, some of the claims around the 'great resignation'<sup>10</sup> associated with the pandemic were overstated. The latest results suggest the labour market has quickly returned to pre-pandemic norms. In 2019, 18% of workers said they were likely to quit, exactly the same share as in 2023. However, that result is remarkable given the much greater availability of jobs measured by unfilled

vacancies and the greater confidence of people in finding a job just as good. We might have expected more people moving to find a better match. The ONS figures on job-to-job moves show more people are moving around post-pandemic than before the pandemic, but it is modest, and the period before the pandemic was one where, on average, job-to-job moves were below the long-run trend.<sup>11</sup>

### Does quitting improve job quality?

The 2023 survey asked people whether their last job move had improved some aspects of their job. Most people reported that compared with their previous job, they had improved their pay (58%), they had more responsibility (53%), that the job was more fulfilling (53%) and that it had a better work–life balance (53%). The number who said it was worse on these measures was much lower (between 15% and 17%). There may be some ambiguity in some of these answers as people may be trading off, say, a better work–life balance or greater fulfilment for lower pay. Moreover, some people might have got what they wanted by staying put and waiting. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that most people seem to get what they want from moving jobs.

**Table 20: Results of last job move (%)**

	More	About the same	Less
Pay	58	24	17
Responsibility	53	31	16
Fulfilment	53	34	13
Work–life balance	53	31	15

Base: n=3,897 (all who were employed directly before starting current job, comparing previous job with current job).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

## 12

# Relations in the workplace

Overall, relations with immediate supervisors, line managers or bosses were good, especially around some of the basics of fairness, respect and recognition, support and working together. There were, however, persistent minorities of between a sixth and a fifth of respondents who identified managerial shortcomings.

Seventy-six per cent agreed they were treated fairly, 75% said they their manager respected them as a person, 72% said they were supportive, and 69% said they got recognition when they did a good job.

Managers were also, on balance, rated positively on other indicators. Fifty-seven per cent agreed they were successful at getting people to work together, with 15% disagreeing. The same share said they could be relied on to keep their promise, with 16% disagreeing. Fifty-six per cent agreed that their managers helped them perform well in their job (with 15% disagreeing); the same share agreed they lead by example (20% disagreed). Fifty-five per cent said they supported their learning and development (15% disagreed), and 54% said they provided useful feedback on work (18% disagreeing).

A majority also agreed that their managers were open and approachable on mental health issues (56%), with just 14% disagreeing. However, 11% said they didn't know, perhaps because the issue had never arisen at their workplace or they were unaware of how their manager might react.

The least successful indicator was still, on balance, positive, but while 49% said their manager supported their long-term career development, 29% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and 19% disagreed. For some managers, this may have been a tough test to pass if they have little influence over career advancement for the people they manage or the workplace offers few if any opportunities for people to advance.

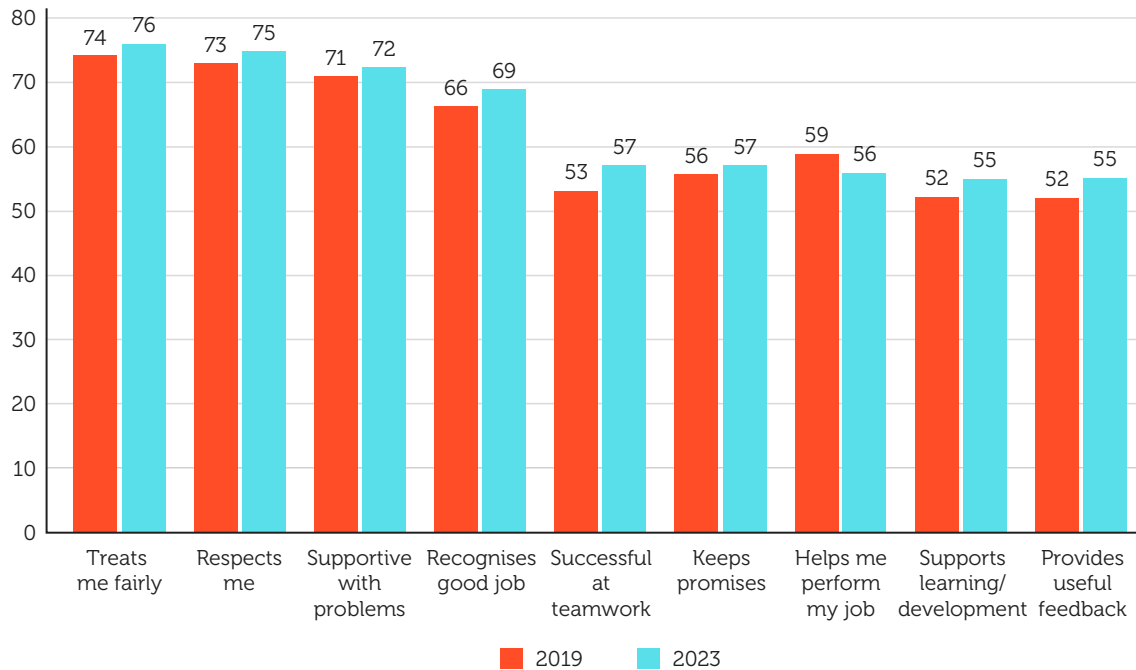
**Table 21: How employees view their line managers and supervisors in 2023 (%)**

All employees with a line manager	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Treats me fairly	76	15	7	3
Respects me as a person	75	14	7	4
Is supportive if I have a problem	72	16	9	4
Recognises when I have done a good job	69	17	12	2
Is successful in getting people to work together	57	25	15	4
Can be relied on to keep their promises	57	23	16	5
Helps me perform well in my job	56	27	15	2
Open and approachable on issues such as mental health	56	19	13	11
Leads by example	56	22	20	3
Supports my learning and development	55	26	15	4
Provides useful feedback on my work	54	24	18	3
Supports my long-term career development	46	29	19	6

Base: n=4,446.

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

Since 2019, many indicators have edged up, though the changes are not significant (questions on career development, open attitude to mental health and leading by example were not asked in 2019). The share who said their manager was successful in getting people to work together increased somewhat, from 53% to 57%. Those who agreed that their manager helped them perform well fell slightly, from 59% to 56%.

**Figure 6: Employee views on line managers, 2019–2023 (%)**

Base: 2019 (n=4,429); 2023 (n=4,446).

A different set of questions asks respondents to describe their overall relationship with others as either good, poor or neither. These figures exclude those who reported they had no relationship and therefore could not offer an assessment.

Managers and supervisors get a high overall rating, with 80% of those with a line manager saying it was good and just 7% saying it was poor. Seventy-five per cent of respondents agreed they had a good relationship with other managers in the workplace and 7% said they were poor. Managers had even higher ratings for those they managed, with 88% describing the relationship as good and 3% poor. It is not unusual in surveys for managers to have a somewhat better view of relations than the people they manage, but in this survey the gap is not that large.

The same high rating is also given to work colleagues in the respondent's team, with 88% saying relations were good and 2% poor. Eighty-one per cent agreed relations with other colleagues in the workplace were good and just 4% poor. Relations with customers and clients and suppliers were equally good. Eighty-three per cent of those who had some sort of relationship with customers and clients said they were good and 3% poor. Seventy-seven per cent of those who had some sort of relationship with suppliers said relations were good and 3% poor. Since 2019, there has been no significant shift in how people view their managers or colleagues or external contacts such as clients, customers, service users and suppliers.

**Table 22: Relations at work in 2023 (%)**

How would you describe your relations at work?	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor
Your line manager or supervisor	80	13	7
Other managers at your workplace	75	18	7
Staff who you manage	88	9	3
Colleagues in your team	88	10	2
Other colleagues at your workplace	81	15	4
Customers, clients, service users	83	14	3
Suppliers	77	21	3

Note: excludes those who said they did not have a relationship.

Base: all (n=5,139); all with a line manager (n=4,446); all who are managers themselves (n=2,206).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

### Handling mistakes and teamwork

A final set of questions looked at how managers handle mistakes and some aspects of teamworking. Most respondents (61%) disagreed that their managers would hold a mistake against them, but 15% agreed. Fifty-eight per cent said their team would not reject others for being different, though 18% agreed. In contrast, 62% agreed that no one in their team would deliberately undermine their efforts, with 15% disagreeing. The answers to these questions were not significantly different in 2019. While most workplaces appear relatively harmonious and tolerant, there are clearly significant minorities where that is not the case.

## 13

# Voice in the workplace

### Channels to senior management

Voice in the workplace – by which we mean the ability of employees to convey their views to senior managers – has long been seen as a powerful means by which changes in the workplace can be driven. It can also have a significant impact on how employees view their work and on recruitment and retention. Voice channels are also key to keeping people informed about what is happening in the organisation and why. People who either have no means of expressing their views or feel they count for nothing when they do are unlikely to be contented with their job.

The survey results show a mixed picture. Most workers have some form of channel through which they can express their views, but one in five do not. Those who did were most likely to cite one-to-one meetings, team meetings and employee surveys. They were also most likely to be cited by those who had no channel at work as their preferred option. But the overwhelming response among those with no channel, when asked what they would like to have, was 'none of the above', at 53%. A small minority of the workforce seem uninterested in any form of voice. Table 23 gives details.

The two most common forms of channel – one-to-one meetings and team meetings – were also rated as good by large majorities (73% and 66% respectively) with relatively few people ranking them as poor. Employees were less positive about employee surveys – the third most common form of channel. They were also less positive about other forms of channel less widely available, such as departmental and organisation-wide meetings, online forums, and trade unions and staff associations.<sup>12</sup> Some channels are clearly working well in the eyes of employees, but others need some improvement. Table 24 gives details.

The survey also asked whether employees thought their managers or employee representatives were doing a good job at keeping them informed, seeking and representing their views, and influencing decisions. We found no difference between managers and employee representatives in how employees rated them. But those ratings are hardly overwhelming. Just over 40% thought their manager or employee representative was doing a good job on informing and seeking views, and around 30% thought they were doing a good job on influencing decisions. Table 25 gives more details.

There are clearly many workplaces where channels providing voice are, in the judgement of employees, working well, especially when conveying information. But there are equally clearly many workplaces where there is either no channel or where the channels are not working very well, especially on the more demanding criteria of whether they offer any ability to influence decisions. On some of these measures effective voice is only available to a minority of UK employees.

It should be noted, however, that no matter how capable and well-intentioned representatives and managers are, they must work within existing workplace structures and with senior managers, who may or may not be receptive to efforts to convey workforce views. Employee evaluation will likely be shaped by whether they think their views have any impact on senior management and not just by the efforts made by representatives and managers on their behalf. It is therefore just as likely shortcomings and potential solutions lie with structures and the attitudes of senior managers as well as individual representatives and line managers.

**Table 23: Channel already available, or channels that employees would like if none are available (%)**

	Present		Would like to have if none
One-to-one meetings	56	One-to-one meetings	22
Team meetings	46	Team meetings	16
Employee surveys	43	Employee surveys	16
Department/organisation meetings	24	Trade unions	7
Trade unions	17	Department/organisation meetings	6
Online forums	15	Employee focus groups	5
Employee focus groups	11	Online forums	3
Staff associations	4	Staff associations	2
Other	1	Other	2
No channel available	20	None of above	53

Base: all in work except self-employed (n=4,634); all with no voice channel (n=860).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

**Table 24: Employee ratings of channels to senior management (%)**

	Sample number	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Don't know
One-to-one meetings	2,676	73	16	9	2
Team meetings	2,270	66	20	11	2
Employee focus groups	537	54	22	12	12
Department/organisation meetings	1,169	49	27	24	5
Employee surveys	2,068	44	26	25	4
Online forums	755	43	27	19	11
Trade unions	839	39	22	18	21
Staff associations	202	34	38	17	11

Base: n=4,634.

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

When asked about which channels are available, 46% of workers in the public sector said they had a trade union, compared with only 10% of private sector workers. However, the rankings given by workers who said they had an employee representative at their workplace are broadly similar in both the public and private sectors. There appears to be little association between the effectiveness of union representatives in providing a channel to senior management as judged by some employees and the much greater presence of trade unions and bargaining structures in the public sector.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 25: Ratings of employee representatives and managers (%)**

<b>Overall, how good/poor would you say workplace representatives at your workplace are at...?</b>	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Don't know
Keeping employees informed of management discussions and decisions	40	25	24	11
Seeking the views of employees	42	24	23	10
Representing employee views to senior management	39	24	23	14
Influencing decisions in your workplace	31	31	26	12
<b>Overall how good/poor would you say managers at your workplace are at...?</b>	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Don't know
Keeping employees informed of management discussions and decisions	41	24	26	9
Seeking the views of employees	39	26	24	11
Responding to suggestions from employees/employee representatives	37	28	23	12
Allowing employees/employee representatives to influence final decisions	29	29	28	15
Recognising the role of employees/employee representatives in negotiating pay	27	26	30	18

Base: all who have a workplace representative (n=963); all who are not self-employed (n=4,634).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.



### Trade unions in the workplace

The relationship between trade union membership and work quality is a complex one. For example, some people will join unions because they are discontented with work, therefore appearing to weaken any association between membership and good work. Conversely, unions bargain better conditions for their members and so we might expect a positive relationship. However, in reality trade unions may be unable to do very much about some aspects of work because they do not fit into the conventional collective bargaining framework.<sup>14</sup>

Time and space mean we are not able to look at the question of whether union membership is associated with better work in this report, and a fuller examination would need to control for the different personal characteristics and sectoral distribution of trade union and non-trade union members. But, on the face of it, there does not appear to be a strong association in either a positive or negative direction. For example, the share who said they were satisfied with their job was similar for both members and non-members.

Trade union members are significantly more likely to report negative impacts of work on mental health, feeling under excessive pressure, or being exhausted at work. They are also more likely to say they are not paid appropriately for the job. However, this is also true for public sector workers in general, and it is likely that sector rather than membership *per se* explains most of these differences.

A longstanding question has been why workers do not join unions in much greater numbers given that significant shares of the workforce are discontented with both pay and non-pay aspects of work. Over the five years to 2021, the number of employees who said they were a member of a union or staff association increased somewhat but remained stable as a share of the workforce.<sup>15</sup> The recent spike in industrial unrest in the public sector has given unions a much higher public profile than for many years previously.

The answers were significantly different in the private and public sectors. In the private sector, the most common reasons were the lack of a trade union or staff association in the workplace (36%) or the lack of a trade union for the type of work the person did (18%). However, there were also concerns over whether trade unions would be able to deliver – some thought it would give no advantage to them (10%), some thought that they get all the benefits anyway (7%), while 9% said it would make no difference in their workplace. In contrast, 12% said they objected to them in principle, 3% thought they would cause trouble in the workplace, and 2% that it would damage their own job prospects. Managerial hostility was cited by very few employees.

In the public sector it was cost that stood out as the biggest factor (31%), but also the delivery of additional benefits – 18% said it would bring them no advantage, 10% said they would get the benefits anyway, and 6% said it would make no difference in their workplace. Non-members in the public sector were also slightly more likely to cite opposition to unions in principle (14%), concerns that they would cause trouble at their workplace (4%) and that they would damage job prospects (4%).

However, these figures should be treated with some caution as there were significant numbers of people who said none of the above, 24% overall and 31% in the public sector. There could be a wider range of individual reasons for not joining or it may be that for some non-members the question has never come up and so they have not had to take a view on the matter.

**Table 26: Why workers say they don't join a trade union (%)**

Most important reason (all not in a union)	All in work	Private	Public
No union or staff association at my workplace	36	40	8
No union or staff association for my work	18	19	5
It would not bring me any advantages	10	10	18
Makes no difference in a workplace like mine	9	10	6
I get all the benefits anyway	7	7	10
I disagree with them in principle	12	12	14
Would only cause trouble at my workplace	3	3	4
Would damage my job prospects	2	2	4
It costs too much	10	8	31
Management disapproves of them	3	4	2
None of the above	24	23	31

Base: all in work (n=4,155); private sector (n=3,481); public sector (n=423).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

### Workforce perceptions of managerial attitudes to unions

The survey also asked about perceptions of managerial attitudes to trade union membership. Just under a fifth thought their management was favourable to union membership (18%), while a fifth thought they were unfavourable. Twenty-seven per cent thought they were neutral. However, many respondents said they did not know what view management took (35%). As expected, there was less opposition to unions in the public sector, where only 12% of employees said their managers disapproved of unions, compared with 22% in the private sector. However, even in the public sector many employees did not know what their manager's attitude was (30%, compared with 39% in the private sector). In many workplaces it may be that the question has never arisen and so employees have no basis to make a judgement. But it may also be that some people think it irrelevant. Managerial disapproval does not seem to be a significant barrier to membership, as only 3% of respondents cited it as a reason for not joining a union.

**Table 27: Perceptions of management attitudes to trade unions (%)**

Most important reason (all not in a union)	All in work	Private	Public
In favour of union membership	18	13	33
Not in favour of union membership	20	22	12
Neutral	27	25	26
Don't know	35	39	30

Base: all in work (n=4,634); private sector (n=3,526); public sector (n=804).

Source: UK Working Lives survey 2023.

# 14 Conclusion

This report shows that the level of job satisfaction in the UK remains high with little change over the last four years. However, this broad finding masks some significant nuances and differences which are key to understanding job quality and how to improve it.

For example, there has been a perceptible increase since 2019 in the proportion of people who see work just as means of making money. Similarly, there has been a reduction in the proportion of employees who say they are prepared to put in discretionary effort for their employer.

The fall in discretionary efforts is particularly marked in the public sector, which is likely to be linked to the decreasing proportion of public sector workers that agree they are paid appropriately.

More widely, a significant minority of workers report their work has a negative impact on their physical and particularly their mental health. Too many workers also continue to be unhappy with the training and development opportunities available to them and their chances for career progression.

Overall, our survey shows there has been a lack of significant progress on raising job quality since the UK Government's Good Work Plan was published in 2018. We estimate that there are large numbers of people (between 6 and 9 million) who continue to have a poor experience of work.

This matters, because besides the personal benefits to the health and wellbeing of workers, raising job quality can support efforts to boost labour market participation and help address skill and labour shortages. A growing body of evidence also highlights a link between increasing job quality and productivity growth.

The CIPD believes there needs to be a renewed public policy focus on improving job quality supported by reforms to a range of policies including skills, business support, Statutory Sick Pay, employment status and labour market enforcement. These should underpin the workforce element of a new industrial strategy focused on raising productivity and living standards across the economy.

## 15

## Recommendations for policy-makers

- ✓ **Improve the quality of careers information, advice and guidance.** This is key to ensuring young people and workers at all stages of their working lives can make better-informed choices on training, qualifications and careers.
- ✓ **Reform the Apprenticeship Levy into a more flexible skills levy.** A more flexible skills levy would enable employers to use it to develop existing staff through other forms of accredited training and skills development, which are typically more suitable for employees aged 25 and over. This would leave more money to invest in apprenticeships for young people, who most need and benefit from them.
- ✓ **Continue to use the expertise and reach of the Flexible Working Taskforce.** The taskforce and its members can play a key role in supporting the provision and uptake of a wider range of flexible working arrangements across the economy.
- ✓ **Improve the quality of locally delivered business support services for SMEs on HR and people management and development.** This type of locally delivered business support is needed to help smaller firms develop the people management and development capability to improve how they recruit, train and retain staff and boost their productivity.
- ✓ **Reform Statutory Sick Pay.** This would include raising the rate to the equivalent of the National Living Wage and making it more flexible to support phased returns to work.
- ✓ **Abolish 'worker' status.** This would align employment status for both employment and tax purposes and provide more clarity for both workers and employers over employment status and rights.
- ✓ **Revamp the labour market enforcement system to improve the protection of workers' rights and raise employment standards across the economy.** This should include the creation of a properly resourced single enforcement body. It would also require a step change in the quality and level of support to help SMEs comply and improve their people management and development capability, alongside more proactive enforcement.

## 16

## Recommendations for practice

- ✓ **Employers should recognise and communicate the importance of financial wellbeing among employees.** Bring financial wellbeing to the forefront of your wider wellbeing strategy through assessment and open discussion.
- ✓ **Employers and people professionals should design jobs that are interesting, meaningful and enable employee autonomy to engage and motivate their workforce.**
- ✓ **Employers and managers should identify and manage skills mismatches to engage and satisfy staff.** Understand and optimise the skills of your staff to make best use of them.
- ✓ **Employers should encourage the use of flexible working arrangements among staff.** Give them autonomy to influence the ways in which they work.
- ✓ **Employers should be proactive in positioning their organisations as attractive for current and prospective employees.** Engage not only with prospective candidates through inclusive recruitment but with current staff by supporting their needs.
- ✓ **People professionals and managers should develop strong interpersonal relationships within teams to allow them to reach their potential.** Build trust, cohesion and psychological safety among staff to create high-performing teams.
- ✓ **Employers should encourage and empower leaders to facilitate employee voice.** Develop an open working environment in which staff feel comfortable speaking up, and managers know how to enable this.

For further recommendations and other practical insights, read our [CIPD Good Work Index 2023 summary report](#).

## 17

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Zero hours have increased from 0.5% to 3.4% of total employment between Q4 2002 and Q4 2022, though the figures may not be directly comparable. The ONS thinks a significant part of this rise is due to better reporting. Latest figures on a directly comparable basis show a rise from 3% in 2019 Q4. The best comparable gig economy estimate to date is from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2018, when it was put at 1% of US employment. The UK figure on the same basis is unlikely to be much larger.

- <sup>2</sup> The comparisons in this report are with 2019 to ensure consistency, as for technical reasons the 2018 survey is not directly comparable with subsequent surveys for some questions.
- <sup>3</sup> [www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/2021/european-working-conditions-telephone-survey-2021](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/2021/european-working-conditions-telephone-survey-2021)
- <sup>4</sup> Bargaining power is typically interpreted as the means to change pay and conditions through negotiation with managers and organisations.
- <sup>5</sup> [cipd.co.uk/Images/from-inadequate-to-outstanding\\_2017-making-the-UK-skills-system-world-class\\_tcm18-19933.pdf](http://cipd.co.uk/Images/from-inadequate-to-outstanding_2017-making-the-UK-skills-system-world-class_tcm18-19933.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> [cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/trends/flexible-working](http://cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/trends/flexible-working)
- <sup>7</sup> In the survey SMEs are defined as employing between 2 and 249 people, while large firms and organisations are defined as 250 or more.
- <sup>8</sup> Unfilled vacancies increased from just under 830,000 to just over 1.1 million between November–January 2018 and November–January 2023 (Office for National Statistics).
- <sup>9</sup> ONS experimental data [ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/labourforcesurveyflowsestimatesx02](http://ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/labourforcesurveyflowsestimatesx02)
- <sup>10</sup> The ‘great resignation’ or ‘great rethink’ was identified by some as a permanent shift in the labour market as people reassessed their current job during the pandemic and started to quit in exceptional numbers.
- <sup>11</sup> ONS experimental statistics show the quit rate for job-to-job moves was 2.6% in Q4 2017 and 2.8% in Q4 2022, or just under 790,000 and 880,000 respectively. This latest figure is similar to rates before 2008, though direct comparisons cannot be made due to a discontinuity in the statistical series.
- <sup>12</sup> A high share of those who rated trade unions said ‘don’t know’.
- <sup>13</sup> The public sector has extensive recognition of trade unions to bargain about some pay and non-pay issues. In 2021 some 58% of public sector employees have their pay determined by a collective agreement between unions and employers, according to BEIS.
- <sup>14</sup> The formal recognition of trade unions by organisations for bargaining purposes on some pay and non-pay issues for at least some of their workforce. [ilo.org/legacy/english/inwork/cb-policy-guide/acasguidelinesrecognitionagreement.pdf](http://ilo.org/legacy/english/inwork/cb-policy-guide/acasguidelinesrecognitionagreement.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> [gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2021](http://gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2021) Trade union or staff association members accounted for 21% of all those in work in 2021 compared with 18% in the 2023 GWI survey.



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