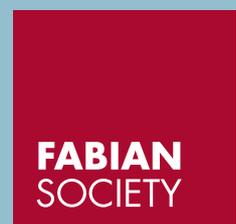


# A good day's work

What workers think about work, and how politics should respond

Cameron Tait | November 2016



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cameron Tait is head of the Changing Work Centre and a senior research fellow at the Fabian Society. Cameron is editor of the report *An Inclusive Future: Ensuring disabled people play a key role in the changing world of work* and contributed to Yvette Cooper's book *Changing Work: progressive ideas for the modern world of work*.

In addition to leading the Society's work on the changing world of work, Cameron has published reports on food poverty and renewable energy. He previously ran the Living Wage Commission, the independent inquiry into low pay chaired by the Archbishop of York, after working for John Denham, the former Secretary of State and Member of Parliament.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is a product of the Changing Work Centre, and Community deserve special praise for recognising the need for new political research into the changing world of work and establishing the centre with the Fabian Society. Thanks also go to the Dartmouth Street Trust and the TUC who both sponsored this report. The report updates a number of questions from TUC research into attitudes at work fifteen years ago.

I would like to thank David Coats for pointing to me towards that research, and to one of the authors of it, Richard Freeman, for giving me the permission and encouragement to update questions from his survey. Extra special thanks go to Penny Bowden who worked on the 2001 research and led the Ipsos MORI team this time around, who gave brilliant advice on the design of the survey and insight into the results. Nicola Smith, Antonia Bance and Kate Bell at the TUC also gave important insights into the development of the survey.

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## SUMMARY

Four in five workers in Britain enjoy their jobs, but job insecurity is on the rise.

This report reveals work is interesting and enjoyable for most people, but for a group of one in 10 workers – over 3 million people – work is not providing the fulfillment it should.

Based on a face to face survey conducted by Ipsos MORI with over 1,300 people in full or part-time employment in Great Britain, this report sets out people's attitudes to work and workplace institutions, and looks at how they have changed since the turn of the millennium.

### PEOPLE TEND TO ENJOY THEIR WORK

Our survey reveals most people hold positive views about their work:

- 79 per cent of Britain's workforce either slightly or strongly agree that their work is interesting.
- 78 per cent of Britain's workforce either slightly or strongly agree that their work is enjoyable.
- 63 per cent of workers either always look forward to work or do so most of the time.

---

# 79%

of Britain's workforce either slightly or strongly agree that their work is interesting

A comparison with a 2001 survey using the same methodology shows people are more likely to look forward to work than they did fifteen years ago:

- In 2001, just 49 per cent of workers either always looked forward to work or did so most of the time, 14 percentage points lower than in 2016.

### BUT ONE IN TEN ARE HAVING A BAD TIME AT WORK

While most people hold positive views about their work, there is a group of around one in ten workers who are not enjoying work in the ways that most people do:

- Our research shows 10 per cent of workers disagree that their work is enjoyable, 11 per cent disagree their work is interesting, and 12 per cent either always or often wish they did not have to go to work.

Our survey shows that workers in working class occupations are more likely to be in this group than those in white collar occupations:

- 68 per cent of working class workers find their work interesting, compared to 86 per cent of white collar workers; 73 per cent of working class workers find their work enjoyable, compared to 81 per cent of white collar workers; and 58 per cent of working class workers look forward to going to work, compared to 66 per cent of white collar workers.

Our survey suggests the key drivers of unenjoyable work are:

- **A lack of flexibility:** 43 per cent of those who do not enjoy their work do not have a healthy work-life balance, and 35 per cent are not given flexibility to deal with commitments outside of work.
- **A lack of agency and initiative:** 43 per cent of those who do not enjoy their work say they lack the freedom to make decisions about their work, 41 per cent say their managers are not good at listening to employees, and 32 per cent say they are not encouraged to use their initiative at work.
- **A lack of security:** 59 per cent of those that do not enjoy their work say that their job is secure, compared to 75 per cent of those that do enjoy their work.

## MANY WORKERS LACK INFLUENCE OVER THEIR WORK AND DISCRIMINATION IS ON THE RISE

But there are still workplace problems for a significant proportion of the workforce. These are a lack of influence over important aspects of work, and a rise in discrimination, bullying and unfair treatment at work.

People lack influence over important issues at work:

- 63 per cent of workers say they have little or no influence over deciding what kind of employee benefits are offered to employees.

Workers in working class occupations are

# 18%

less likely than white collar workers to find their work interesting or enjoyable, or look forward to it

- 46 per cent of workers say they have little or no influence over how they work with new equipment or software.
- 42 per cent of workers say they have little or no influence over setting their working hours.

Discrimination, bullying and unfair treatment have risen since 2001:

- The proportion of workers saying they have experienced or been aware of discrimination at work in their career has risen from 9 to 17 per cent since 2001, and when this question was asked in regards to their current workplace, reports rose from 3 to 9 per cent.
- The proportion of workers saying they have experienced or been aware of bullying by management or fellow workers has grown from 25 to 35 per cent since 2001, or from 9 to 19 per cent in their current workplace.

## SUPPORT FOR TRADE UNIONS IS GREATER THAN MEMBERSHIP FIGURES SUGGEST

While only 24 per cent of the workforce were members of a trade union in 2015, our survey shows support for trade unions runs much wider:

- The majority of workers think trade unions are necessary to protect working conditions (66 per cent) and wages (56 per cent), and only 18 per cent feel trade unions have no future in modern Britain (51 per cent disagree).
- The more exposure workers have to unions, the more likely they are to feel unions are necessary. 87 per cent of union members agreed unions were necessary to protect working conditions, compared to 72 per cent of people who had a union rep in their workplace, 58 per cent of non-unionised workers, and 55 per cent of those who were not union members and had no union rep in their workplace.

---

# 42%

of workers say they have little or no influence over setting their working hours

---

# 66%

of workers think trade unions are necessary to protect working conditions

## POLITICAL LEADERS NEED TO TELL A POSITIVE STORY ABOUT WORK

The survey results show that most people enjoy their work and find it interesting, but that political leadership is needed to ensure everybody has access to good work. This report argues that a positive political story is likely to win the hearts minds and votes of workers, and proposes four key tenets underlying a positive political story about work:

- 1 *Work is the answer, not the problem.*** A popular and inclusive story about work will trump alienating and implausible narratives of constant exploitation and the end of work altogether.
- 2 *But the one in ten workers having a bad time at work must not be left behind.*** Any political party that claims to be the party of the workers will need to have a compelling strategy to improve the working lives of this group.
- 3 *Every working life can be improved.*** Improving work for everybody means having something to offer to people who already enjoy work, but for whom it can get better – especially when it comes to control and fair treatment in the workplace.
- 4 *Trade unions need to be part of the solution.*** Despite declining membership figures, political leaders should take note of the public's view that trade unions play a necessary role in the modern workplace across a range of issues.

## INTRODUCTION

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do.”

– Steve Jobs, Commencement address at Stanford University, 2005

The UK employment rate is at a record high, but political and economic commentators have raised a number of concerns about the quality of work that is being produced, from low pay and productivity to exploitative contracts.

But how do these stories stack up against people’s experiences of work? This research suggests that most people enjoy their work, but there are question marks over quality for a significant proportion of the workforce.

In order to develop a better understanding of people’s attitudes towards work, we worked in partnership with the TUC and Ipsos MORI to conduct a face to face survey with 1,339 people in full or part-time employment in Great Britain.\*

We wanted to understand how attitudes to work have changed over the last fifteen years, so we matched the methodology and included a selection of questions from Wayne Diamond and Richard Freeman’s 2001 report for the TUC, *What workers want from workplace organisations*.

Despite major technological and economic change (from the first iPhone to the worst recession since the great depression) between 2001 and 2016, our research shows little change in attitudes on most measures.

However, one significant movement shows that the number of people who often or always look forward to going to work increased by 14 percentage points between 2001 and 2016. Over 20 million people now wake up most

\* Research was undertaken by Ipsos MORI between 10 and 23 June 2016 using CAPiBus, Ipsos MORI’s computer aided face to face in-home omnibus survey with 1,339 adults aged 18 and over who are in full or part time work in GB. Data have been weighted by age, gender, region, working status, social grade, tenure and ethnicity to the known population profile of working adults aged 18+ in GB.

days looking forward to going to work. And the survey also shows that four in five workers find their work interesting and enjoyable.

The widespread positivity about work should lead political leaders to pause before they talk work down. To reflect the reality of work for most people, they also need to talk up the good experiences millions of people have at work every day.

Recently some commentators have even been claiming that technological advances mean we can or must imagine a future with less work. This is one of the arguments used to support ideas like a universal basic income, which has been floated by figures from President Obama downwards as an alternative or supplement to earned income.<sup>†</sup> But such proposals fail to take account of the positivity most people have towards work. Political leaders tempted by the allure of automated leisure should take stock of our survey findings, which show that for the vast majority of people, work provides much more than a pay cheque.

While most people are having a positive time at work, not everybody is. Our survey suggests there is a group of around one in ten workers who often or always wish they did not have to go to work, and who do not find their job interesting or enjoyable. And the survey shows people in working class occupations are significantly more likely to be in this group than those in white collar jobs.

Ensuring everybody has access to decent, fulfilling work should be an aim of any government, no matter what party is in power. But an interesting finding in this report is that enjoyment at work has less to do with income than other issues like whether or not people have flexibility, agency and security at work.

Since becoming prime minister, Theresa May has aimed to rebrand her Conservative party as the “party of the workers”, claiming the Labour party no longer deserve the title. In doing so, May has placed work at the heart of the UK’s political battleground for the coming years.

<sup>†</sup> There are many different variations of the universal basic income model, some of which are proposed to complement work (for example, see proposals published by Harrop, A, in *For us all*, Fabian Society, 2016, and Painter, A, in ‘Insecurity cubed’ in *Changing Work*, Fabian Society, 2016) but others like Srnicek, N, and Williams, A, in their book *Inventing the future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, Verso, 2016, frame the universal basic income around a ‘right to be lazy’ and a replacement to deriving income from paid work.

With nearly 32 million people in work in the UK there is an obvious electoral rationale behind any aspirant claim to be the 'party of the workers'. But a political leader wanting to win the hearts, minds and votes of working people will need to speak to where workers are today.

The findings of this report should give succour to political leaders to continue to talk up the value of work and the importance of full employment. And it should put paid to the minority political view that work - in general - is miserable and exploitative.

But the survey also shows that for one in 10 workers - over 3 million people in the UK - work is not providing the fulfillment most people take for granted.

Therefore political leaders need to provide a strong offer to those who are enjoying work but for whom it can get better, as well as the unlucky minority, who need to be given more reason to look forward to work.

## 1. PEOPLE TEND TO ENJOY THEIR WORK

Our survey reveals most people hold positive views about their work. The research shows that people tend to find their work interesting and enjoyable, and the vast majority of people in Britain look forward to going to work. It confirms that despite bad days, most people like what they do and find fulfilment in it.

The findings suggest there is a gulf between the public's view and current political debate. Whether it is an employment crisis in a declining industry, exploitation in the supply chain of a major retailer, or the risks posed by automation, recent political debates on work have often focused on the failure of work to provide give people what they want. Alternatively, governments can tend to assume all work is good and fulfilling. But our research shows neither story accurately reflects the opinions of workers.

### People find their work interesting and enjoyable, and they look forward to it

Our research shows nearly one in two workers (48 per cent) strongly agree their work is interesting, and almost four in five workers (79 per cent) either slightly or strongly agree with this statement. 78 per cent of Britain's workforce slightly or strongly agree their work is enjoyable. And nearly two thirds of Britain's workforce look forward to going to work, with 63 per cent of workers either always looking forward to work, or doing so most of the time.

**Figure 1**

Work is interesting for most people:  
response to statement 'my job is interesting'

AGREE



DISAGREE



Strongly

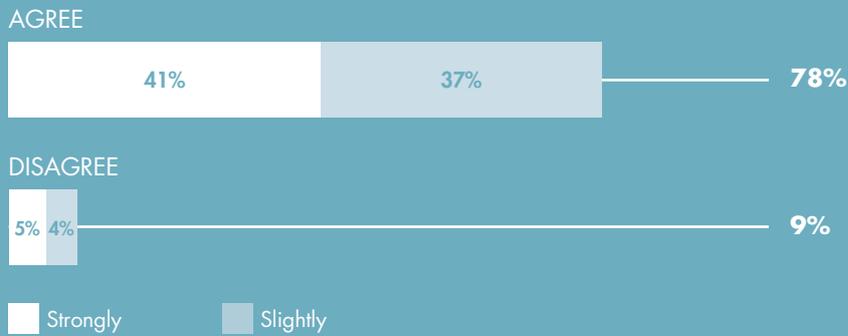
Slightly

# 79%

of workers either slightly or strongly agree their work is interesting

## Figure 2

Work is enjoyable for most people:  
response to statement 'my job is enjoyable'



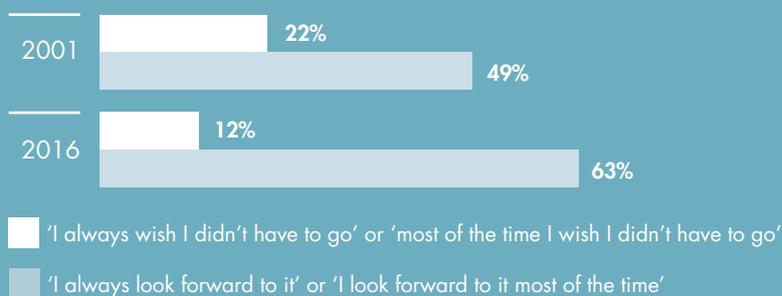
# 78%

of Britain's workforce  
slightly or strongly  
agree their work is  
enjoyable

A comparison with the 2001 survey in which similar questions were asked shows that the proportion of workers who enjoy their work and find it interesting has not significantly changed. ‡ However, movement between the surveys suggests people are more likely to look forward to work today than they did fifteen years ago. In response to the question 'how do you feel about going to work?' the proportion of people that said they either always looked forward to work or did so most of the time rose from 49 per cent to 63 per cent.

## Figure 3

More of us look forward to work than we did fifteen years ago:  
response to 'how do you feel about going to work?'  
in 2001 and 2016



# 63%

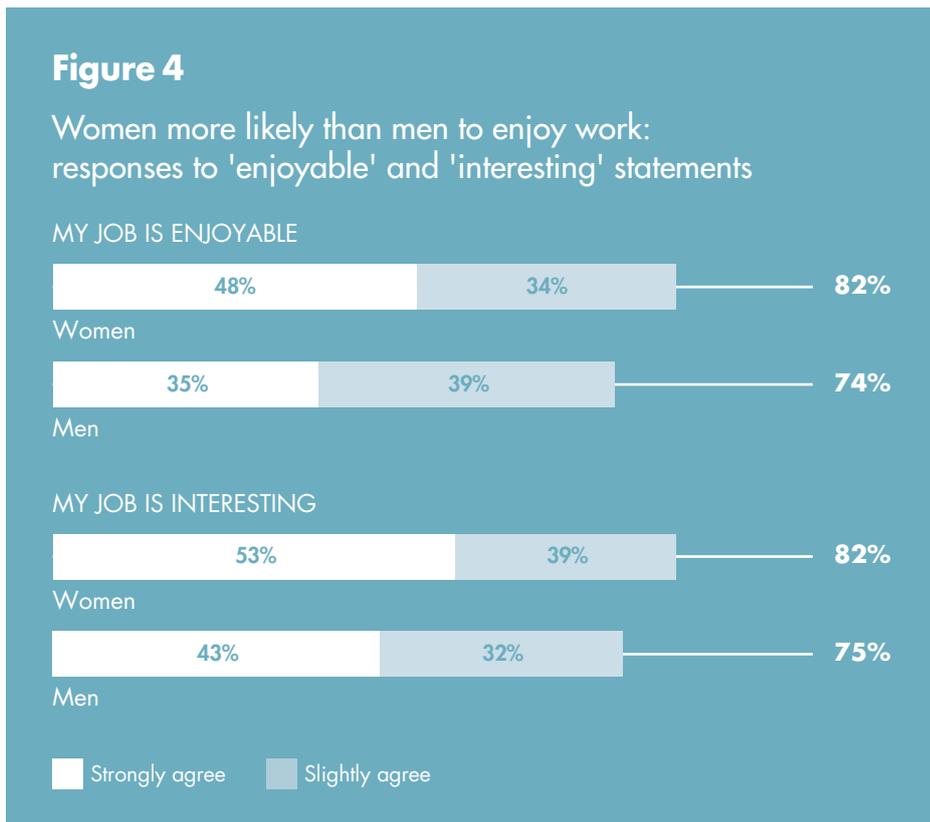
of workers either  
always look forward to  
work or look forward  
to it most of the time

‡ In the Diamond and Freeman (2001) survey, those surveyed were asked for their response to the statement 'my job is interesting and enjoyable'. 77 per cent of respondents either slightly or strongly agreed with this statement. The question was split up in the 2016 survey with similar results. 78 per cent of respondents agreed with the (separate) statements 'my job is interesting' and 'my job is enjoyable'.

## Women and older people are more likely to enjoy their work

In particular, women and older people are more likely to strongly enjoy their work and find it interesting. Our research shows 82 per cent of women find their work enjoyable, compared to 74 per cent of men. And similarly, 82 per cent of women find their work interesting, compared to 75 per cent of men. While the sample size for those aged over 65 is very small (just 36 workers), those surveyed are 20 percentage points more likely to strongly agree their work is enjoyable than the average for the workforce, and 14 percentage points more likely than average to strongly agree their work is interesting.

Women and older people are also more likely to look forward to going to work. 66 per cent of women either always or often look forward to going to work, compared to 61 per cent of men. And a remarkable 88 per cent of workers aged over 65 either always or often look forward to going to work.<sup>§</sup>



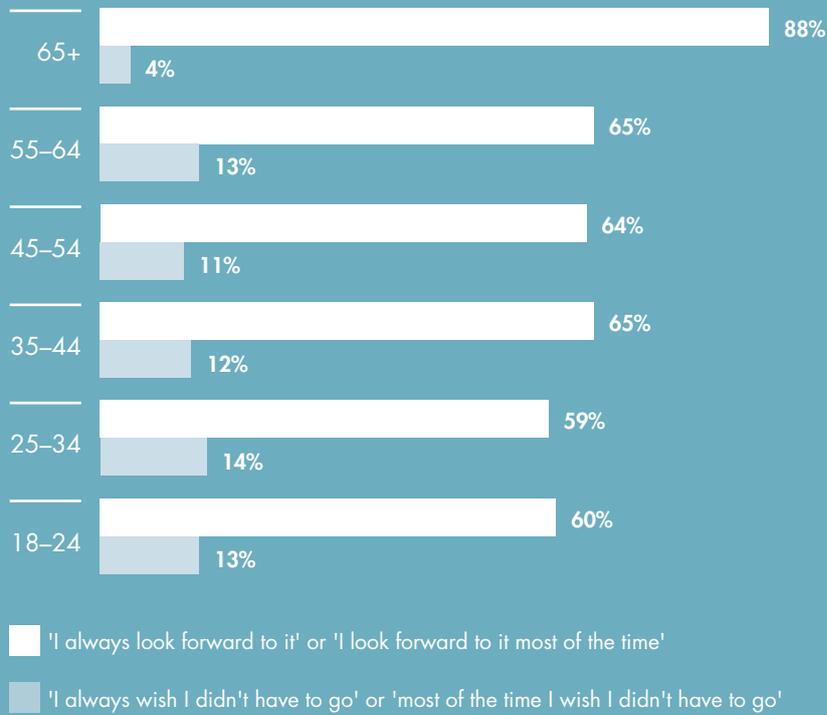
**82%**

of women either strongly or slightly agree that their job is enjoyable

§ In the statistics for older people, there is clearly some self-selection going on. As most of these workers are above pensionable age, most will have a choice about whether or not to continue working, and as only people in work were surveyed, it only covers those older workers who have chosen to continue working.

**Figure 5**

Older workers more positive about work: response to 'how do you feel about going to work?'



**88%**

or workers aged over 65 either always or often look forward to going to work

\* Caution: 65+ figure has a low base size.

## 2. ONE IN TEN ARE HAVING A BAD TIME AT WORK

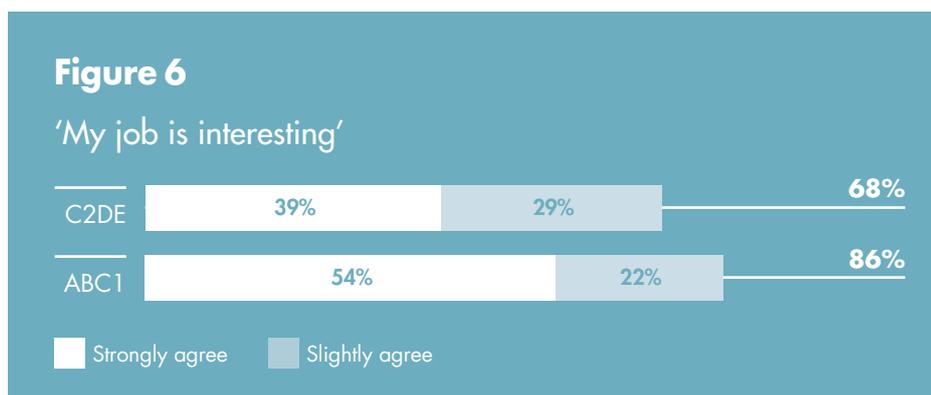
While most people hold positive views about their work, there is a group of around one in ten workers – or 3 million people – who are not enjoying work in the ways that most people do. Our research shows 10 per cent of workers disagree that their work is enjoyable, 11 per cent disagree their work is interesting, and 12 per cent either always or often wish they did not have to go to work.

Our survey shows that workers in working class occupations are more likely to be in this group than those in white collar occupations.<sup>¶</sup> 68 per cent of working class workers find their work interesting, compared to 86 per cent of white collar workers; 73 per cent of working class workers find their work enjoyable, compared to 81 per cent of white collar workers; and 58 per cent of working class workers look forward to going to work, compared to 66 per cent of white collar workers.

In order to ensure everybody has access to good, fulfilling work regardless of what background they are from, it will be important to address the issues which are making leading to negative experiences for this group of workers, the 'one in ten'.

# 10%

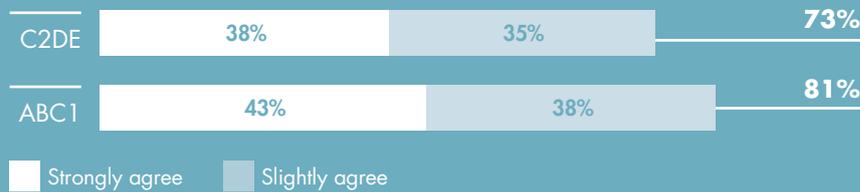
of workers disagree that their work is enjoyable



<sup>¶</sup> In this report, 'working class occupations' refers to a net response of C2 and DE voters - those from skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations. 'White collar occupations' refers to a net response of AB and C1 voters, from higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, professional occupations and supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional occupations. While this categorisation is not always helpful (class identity and social grade are closely related but not identical), in this case it provides a useful way of describing particular groups of people working in different types of occupation.

**Figure 7**

'My job is enjoyable'

**Figure 8**

How do you feel about going to work?



The survey suggests three key drivers behind bad experiences of work: there is a correlation between negative attitudes to work and low reported levels of flexibility, agency and initiative, and security at work.\*\* These qualities are more closely linked to attitudes to work than other factors, such as the level of household income.††

\*\* In order to look at the correlation between negative attitudes to work and answers to other questions in the survey, we chose to look at those who agreed with the statement 'my work is enjoyable'. The survey results showed that this was the best single indicator of negative attitudes to work, with 91 per cent of those that look forward to work also finding it enjoyable, and 90 per cent of those that find it interesting also finding it enjoyable.

†† Income appeared to be a less important factor in whether or not people tended to enjoy their work. 74 per cent of those with an income below £25,000 a year said they enjoyed their work, compared to 79 per cent of those with an income above that figure.

## A lack of flexibility

Many of those who do not enjoy their work lack flexibility. Workers who do not enjoy their work are nearly four times less likely to have flexibility at work or a healthy work-life balance than those who do enjoy their work.

- **43%** of those who do not enjoy work say they do not have a manager supportive of a healthy work-life balance, compared to only 11 per cent of those who do enjoy their work.
- **35%** of those who do not enjoy work say they are not given flexibility to deal with commitments outside of work, compared to 9 per cent of those who enjoy their work.

Our survey shows workers in working class occupations are 13 percentage points less likely to have flexibility than workers in white collar occupations, and 6 percentage points less likely to feel their manager is supportive of a healthy work-life balance.



**43%**

of workers who do not enjoy their work do not have a manager supportive of a healthy work-life balance

## Lack of agency and initiative

Those who do not enjoy their work tend to be afforded less agency at work, and are less likely to be given the space to take initiative in their jobs. Nearly half of those that do not enjoy their work say they are not given freedom to make decisions or are listened to by their managers. Those that do enjoy their work are more than four times more likely to be encouraged to use their initiative than those that do not enjoy it.

- **43%** of those who do not enjoy work say they lack the freedom to make decisions about their work, compared to 13 per cent of those who enjoy their work.
- **41%** say their managers are not good at listening to their employees, compared to 14 per cent of those who enjoy their work.
- **32%** say they are not encouraged to use their initiative, compared to 7 per cent of those who enjoy their work.

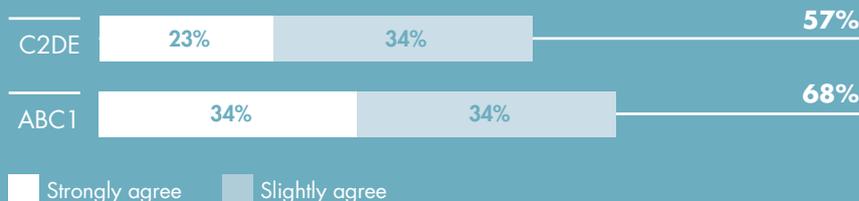
Workers in working class occupations tend to have less agency and initiative at work. Working class workers are 11 percentage points less likely than white collar workers to have the freedom to make decisions about their work, 14 percentage points less likely to be encouraged to use their initiative at work, and 4 percentage points less likely to feel they are listened to by their manager.

# 32%

of workers who do not enjoy their work say they are not encouraged to use their initiative

### Figure 11

'All or most of my managers give employees freedom to make decisions about their work'





### Lack of security

Enjoying work is also linked to job security. People who do not enjoy their work are 16 percentage points less likely to say their job is secure than those that do enjoy their work.

- **59%** of those that don't enjoy their work say that their job is secure, compared to 75 per cent of those that do enjoy their work.

While there is a smaller gap on this issue than on flexibility or agency, concern about job security is on the rise. Overall, the proportion of respondents saying they felt they had security at work dropped from 77 per cent in 2001 to 70 per cent in 2016. There is also a much smaller social grade correlation on insecurity at work, with those in working class occupations only 3 percentage points more likely to say their work is insecure (69 per cent) than those in white collar occupations (72 per cent).

**59%**

of workers who do not enjoy their work say their job is secure, compared to 75% of those that do enjoy their work

### 3. A LACK OF INFLUENCE AND RISING REPORTS OF DISCRIMINATION

While most people enjoy their work, our research suggests there is plenty of room for improvement. In particular, there are two key areas that affect a significant proportion of the workforce – a lack of influence over important aspects of work, and a rise in discrimination, bullying and unfair treatment at work.

#### The influence deficit

A key finding from the Diamond and Freeman (2001) survey was that workers wanted to be more involved in decisions in their workplace. This finding contributed to an understanding of how workforce attitudes had moved on from the top-down, hierarchical (so-called 'Fordist') business models that dominated many firms in the previous century.

Our survey shows that little progress has been made to plug this 'influence deficit' – the proportion of the workforce that lack influence over key issues at work. Our survey updated the Diamond and Freeman questions on influence at work, asking respondents 'how important, if at all, is it for you to have influence over each of the following at your work?' and 'to what extent, if at all, are you able to influence the following decisions at your work?'

Our research showed that the most important issue for workers today is 'deciding how to do your job', which 88 per cent of the workforce felt was very or fairly important to influence. 'Deciding what kind of workplace benefits are offered to employees' scored the lowest in the survey, but it was still an important issue, with 62 per cent of workers wanting influence over it.

# 88%

of workers said that having influence over 'deciding how to do your job' was a very or fairly important issue for them

**Figure 14**

'How important, is it for you to have influence over each of the following at your work?'



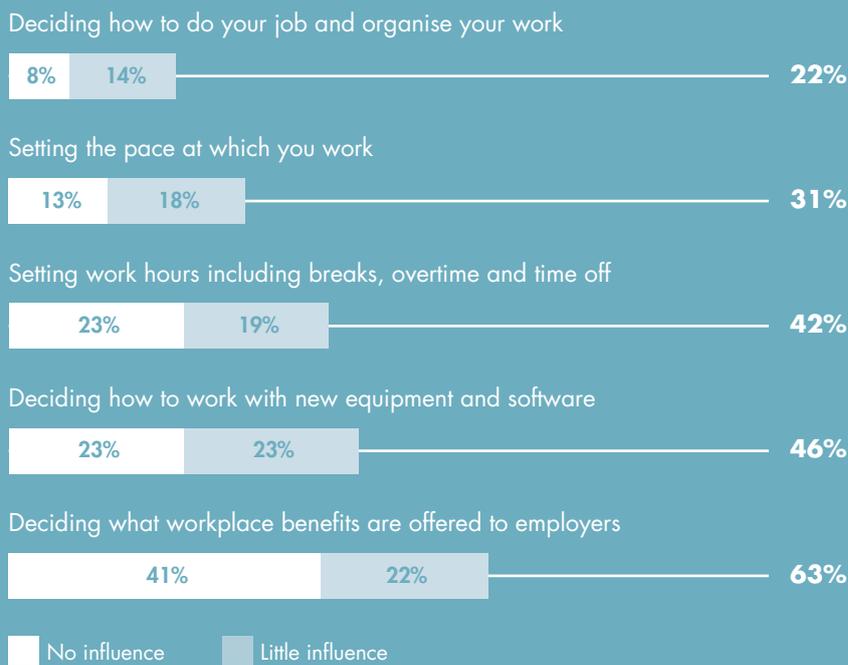
Percentage answering 'very important' or 'fairly important' to influence

\*e.g. flexible work hours, breaks, overtime and time off

On the most important issue for workers, 'deciding how to do your job', more than one in five workers (22 per cent) feel they have little or no influence. On setting the pace at which you work and setting working hours, both of which were seen as important by at least four in five workers, 31 per cent and 42 per cent of workers respectively felt they had little or no influence over decisions taken. 46 per cent of workers feel they have little or no influence over how they work with new equipment or software, despite 68 per cent thinking influence on this issue is important, and nearly two thirds of the workforce (63 per cent) feel they have little or no influence over workplace benefits, despite a similar number (62 per cent) feeling this is important.

**Figure 15**

The influence deficit: response to 'to what extent if at all, are you able to influence the following decisions at your work?'



**42%**

of workers felt they had little or no influence on setting working hours

A comparison between the Diamond and Freeman (2001) survey and the 2016 survey shows that there has been little progress in addressing the influence deficit over the last fifteen years.

The proportion of the workforce reporting little or no influence has not improved since 2001, with the figures going up (all be it within the margin of error) on the two most important issues for workers:

- **22%** of workers have little or no influence over how to do their job, up from 19 per cent in 2001.
- **31%** of workers have little or no influence over setting the pace at which they work, up from 29 per cent in 2001.

And on other measures, progress has been made but large influence deficits remain:

- **42%** of workers have little or no influence over working hours, down from 53 per cent in 2001.
- **63%** of workers have little or no influence over workplace benefits, down from 82 per cent in 2001.

## Figure 16

Little progress closing the influence deficit:  
% reporting little or no influence in response to  
'to what extent, if at all, are you able to influence the  
following decisions at your work?' in 2001 and 2016

Deciding how to work with new equipment and software



Setting work hours including breaks, overtime and time off



Setting the pace at which you work



Deciding how to do your job and organise your work



2001 2016

## Rise in reports of discrimination, bullying and unfair treatment

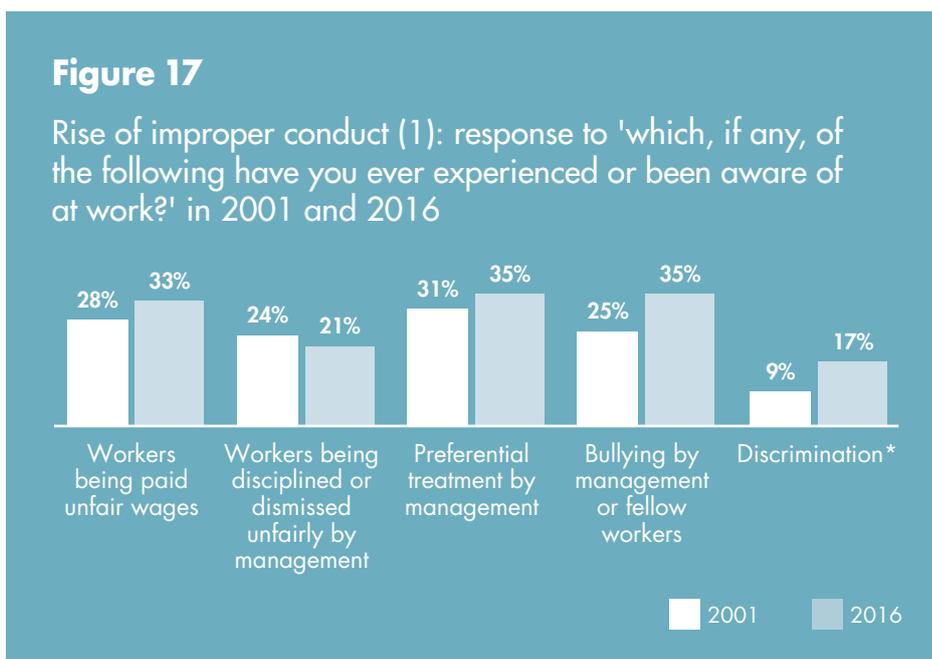
The second issue at work reported by a significant proportion of the workforce is the rise of discrimination, bullying and unfair treatment. The majority of respondents (56 per cent) told our survey they had witnessed discrimination, bullying or unfair treatment in their professional life, and 40 per cent had witnessed at least one of these problems in their current workplace.

Worryingly, there has been a rise in reports of discrimination, bullying and unfair treatment since 2001 on most of the measures we used. The biggest rise was in reports of bullying, with the percentage of people having witnessed it in their professional lives rising from 25 to 35 per cent over the 15 years, and reports more than doubling (from 9 to 19 per cent) in current workplaces. Reports of discrimination at work also rose significantly, rising from 9 to 17 per cent throughout people's working lives, and tripling (from 3 to 9 per cent) when people were asked about their current workplaces.

Reports of workers being paid unfair wages and preferential treatment by management have also risen since 2001. Some of the increases reported may be a result of stronger awareness of the problems, rather than higher incidence, and in the case of discrimination the rise is likely to be related in part to the increase in the number of characteristics protected from unequal treatment under law (see note below chart).

**56%**

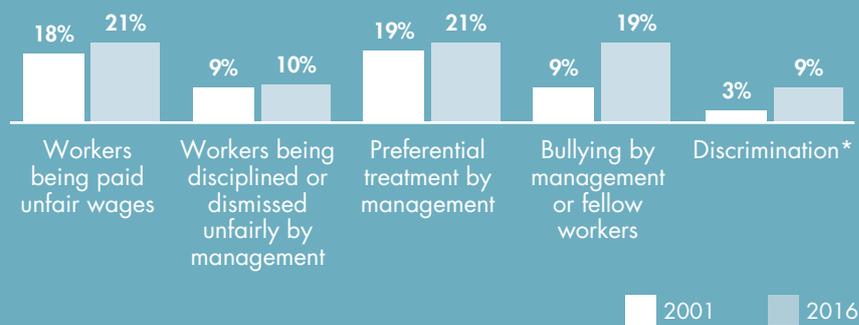
of respondents told our survey they had witnessed discrimination, bullying or unfair treatment in their professional life



\* There was a change in the wording of the question on discrimination at work in the 2016 survey in order to reflect contemporary definitions of protected characteristics, which may have been a factor in the sharp increase between 2001 and 2016. The 2001 survey gave the option of reporting 'Sexual or Racial discrimination', whereas the 2016 survey updated this to a wider definition of 'Discrimination against employees according to age, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief, or pregnancy or maternity'.

**Figure 18**

Rise of improper conduct (2): response to 'which, if any, of the following have you experienced or been aware of at your current job?' in 2001 and 2016



\* There was a change in the wording of the question on discrimination at work in the 2016 survey in order to reflect contemporary definitions of protected characteristics, which may have been a factor in the sharp increase between 2001 and 2016. The 2001 survey gave the option of reporting 'Sexual or Racial discrimination', whereas the 2016 survey updated this to a wider definition of 'Discrimination against employees according to age, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief, or pregnancy or maternity'.

## More to be done on influence and improper conduct

The findings that little progress has been made in giving people more influence at work and tackling discrimination, bullying and unfair treatment at work suggests that landmark government initiatives have had limited impact.

For example, in 2008, midway between the two surveys, the then Labour government asked a group of experts led by David MacLeod and Nita Clarke to look at how to boost employee engagement in the workplace, and the Labour and subsequent coalition governments implemented a range of their recommendations.<sup>1</sup> However, while this improved engagement at a number of leading organisations, these survey results suggest that more action is required to see worker influence and engagement enter the mainstream.

Similarly, the Equality Act was enacted in 2010, which updated pre-existing legislation to enshrine equal treatment and access to employment regardless of age, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief, or pregnancy or maternity in to law. But our survey shows reported discrimination has gone up since 2001, and while the Equality Act and subsequent interventions may have contributed to a better public understanding of discrimination (and therefore a higher likelihood of reporting it), more work is needed to stamp it out of the workplace.

## 4. TRADE UNIONS AS SOLUTION?

Our research shows that despite the long-term decline of trade union membership, support for trade unions is strong, across a range of measures. And the more exposure people have to unions, the more supportive they tend to be.

### Support for trade unions is greater than membership figures suggest

The majority of people think trade unions are necessary to protect working conditions (66 per cent) and wages (56 per cent), and only 18 per cent feel trade unions have no future in modern Britain (while 51 per cent disagree). This shows that the proportion of the workforce that support the role of trade unions is far higher than the proportion of the workforce who are members (24 per cent in 2015).<sup>2</sup>

The more exposure respondents had to unions, the more likely they were to feel they were necessary. 87 per cent of union members agreed unions were necessary to protect working conditions, compared to 72 per cent of people who had a union rep in their workplace, 58 per cent of non-unionised workers, and 55 per cent of those with no union exposure at all. The same rule applied to responses on the necessity of unions to protecting wages, and those who disagreed with the statement 'trade unions have no future in modern Britain'.

66%

of people think trade unions are necessary to protect working conditions

**Figure 19**

Strong support for unions: responses to 'to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?'



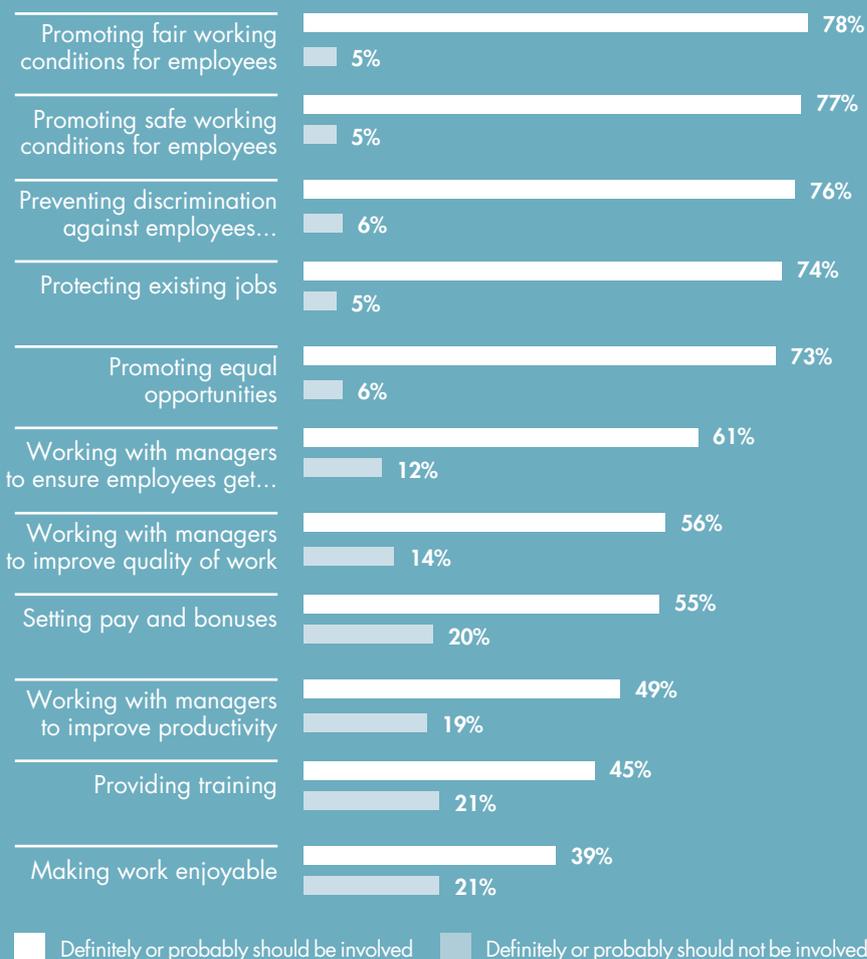
56%

of people think trade unions are necessary to protect wages

There is also strong workforce support for union involvement in the workplace across a range of issues. More than three quarters of workers think trade unions should either probably or definitely be involved in promoting fair working conditions (78 per cent), promoting safe working conditions (77 per cent) and preventing discrimination against employees (76 per cent). Over two thirds think unions should probably or definitely be involved in protecting existing jobs (74 per cent) and promoting equal opportunities (73 per cent), and the majority think unions should probably or definitely be involved in ensuring employees get the training they need (61 per cent), improving the quality of work (56 per cent), and setting pay and bonuses (55 per cent).

## Figure 20

Broad support for union involvement in the workplace: responses to 'to what extent do you believe that trade unions should be involved, or not, in each of the following?'



# 76%

of workers believe trade unions should probably or definitely be involved in preventing discrimination against employees

People see less need for unions to be involved in improving productivity (49 per cent thought they probably or definitely should be involved), providing training (45 per cent) or making work enjoyable (39 per cent) but the proportion of respondents supporting the involvement of unions in these areas was significantly higher than the proportion who felt unions should probably or definitely not be involved in each case.

## A strong role for collectivism in the workplace

The support for trade unions being involved in the workplace reflects wide-ranging support for collective approaches to issues at work. However, our research suggests workers are now as likely to want to deal with pay individually as they are collectively, a shift from the 2001 survey.

Our survey shows there is general support from workers for cooperation and collectivism in the workplace. 77 per cent of respondents agreed 'working in a team is the best way to get things done', compared to 23 per cent who felt 'working with others is usually more trouble than it is worth'. And on specific issues, between 55 and 62 per cent of workers said they would prefer to deal with training, discrimination and bullying as a team, rather than individually. A lower proportion of workers (46 per cent) wanted to negotiate working hours as a team, but still significantly more than those who preferred to deal with this individually (29 per cent).

However, when workers consider negotiating their salary, our survey shows that they are now as likely to want to do so on an individual basis as they are on a collective basis. In 2001, nearly twice as many people preferred to negotiate on pay collectively (63 per cent) as individually (34 per cent). The scales were changed in the same question in 2016, which makes it difficult to compare figures directly, but today respondents are as likely to want to negotiate their salary on their own (37 per cent), as to do it collectively (36 per cent).<sup>‡‡</sup> This is likely to reflect declining union coverage, meaning that fewer people have had the opportunity to benefit from the impact of collective bargaining both on pay and other workplace benefits.

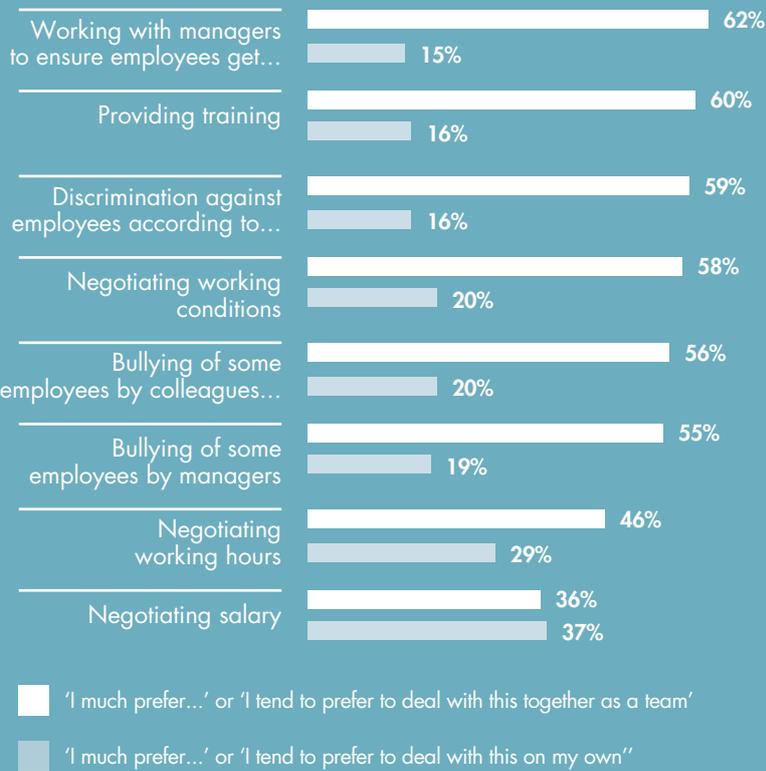
# 77%

of respondents told our survey 'working in a team is the best way to get things done'

<sup>‡‡</sup> The questions in the two surveys remained the same, 'How would you prefer to deal with each of the following problems?', however, the 2016 survey gave respondents a sliding scale of responses and the option of stating 'it makes no difference either way' to reflect advances in methodological best practice since 2001. The 2001 survey simply offered two responses, 'with colleagues or fellow workers' or 'on your own'.

**Figure 21**

Workers prefer a collective approach on all issues except pay: response to 'generally, how would you prefer to deal with each of the following problems?'



## Trade unions face competition to be first port of call for advice

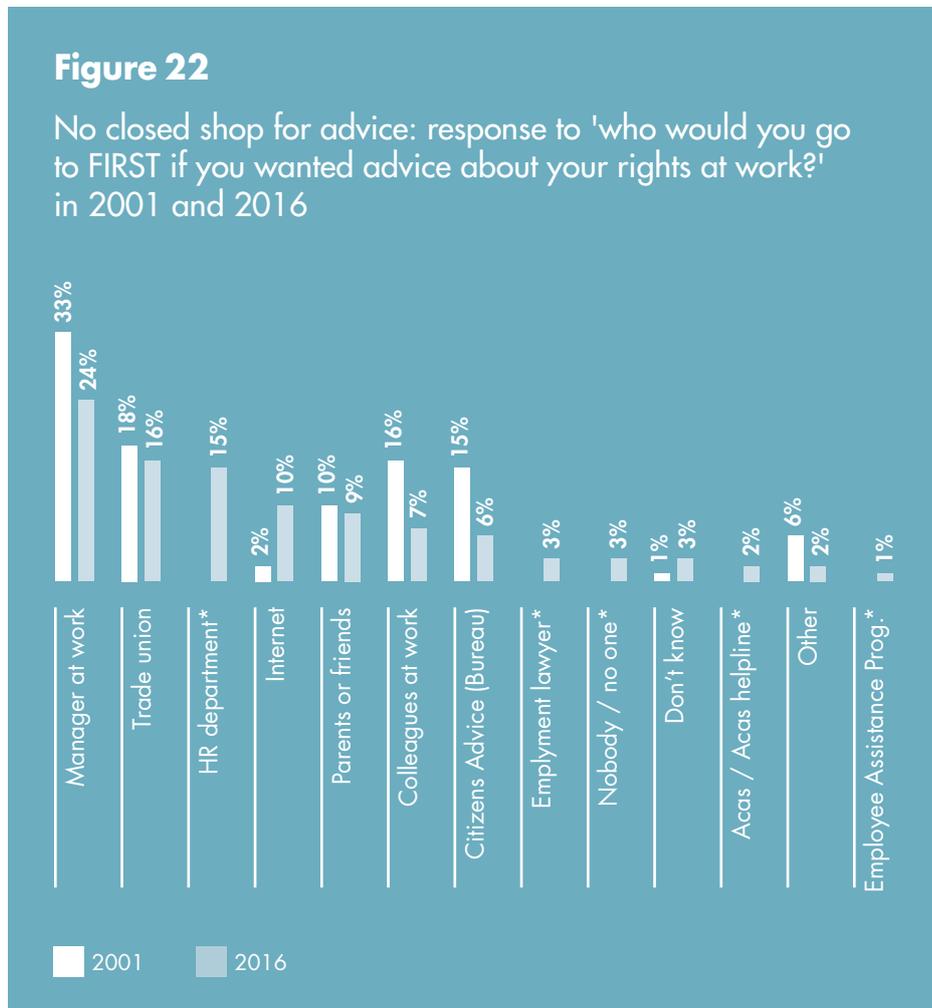
Our research shows trade unions have retained their position from the 2001 survey as the second most common port of call for advice about rights at work, but that they face increasing competition from new sources of advice and the rise of the internet.

Behind managers (24 per cent), trade unions are the second most popular source of information about rights at work, with 16 per cent of workers viewing them as their first port of call. HR departments (15 per cent), the internet (10 per cent) and parents or friends (9 per cent) come closely behind. The rise of the HR department is particularly noteworthy as it was not deemed to be a significant enough source of advice to be included as an option in the 2001 poll. The survey also shows the proportion of workers

# 16%

of workers view trade unions as their first port of call for information about rights at work

turning to the internet first for advice has grown by five times since 2001 (from 2 to 10 per cent). With the professionalization of 'human resources' and the rise of the internet, trade unions will have to continually adapt in order to retain their position as a key port of call for advice.



\* These categories were added in the 2016 survey to provide a more comprehensive set of options reflecting new initiatives and institutions.

### Support for unions at odds with discourse of decline

The challenges faced by trade unions in Britain are well documented. Despite a growing population and workforce, the number of trade union members has more than halved from a peak of over 13 million people in 1979 to just over 6 million today.<sup>3</sup> Membership is concentrated in a shrinking public sector, with just 14 per cent of private sector workers in trade unions.<sup>4</sup>

However, our research shows that worker support for unions should not be judged by membership figures alone. Trade unions have broad support, even from those that are not members of them. And the more exposure people have to unions, the more likely they are to think they are necessary. This shows that there is a strong base of support for trade unions to tap into, and if they are able to adapt to the changing world of work, the story of trade unionism in Britain need not be one of decline.

Trade unions face a multitude of challenges as the world of work changes, from more fragmented workplaces to challenging legislation. But our survey points to two specific issues that unions could take action on now. Firstly, the fact that workers are now as likely to want to deal with their salary individually as they are collectively is a challenge that unions should acknowledge, building understanding of the benefits of collective approaches in workplaces. Secondly, increasing competition from other sources of advice about rights at work shows that like any business or government, unions need to adapt to these new realities if they are to survive. If unions can mount a response to these two specific challenges, as well play a wider role in addressing the issues raised in this report, our research suggests the public support is there for unions to play an even more important role in workplaces of the future.

## CHANGING THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Work will be a critical battleground for politicians in the coming months and years. This report has argued that as well as ensuring everybody has access to fulfilling work, politicians must find a way to speak to the four in five workers who enjoy their work and find it interesting.

Here Theresa May has attempted to steal a march on the Labour party. Not only has she called on her party to become the 'party of workers', but she has also used her nascent premiership to touch on a number of issues raised by our survey. She has recognised the importance of "the dignity that comes with a job well done", the need to ensure everybody is "properly protected at work", and the lack of influence many people feel at work – an issue she has responded to with a plan to put workers on boards.<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, the Labour Party went into the last election with a story about low pay, zero hour contracts and miserable work, and more recently John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, has entertained an end to work as we know it.<sup>6</sup> Our survey suggests these scare stories are wide of the mark of what most workers think about work.

It is not all bad news for the Labour party. Our survey suggests Conservative rhetoric about trade unions is out of step with the view of most workers that unions play a necessary role in working life.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Jeremy Corbyn has begun to set out the Labour party's approach to tackling discrimination at work, a key issue raised by our survey, and has launched an encouraging review into people's experiences at work.<sup>8</sup>

But if Labour are to retain their claim to be the 'party of work' they will need to develop a new political story about work. That story will need to go with the grain of people's experiences. Above all, this means understanding that most people think of work as a good thing. They enjoy it. They find it interesting. They look forward to it.

There are four principles that should sit at the heart of this new story:

### 1. Work is the answer, not the problem

A large majority of people enjoy their work. A popular and inclusive story about work will trump alienating and implausible narratives of workplace misery or a world with no work at all.

Rather than reaching out for replacements to work and the income it provides, such as the idea of a universal basic income, a positive story should focus on improving work for the many. 78 per cent of workers enjoy their work and find it interesting, but the goal should be for everybody to be able to thrive at work.

## 2. Nobody should be left behind

While most people find fulfilment in their work, there is a group of around one in ten workers who do not enjoy their work, find it interesting or look forward to it. And working class workers are significantly more likely to be in this group than white collar workers.

Any political party that claims to be the party of workers will need to have a compelling strategy to improve the working lives of this group for whom the world of work is not delivering, and a clear idea of the steps they will take to ensure this group does not grow as work changes.

The recent creation of a new department with specific responsibility for 'industrial strategy' as well as business and energy provides a convenient avenue for such an agenda. But as political parties debate their differing definitions of what modern British industrial policy should look like, they should do so with a view to creating broad-based growth that benefits everybody, especially those one in ten workers for whom work is not providing adequate fulfilment.

## 3. Every working life can be improved

Improving work for everybody means having something to offer to people who already enjoy work, but for whom it can get better. Two examples of such issues are the 'influence deficit' and rising concerns about discrimination and bullying at work. 63 per cent of the workforce lack influence in at least one dimension of their work which they view as important to have a say over; and 56 per cent of workers have experienced or been aware of discrimination, bullying or unfair treatment at work.

Giving people the influence they want over their work should be a priority for political leaders wanting to give people back control after the EU referendum. And in order to ensure the future of work is inclusive, political leaders should revisit the Equality Act by asking how anti-discrimination

legislation can be better enforced, while also working with employers to stamp bullying and unfair treatment out of the workplace.

#### **4. Trade unions need to be part of the solution**

Trade unions were set up to improve working lives and, despite a decline in membership, this survey shows that workers want them to continue to play an important function in doing so. Political leaders, particularly in the Conservative party, should take note of most workers' views that trade unions play a necessary role in the workplace across a range of issues including protecting working conditions and pay.

However, unions and union leaders need to change too. Unions already face key challenges to deal with the changing nature of work and the increasing fragmentation of workplaces, but this survey shows there are also attitudinal challenges to address too.

Firstly, the survey shows a growing preference from workers for dealing with pay on an individual basis. Given the importance of collective bargaining in tackling wage inequality and boosting the wage share, as well as the fact our survey still shows significant worker support for it, it should continue to be at the heart of what trade unions do. But trade unions should also look at how they can improve their support for workers looking for individual changes to their pay and conditions. Such an approach could be integrated with the offers unions make to the growing number of self-employed workers, who were not included in our survey.

Secondly, our survey shows trade unions face increasing competition to be the first port of call for advice about rights at work for more people. There is a need for unions to modernise and update their digital strategies to maintain and grow the relevance and accessibility of their services.

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