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**Opportunity Knocks? The Possibilities and Levers for Improving Job Quality**

Patricia Findlay, University of Strathclyde

Chris Warhurst, University of Warwick

Ewart Keep, University of Oxford

Caroline Lloyd, University of Cardiff

## Opportunity Knocks? The Possibilities and Levers for Improving Job Quality

*Patricia Findlay, Chris Warhurst, Ewart Keep and Caroline Lloyd*

### Abstract

This article focuses on demands and interventions to improve or maintain job quality. There is need for better understanding of what can be done, by whom and with what impacts. The article provides a framework for reflection focused on interventions within and outwith the workplace. Drawing on secondary data, it outlines the renewed policy and academic interest in job quality, examines the multi-level reasons for intervention, the factors that shape this intervention and evaluates the loci of intervention. On the basis of the evidence to date, it argues that there is scope for intervention and that intervention can be effective.

### Key Words

bad jobs, community organisations, education and training, employer choice, good jobs, job quality, job quality interventions, labor law, labor unions

Job quality and recognition that it needs to be improved has gone mainstream amongst policymakers. In September 2015 the G20 - the forum of governments and central banks of the advanced economies which includes the US and UK - signed the Ankara Declaration. This explicitly and formally recognizes the importance of job quality. It commits governments to strengthening job quality as a route to achieving strong, sustainable and balanced economic growth that might also deliver inclusiveness and improved living standards. The significance of this development should not be under-estimated, as G20 countries contribute 85 per cent of gross world product and have two-thirds of the world's population (G20.org).

The Ankara Declaration is part of a trend in which supranational and inter-governmental organizations such as the OECD (2014) and the European Union (European Commission 2012) have introduced initiatives to promote job quality and its economic and social benefits. National governments also recognize the importance of job quality. Scotland, for example, has established a Fair Work Convention in 2014 (Fair Work Convention 2016), subsequently stimulating a Parliamentary Inquiry into work, wages and well-being, which argued that the low road to poor job quality must be closed off and a high road to good job quality created (Scottish Parliament Economy, Enterprise and Tourism Committee 2016). Resonating with this aim, practitioners within countries, for example professional human resource associations (e.g. the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) and national labour union confederations, (e.g. the AFL-CIO) as well as individual unions have become increasingly aware of the importance of job quality (see Findlay et al. 2013).

There has also been renewed academic interest internationally in job quality. Explicitly and implicitly, job quality featured strongly in what are now classic studies of work (e.g. Braverman 1974). Some of this academic research translated into workplace interventions

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3 through the international Quality of Working Life movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Grote  
4 and Guest 2016). However interest waned with the onslaught of economic crisis from the  
5 mid-1970s, with job losses exercising not only policymaker but also academic minds, resting  
6 on the assumption that, by way of response to the crisis, it was better to have any jobs than  
7 pursue good jobs ([www.makingbadjobsbetter.org.uk](http://www.makingbadjobsbetter.org.uk)). With this renewed interest, research  
8 now focuses on job quality generally (e.g. Gallie 2007; Holzer et al. 2011) and on what might  
9 be termed ‘bad jobs’ (e.g. McGovern et al. 2007; Gautie and Schmitt, 2009; Kalleberg 2011).  
10 A key concern has been how to define job quality (see Findlay et al. 2013; Wright 2015).  
11 While no definitional consensus has emerged and debates over objective job characteristics  
12 and subjective employee perceptions continue (Knox et al. 2016), key components have been  
13 identified and a second research dimension has emerged evaluating patterns of, and trends in,  
14 job quality nationally and internationally (e.g. Kalleberg 2011; Muñoz de Bustillo et al.  
15 2011).

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20 This research shows that too many developed countries have poor quality job and that whilst  
21 there have been some improvements within some countries, a number of previously good  
22 jobs are worsening and there is growth in the number of bad jobs (Hurley et al. 2015;  
23 Rothstein 2012; Kalleberg 2011; Leschke et al. 2012). As Carré et al (2012) explain, good  
24 jobs can deteriorate and bad jobs get worse, and, with employment growth or contraction, the  
25 stock of good and bad jobs can change nationally – as well as by industry and locality (Green  
26 and Owen 2006).

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30 As a result, there have been calls by academics for interventions to improve job quality. For  
31 example, Kalleberg (2011) has called for a ‘new social contract’ to address jobs polarisation  
32 and precarity (e.g. PEPSO 2015), Grimshaw and Carroll (2008) have outlined a ‘new deal’  
33 for workers in low-wage, low skill jobs, and Osterman and Shulman (2011) have called  
34 simply for bad jobs to be made good. Most recently, following the Presidential election  
35 success of Donald Trump, the Economic Policy Institute (2016) has called for a ‘real agenda’  
36 to support good jobs in the US.

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40 These debates raises obvious questions: if job quality is a problem, what can be done – and  
41 by whom - to maintain or improve it? These are challenging questions and are the focus of  
42 this special issue. This opening article provides a framework for reflection that focuses  
43 interventions that are within and outwith the workplace, examining not just where  
44 intervention occurs but also who intervenes and with what impacts. The next section outlines  
45 the contextual reasons for intervention and the factors that shape that intervention.. The  
46 following section then examines the emerging scope for intervention, with the final main  
47 section evaluating the loci of targeted intervention.

### 50 **Reasons to be cheerful? The good and bad news about job quality**

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52 Policy interest has been stimulated by both bad and good news about job quality – that is, the  
53 negative and positive drivers for improving it (Warhurst and Knox 2015). The bad news  
54 relates to the negative impacts of poor job quality on individual workers, firms and countries.  
55 Working in bad jobs can depress individual earnings, job satisfaction and health (Chandola  
56 2010). Bad jobs can also impose costs on employers directly and indirectly, for example,  
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3 through higher turnover rates (Sisson 2014) that in turn pose additional recruitment and  
4 retraining costs, and through lower productivity and performance. The cost of bad jobs is also  
5 externalised beyond the workplace to healthcare, welfare and taxation systems and so is of  
6 concern to governments (Chandola 2010). This bad news story also bridges individuals and  
7 societies in terms of career and earnings progression potential and their implications for  
8 inequality and social mobility. In the US, concern over growing income inequality and living  
9 standards has stimulated discussion on how to improve job quality (Hiltonsmith and Daly  
10 2014).  
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14 As for the good news, there is increasingly strong evidence attesting to the importance of  
15 good quality jobs for individuals, organisations and countries (Green 2009; Tomlinson and  
16 Walker 2010). For the EU, economic crisis threw into sharp focus the recognition that  
17 countries with better job quality tend to have higher employment participation and lower  
18 unemployment rates. The Scandinavian nations' attention has been drawn by the apparent  
19 relationship between good jobs, organizational learning cultures and company-level  
20 innovation, as witnessed in the various Finnish working life development programmes  
21 (Alasoini 2009). Indeed, there is now evidence of a strong correlation between innovation  
22 and job quality across countries and industries, at least in Europe (Erhel and Guergoat-  
23 Larivière 2016). In Scotland, concerns over the limited impact of improving skills supply and  
24 a growing concern over poverty and inequality have driven policy and practitioner concerns  
25 over job quality, and have shifted the policy debate significantly towards support for fair  
26 work and workplace innovation (Findlay et al. 2016). In Australia, the focus on job quality  
27 arose with government recognition that more effective skill utilization could be levered  
28 through working practices that characterize good jobs (Skills Australia 2012).  
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34 Given the range of positive outcomes associated with good jobs and the range of negative  
35 outcomes associated with bad jobs, what then explains the persistence of bad jobs and good  
36 jobs becoming worse? The answer is complex. The quality and quantity of jobs is shaped in  
37 large part by structural and technological factors, mediated by national institutional  
38 characteristics (Vidal 2013; Frege and Godard 2014). This mediation is notably through the  
39 role and activities of social partners in national and workplace level policy and practice. As  
40 Holman (2013: 496-7) has argued, institutional facilitators of good job quality in social  
41 democratic regimes include policies promoting full employment and employment rights for  
42 all alongside 'organised labour's strong capacity to influence decision-making within firms  
43 and government'. An example of this possibility is provided by Simms (2017) in this special  
44 issue. She argues that job quality outcomes should be understood as the result of contested  
45 power dynamics amongst interest representation.  
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50 In liberal market regimes, however, reduced labor union power and increasingly  
51 individualised employment relationships lower the pressure on employers to invest in good  
52 job quality. This point is made by Kalleberg (2011) for the US and McGovern et al. (2007)  
53 for the UK. Put bluntly, the weakening of organised labour is a key driver of declining job  
54 quality. Strong institutional environments can shape job quality more directly than weaker  
55 institutional environments. However employer practices can offset any negative impact on  
56 workers of weak or unfavourable institutional environments (Frege and Godard 2014). As  
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3 such, it should be recognised that differences at the firm-level can exist within countries and  
4 industries, mediated by employers. Put simply ‘deviation by individual organisations’ is  
5 possible (Vidal 2013: 589).  
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### 7 8 **The emerging scope for intervention**

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10 The message is clear: job quality is not pre-determined but results from choices made by  
11 countries, industries and firms (Sen Gupta et al. 2009). There is, therefore, scope for agency  
12 in job quality outcomes. The obvious question then is why common sense (good jobs are  
13 better for everyone than bad jobs) is not common practice. Part of the answer relates to  
14 alternative business models and strategies (Boxall and Purcell 2017), and part to the  
15 differential impact of bad jobs on workplace stakeholders. Indeed, these two answers are  
16 interlinked. While individual workers most directly bear the costs, and while society bears the  
17 knock-on effects and the remedial costs of addressing the negative impact of poor quality  
18 work on individuals, employers’ short term performance and profitability may, in some  
19 contexts and under particular business models, be predicated on limited job quality (Keep et  
20 al. 2006). Moreover, while employers may collectively bear the important opportunity costs  
21 imposed, individual employers may not. The stark reality is that for some employers,  
22 providing poor jobs is consistent with profitable operations – and not just in the short term.  
23 Where institutional constraints are weak, employers may externalise the costs to welfare and  
24 taxation systems and, in terms of financial insecurity and ill health, to workers. For some  
25 individual employers, therefore, providing bad jobs makes good business sense.  
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29 Correspondingly, the problems of poor job quality are unlikely to be resolved without  
30 intervention. Technological change can and does in some circumstances eliminate such jobs.  
31 Similarly, market positioning and employer strategies around service quality can and do drive  
32 improvements, as Findlay et al. (2017) argue in this special issue for the Scottish health  
33 sector. However, the growth of industries and occupations that are less susceptible to  
34 technical change, such as routine interactive and personal service work, limits the  
35 technological route to enhanced job quality, and the low-cost driven business models that  
36 prevail in many industries and countries are, as employers often argue, inimical to improving  
37 job quality. Where there is a strong business case for attracting and utilizing high quality  
38 labour through high quality jobs, market signals are more likely to be sufficient (Skills  
39 Australia 2012). Beyond this possibility, the strongest case for intervention arises from  
40 assessing the full costs of poor job quality from a multi-stakeholder perspective and from  
41 consideration of the particular impacts on distinctive sections of the workforce, given that  
42 much (but not all) of the burden of poor quality work falls disproportionately on women, the  
43 young, temporary workers and those in involuntary self-employment (OECD 2014).  
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47 The costs and missed opportunities of poor job quality do not, in themselves, establish a case  
48 for intervention. Beyond relying on stakeholders to drive interventions, levels and forms of  
49 intervention must be identified that could improve job quality without generating other  
50 negative consequences. As Pond argues, ‘the prevailing wisdom has been that there is a cruel  
51 but inevitable trade-off between the quality and the quantity of jobs that an economy can  
52 generate. The higher the wage offered and the more generous the conditions of employment,  
53 the fewer jobs that will exist (1997:167). Neoclassical arguments become more prominent in  
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3 a globalised economy where concerns abound that ‘too much’ employment protection can  
4 reduce employment levels as employers shift from countries with higher to those with lower  
5 employment protection. Beyond such concerns, some commentators argue that bad jobs are  
6 employment access points for workers with low human capital, despite evidence that these so  
7 called entry points can become bad job traps (Booth and Snower 1996; Sarfati 2015).  
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10 The trade-off argument has, however, been refuted in Erhel et al.’s (2010) longitudinal  
11 analysis of job quality and quantity in EU countries which is cited widely in the 1997  
12 European Union’s ‘more and better jobs’ employment strategy. As Erhel et al. note: ‘Our  
13 empirical results tend to validate this positive view of the link between job quality and  
14 quantity. The correlation between employment rates and some components of job quality is  
15 positive and significant when longitudinal European data are used’ (p.8). Job quality  
16 interventions need not, therefore, decrease employment. Similarly, research on regulatory  
17 interventions has established that the costs and consequences of labour standards are often  
18 overstated and that well-designed labour standards may have little or no negative  
19 employment effects, allowing considerable scope for variation in these and in wider labour  
20 market institutions (for a point-by-point critique of the trade-off argument, see Osterman  
21 2012).  
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26 More pragmatically, for many advanced economies, the option of competing on the basis of  
27 poor quality jobs is highly circumscribed – given demographic characteristics, institutional  
28 structures and political imperatives, particularly around concerns over growing inequality – a  
29 race to the bottom is a race that they are unlikely to win – certainly not electorally, as the  
30 2016 Brexit result in the UK illustrates (Warhurst 2017). The economic case is also now  
31 clearer: job quality is part of the solution to economic sustainability, not a barrier to it. There  
32 is no necessary clash of policy outcomes in wanting both more jobs and better jobs as part of  
33 the route out of crisis and into economic growth. As Eurofound, the agency charged with  
34 improving living and working conditions within the EU, states, ‘High levels of employment  
35 and good economic performance are not achieved by compromising on job quality’ (2016:  
36 49).  
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40 Acknowledging that interventions may be required and can, at the macro level at least, avoid  
41 negative employment effects, is an important first step in establishing their credibility. The  
42 next step is to understand the drive to intervene. Often this is to remove bad jobs or to make  
43 them better. The other is to create or maintain ‘good jobs’. Both can stem from productivist  
44 and non-productivist orientations. The former focuses on improvements as a vehicle for  
45 boosting enterprise and economic performance and can, at government level, link with  
46 broader developments in industrial, education and innovation policy. The latter, based on  
47 altruism or social responsibility, focuses on decreasing the burden of poor quality work on  
48 those who bear it most. The two can be connected – reducing the burden on individuals may  
49 also enhance economic performance directly and indirectly as argued in models of inclusive  
50 innovation and growth and there are emerging examples of policy debates driven by concern  
51 over both (Scottish Government 2014). Both of these drivers affirm that this is a multi-  
52 stakeholder issue. While immediate workplace stakeholders – employers, workers and unions  
53 – are most proximate, inaction at workplace level can drive other stakeholders – community  
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3 organisations, consumers/service users and government among others – to pursue change that  
4 enhances job quality.  
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### 6 **Targeting interventions in job quality** 7

8 Targeting intervention involves consideration of who can intervene, where and with what  
9 impact. Relevant stakeholders who can drive change do so in different and sometimes  
10 overlapping spheres. There are two different ways of thinking about the loci for intervention.  
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12 The first and most straightforward is to consider which jobs, in which sectors, industries and  
13 regions could and should be prioritised for intervention (Carre et al. 2013). In focusing on  
14 where bad jobs are to be found, this approach is largely problem driven and remedial in  
15 orientation. Targeting specific bad jobs or the components of bad jobs has the benefit of  
16 relative conceptual simplicity. Gaining consensus on what makes a bad job is easier to  
17 achieve than agreement on what makes a good job. Employment that doesn't pay a living  
18 wage cannot be said to be good (although what constitutes a living wage will vary  
19 geographically and demographically); deciding on what level of income constitutes a good  
20 job is trickier. For both good and bad jobs, while identifying the job itself is important, it is  
21 also crucial to understand the relationship between job quality and job holders given the  
22 predominance of certain groups in good and poor quality work (Knox et al. 2015).  
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27 The second way of considering loci is more general – should intervention to improve job  
28 quality take place inside the workplace or elsewhere, either prior to entering the workplace or  
29 parallel to the workplace? While interventions at multiple levels may be the best option to  
30 impact on job quality (Pocock and Charlesworth 2017, this special issue), considering loci  
31 discretely allows a greater focus on what specific actors can contribute to job quality  
32 interventions.  
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### 35 *Workplace interventions* 36

37 The most obvious loci in which to address job quality issues is the workplace, and can  
38 happen through a variety of routes. Addressing job quality as an internal workplace  
39 stakeholder issue has important attractions, not least in terms of a dialogue that can better  
40 define job quality and job quality improvements in context.  
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43 Given the asymmetry of power and the contractual nature of the employment relationship,  
44 employers are most able to affect job quality interventions. However, employers also have  
45 multiple and potentially competing interests. If skill equilibrium theory is correct, a link  
46 exists between firms' product market strategies and skills and pay. By taking the 'high road'  
47 and moving into product markets based on quality or innovation rather than cost, firms  
48 should be able to raise the pay and skill levels of their employees – though this possibility  
49 seem more realizable in manufacturing than services (Lloyd et al. 2013). In sectors and  
50 industries where quality of goods and particularly services is a key strategic priority, high  
51 quality work is an important managerial priority (Findlay et al. 2017, this special issue).  
52 Employers can, and do, configure job quality – in terms of pay, contractual stability, training  
53 and skills formation, job design, career development opportunities etc. – to produce good or  
54 at least better jobs. As Metcalf and Dhudwar (2010: 1) note, 'employers determine terms and  
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3 conditions and how work is organised, including pay, the balance between temporary and  
4 permanent work, skill requirements and progression structures'. Employer choices can be  
5 driven by business models and the need to drive high quality performance but also by broader  
6 concerns over corporate social responsibility and reputation. Unfortunately, the 'low road' of  
7 competing on cost remains attractive to many firms, especially where institutional constraints  
8 are weaker. In these organizations, neither business pressures nor employers' orientations are  
9 likely to drive improvements in job quality (Lloyd et al. 2008a).

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13 Labor unions also have long had a direct interest in improving job quality. Prior to the 1980s,  
14 in many of the advanced economies they played an important role in relation to key  
15 dimensions of job quality such as pay and benefits, access to training, occupational health and  
16 safety and employment security. Union absence is strongly associated with poorer job  
17 characteristics (Clark 2005), while union presence is associated with better job characteristics  
18 (Hoque et al. 2014). Recently, however, many of the union gains made over decades on job  
19 quality have been rolled back with the decline of labor union membership and strength. This  
20 process is, however, uneven across and within countries. Where union rights are  
21 institutionally secure (Frege and Godard 2014) or where industrial power has been  
22 maintained, unions continue to maintain or even drive up improvements through collective  
23 bargaining, but also through, for example, collaborative work with employers on skills and  
24 learning (e.g. Wilson 2015; Findlay and Warhurst 2011). Where unions may not have a  
25 significant presence, they can adopt innovative organising strategies often in conjunction with  
26 other organisations; one example being London Citizens and US and UK unions campaign  
27 against low pay in the London hotel industry (Lloyd et al. 2008b).

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34 Workplace interventions in relation to job quality are, however, highly dependent on the  
35 orientation of employers and the relative power of workers, individually or collectively.  
36 Where unions are absent, or lack industrial power (Simms 2017, this special issue; Gregg et  
37 al. 2014), responsibility for creating better jobs has shifted either onto the shoulders of  
38 individuals as we discuss below, or to stakeholders external to the workplace.

#### 39 40 41 *Interventions outwith the workplace*

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43 There are two possibilities for intervening outwith the workplace. The first is prior to entry to  
44 the labour market and, topically, centers on initial education and training for workers and, we  
45 would argue, managers. The second is parallel to the workplace and typically centers on  
46 action by the state and community organizations.

#### 47 48 49 Interventions prior to the workplace

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51 Education and training is widely considered as a key policy lever for improving opportunity  
52 for individuals to access better jobs. In terms of relative risks and rewards, workers have  
53 perhaps the strongest interest in improved job quality and can invest in and develop their own  
54 human capital to improve their prospects of accessing good quality work. Policy intervention  
55 can support and influence individuals to invest in skills, often through public provision and  
56 funding, and with the possibility of offering mutual gains for employers and government. As  
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3 Warhurst and Findlay (2012: 3-4) have argued, ‘Under-pinning this supply-side intervention  
4 is an assumed causal chain – from workforce development based on increasing workers’  
5 skills through organisational development that provides more highly skilled jobs to business  
6 development and to a more productive economy. Supply-side intervention in the labour  
7 market also avoids the political and operational challenges of more direct government  
8 intervention in the management of firms’.

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11 However the education lever has limitations. While better qualifications are associated with  
12 higher pay and autonomy, returns to human capital investment are imperfect and  
13 differentially distributed (Keep et al. 2006). In addition, while education and training may  
14 improve the stock of skills and capabilities available to be deployed in good quality jobs, it  
15 cannot address the level of demand for higher skills in better jobs. That is, good jobs have to  
16 exist in which these skills are needed, and there is not enough room at the top currently;  
17 indeed the best qualified workers – graduates – often find that they have to trade down to  
18 work in non-graduate jobs for lack of sufficient number of appropriate graduate-level jobs  
19 (Tholen et al. 2016). In some economies, it is becoming more evident that the stock of good  
20 jobs is failed to keep pace with the stock of workers with higher qualifications. Individuals  
21 improving their qualification levels is therefore important but not sufficient where employer  
22 demand for higher skilled workers is limited (Keep and James 2012).

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27 Education systems impact on job quality in other important ways. If employer choices play a  
28 part in job quality, then what informs these choices should be of analytical concern. One  
29 obvious area of interest is management education. The assumption must be that what is  
30 taught – and what is not taught – matters. The provision of management education orientated  
31 to job quality issues varies enormously between countries. For example, Finland and many  
32 other Northern European countries have evolved substantial innovation support systems to  
33 deliver organizational development to enable technological change and workplace innovation  
34 (Ramstad 2009), whereas the UK government has consistently refused to consider such  
35 developments. Even worse, in terms of management education, is the degree to which people  
36 management is an integral component of taught courses rather than an optional supplement.  
37 Some UK management schools, for example, Oxford University’s Said School, have  
38 abandoned teaching human resource management.

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43 Management education, as with the education of workers, has more potential for leveraging  
44 improvements in job quality than is currently being realized. Underpinned by research-based  
45 evidence on job quality interventions and the effectiveness of high road business strategies,  
46 and encouraged by government, better business education on the costs and consequences of  
47 job quality could facilitate greater commitment to job quality and more effective  
48 interventions within workplaces.

#### 49 50 51 Interventions parallel to the workplace

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54 Where employers fail to address poor job quality, it provides a strong justification for others  
55 to intervene. These external stakeholders include civil society organizations, customers,  
56 relevant experts and government at all levels, whose role has taken on increased prominence  
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3 as labor union power has declined. Although aiming to improve job quality in the workplace,  
4 many of these stakeholders' locus of intervention is not the workplace.  
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6 Over the last two decades, an array of civil society organizations have entered the debate on  
7 job quality, working both independently of and alongside labor unions (Bernhardt and  
8 Osterman 2017, this special issue). A plethora of advocacy and campaigning groups – living  
9 wage campaigns, fair trade organizations, equalities groups, health related campaigners and  
10 service users – have responded to discrete job quality problems, often focusing on single  
11 issue campaigns and drawing on a wide stakeholder group. Their campaigns can be aimed at  
12 government, in terms of enforcing or increasing regulation, but also at employers, focusing  
13 on business benefit (Wills and Linneker 2014; Coulson and Bonner 2015) – and the public.  
14 This form of activism highlights the link between the economic and social impact of bad jobs  
15 and provides an alternative route to influence important dimensions such as low pay,  
16 exploitative working conditions and health and well-being. For example, the UK Living  
17 Wage campaign unites workers, communities, businesses, unions and faith groups to address  
18 in-work poverty and has, since its inception in 2001 ([www.livingwage.org.uk](http://www.livingwage.org.uk)). Other notable  
19 examples include consumer initiatives such as Fair Trade (Moore 2004) and combined safety  
20 and environmental campaigns (Meyer 2009).  
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26 Where employers do not, and unions and community groups cannot, address job quality  
27 problems, intervention often falls to various levels of state, national and supra-national  
28 government, and most obviously through legislation. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, Murray  
29 and Stewart (2015: 41) note, 'labour law is based on the idea that if working conditions are  
30 left to the "higgling of the market", then socially undesirable and unjust outcomes will  
31 result.' Resultant legislation sets and aims to enforce minimum standards that impact on job  
32 quality by intervening directly in workplace or job level practice – for example, through  
33 minimum wage requirements, anti-discrimination legislation, working time restrictions,  
34 health and safety regulation and employment rights relating to work-life balance. It not only  
35 protects workers but can close off the low road and provide a level playing field for business  
36 competition. G government may not always intend to influence job quality per se with  
37 legislation – as Bosch and Weinkopf (2017, this special issue) argue – but may do so in  
38 pursuit of other policy objectives. Broader priorities relating to competitiveness, innovation,  
39 education and inequality can bring policy interventions that indirectly affect job quality.  
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44 Legislation, though, is a powerful but imperfect lever: powerful in its reach though often  
45 imperfect in its application or enforcement (Kahn-Freund 1972). Quasi-governmental  
46 organisations established to support regulatory interventions have a role in shaping workplace  
47 practice in ways that support key dimensions of job quality – such as equalities organisations  
48 focusing on access and opportunity, and occupational health and safety organisations that  
49 promote not just safe but healthier forms of working.  
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52 Many of the levers – hard and soft – that government can use to address bad job  
53 characteristics are available to support the creation and maintenance of good jobs – but from  
54 a more ambitious and positive agenda. Governments can, for example, insert job quality  
55 clauses into public procurement contracts for private and voluntary sector contractors; align  
56 economic development and business support to a job quality agenda; providing assistance for  
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3 technological or business system upgrading, especially for smaller or informal businesses,  
4 conditional on these being used to support job quality improvements; use industrial policy  
5 levers to support competitive strategies that are not based on pure price competition; and use  
6 education system levers to drive not just skills and qualifications but expectations of high  
7 quality work into the labour market. Government can pursue integrated policies that aligns  
8 workplace practice better with family, community and civic life, for example by facilitating  
9 support in the reproductive sphere that can improve the interface between work and family  
10 life (Pocock and Charlesworth 2017, this issue). In this respect governments are more likely  
11 to act on job quality where there is pressure for them to do so. A focus on job quality per se  
12 is at greater risk of being dismissed as a marginal concern; it is likely to gain more traction  
13 with support from a broader constituency of relevant stakeholders.  
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### 17 18 **Conclusion**

19  
20 The costs and missed opportunities arising from poor job quality do not simply affect workers  
21 in bad jobs. Acknowledging the full economic and social costs imposed by poor job quality in  
22 the short and the long term – on workers, employers and society – provides the rationale for  
23 interventions to enhance job quality by stakeholders within and outwith the workplace.  
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26 In the context of current opportunities, this article has sought to map out the terrain of job  
27 quality interventions. Yet driving and designing effective interventions – to make bad jobs  
28 better and support good jobs – is not straightforward and different levers operating in  
29 different loci are available to different stakeholders. Agency is possible: levels of job quality  
30 are not wholly structurally determined and employers facing similar market conditions can  
31 make distinctive choices. These choices may be influenced by institutional factors as well as  
32 the drivers for intervention. In regimes in which employer choices are relatively unfettered,  
33 however, diminished labor union power and increasingly individualised employment  
34 relationships lower the pressure on employers to invest in good job quality.  
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38 Legislation and regulation offer greater reach and impact than reliance on individual  
39 employer approaches but are largely remedial in orientation and generally target the poorest  
40 job characteristics only, and there is often little appetite across governments and businesses  
41 for more regulation without external pressure. Moreover, the existence of individual  
42 employment protections does not always ensure ready access to effective remedy nor to  
43 effective enforcement. While legislation may be the tool of last resort with which to address  
44 bad jobs, its potential to support good jobs is more questionable.  
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48 Weaker institutional constraints are at least part of the explanation for a focus on job quality  
49 interventions prior to and parallel to the workplace. Yet interventions by external  
50 stakeholders outside of the workplace are less likely to be sensitive to workplace context than  
51 well-designed job quality interventions constructed at workplace level by direct stakeholders.  
52 This point does not underplay the potential of non-workplace interventions and in particular  
53 the role of government. National governments and supra-national governmental bodies such  
54 as the European Union are now leading debate about the importance of good jobs for  
55 workers, businesses and society. Intervening to improve job quality, however, requires more  
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3 than exhortation, and many governments fail to deploy sufficiently or at all the range of  
4 levers at their disposal.  
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6 In an increasingly globalised world, the challenges of improving job quality are significant.  
7 We have argued that there is scope for intervention and evidence that intervention can be  
8 effective. Returning to where this article began – renewed policy and academic interest in job  
9 quality – there is a pressing need to widen and deepen our knowledge of job quality  
10 interventions through empirical work that can explain and evaluate the effectiveness, impact  
11 and sustainability of interventions at every level. The articles in the this special issue are part  
12 of that task.  
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15  
16  
17 Patricia Findlay is Professor of Work and Employment Relations and Director of the Scottish  
18 Centre for Employment Research, University of Strathclyde Business School. Her recent  
19 interests span workplace innovation ([www.innovatingworks.org.uk](http://www.innovatingworks.org.uk)); job quality; skills and  
20 employer-employee partnerships. She co-edited *Are Bad Jobs Inevitable?* (Palgrave  
21 Macmillan, 2012)  
22  
23

24  
25 Chris Warhurst is Professor and Director of the Institute for Employment Research at the  
26 University of Warwick. His current research interests include job quality, skills, vocational  
27 education and training, and aesthetic labour. He is a Trustee of the Tavistock Institute, a  
28 Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and an advisor on skills to the UK Government.  
29  
30

31  
32 Ewart Keep is Professor and Director of the Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational  
33 Performance at the University of Oxford. Hi research focuses on education, training and skill.  
34 He co-edited *The Skills that Matter* (Palgrave, 2006). He has advised UK and Scottish  
35 parliamentary committees and been consultant to the Australian and New Zealand  
36 Governments.  
37

38  
39 Caroline Lloyd is Professor in Cardiff University Business School. Her main research interest  
40 focuses on the relationship between product markets, labour markets, work organisation and  
41 skill. She co-edited *Low-Wage Work in the United Kingdom* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2008)  
42 and co-authored *Skills in the Age of Overqualification* (Oxford University Press, 2016). She  
43 is Associate Editor of *Industrial Relations Journal*.  
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