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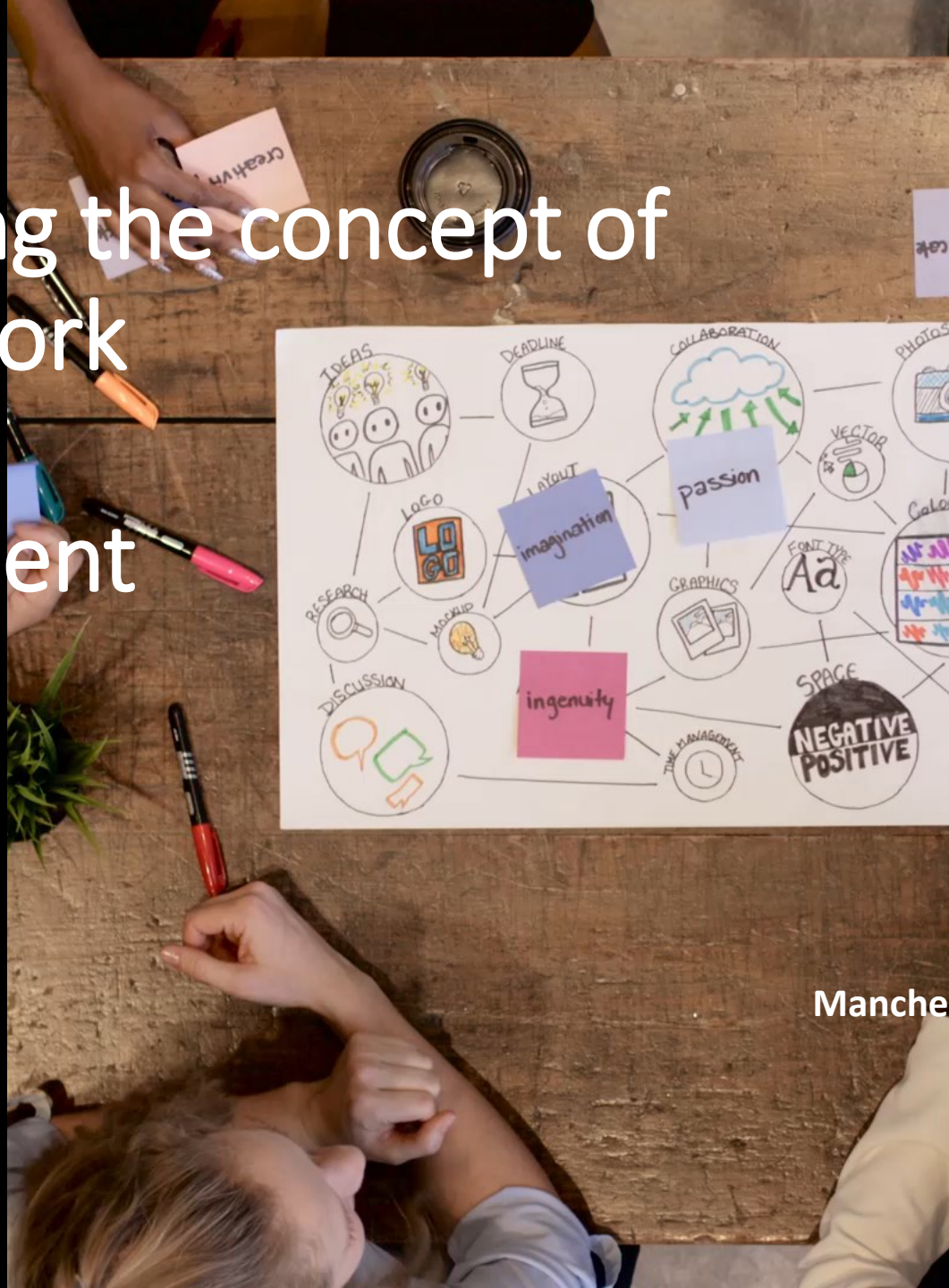
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# Embedding the concept of Decent Work in career development learning



Fiona Christie and Eileen Cunningham  
Manchester Metropolitan University Business School  
NICEC Conference, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024

# Aims

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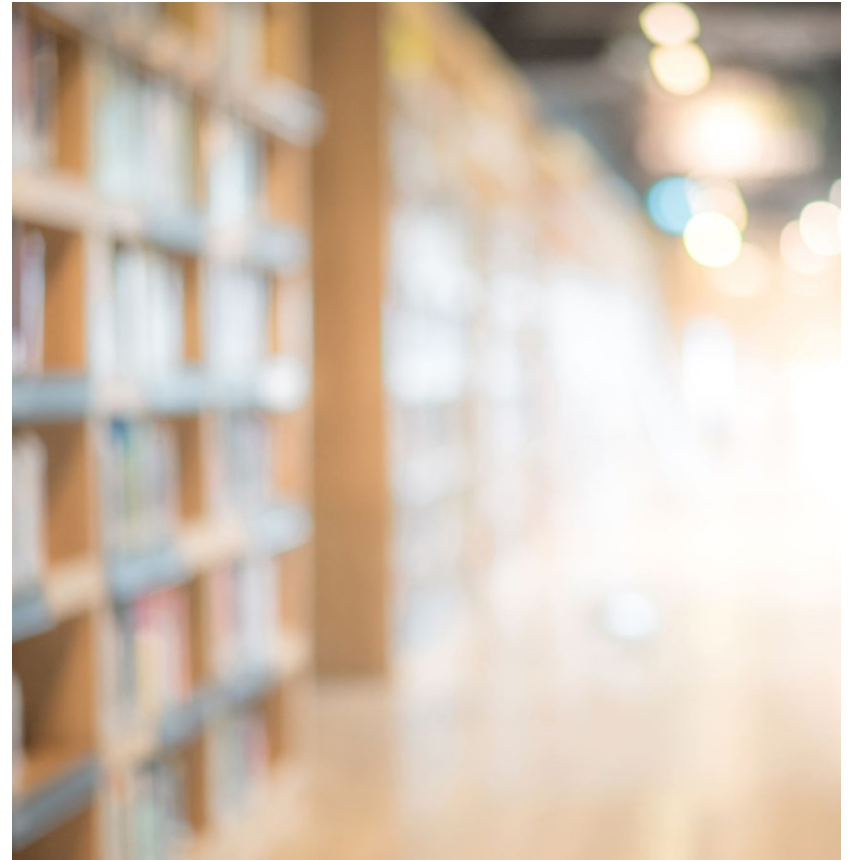
1. To outline **theoretical ideas** that have been useful in the development of a Decent Work informed approach to career learning,
2. To share findings from **recent research** about young people in precarious work which highlight questions about critical consciousness with young people in careers practice.
3. To share insights about a **current project** with the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter team to develop a resource for students.
4. To introduce a practitioner **teaching resource** that has been created to use alongside the student/graduate publication



# Our influences

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- Practice-oriented – ‘pracademics’
- Social justice – editors of Career Guidance blog
- Experimenting with a ‘critical graduate employability’ approach in our teaching in universities
- Philosophical perspectives which have influenced us as researchers/educators
  - Anthropology – focus on culture (Holland et al., 1998)
  - Phenomenology - focus on lived experience (Van Manen, 2016)



# Agenda

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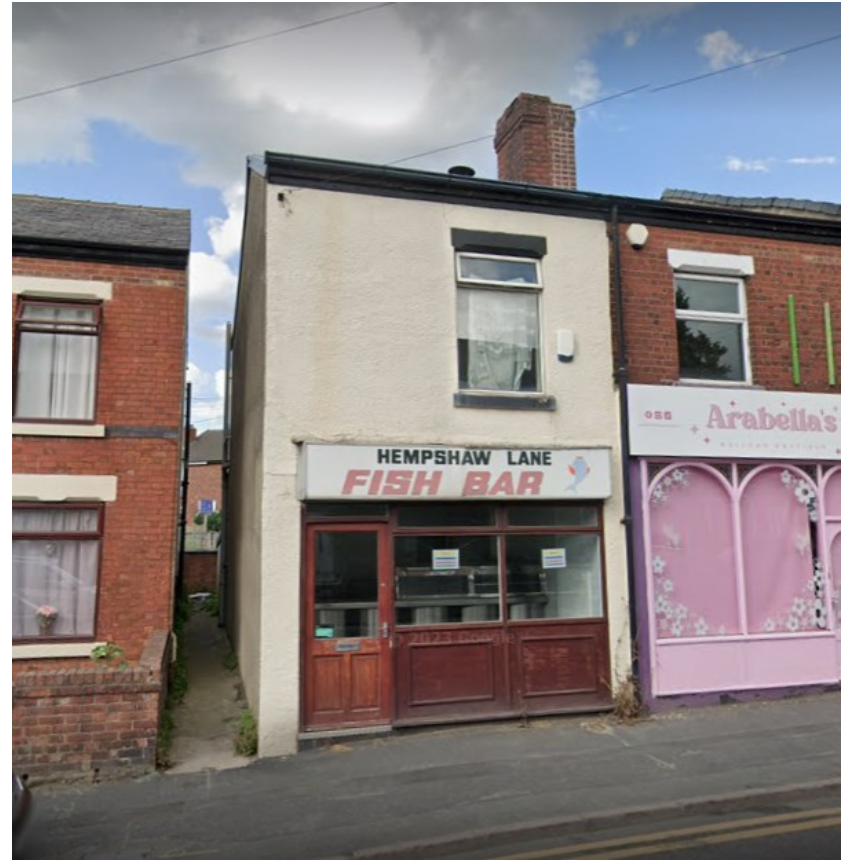
- 14.30 Intros and icebreaker
- 14.40 Setting the scene in the career development and decent work literature
- 14.50 Quiz time - What do you know about Good Work?
- 15.00 Findings from research with young people about precarious work
- 15.15 Critical consciousness for career learning - Legal and psycho-social literacies
- 15.20 Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter. Our new resource: Guide for students on Good Work.
- 15.30 Scenarios - Advising on bad/indecent work issues
- 15.45 Finish



# What was your first job?

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- What was good about it?
- What was bad about it?
- *In pairs and/or chat.*



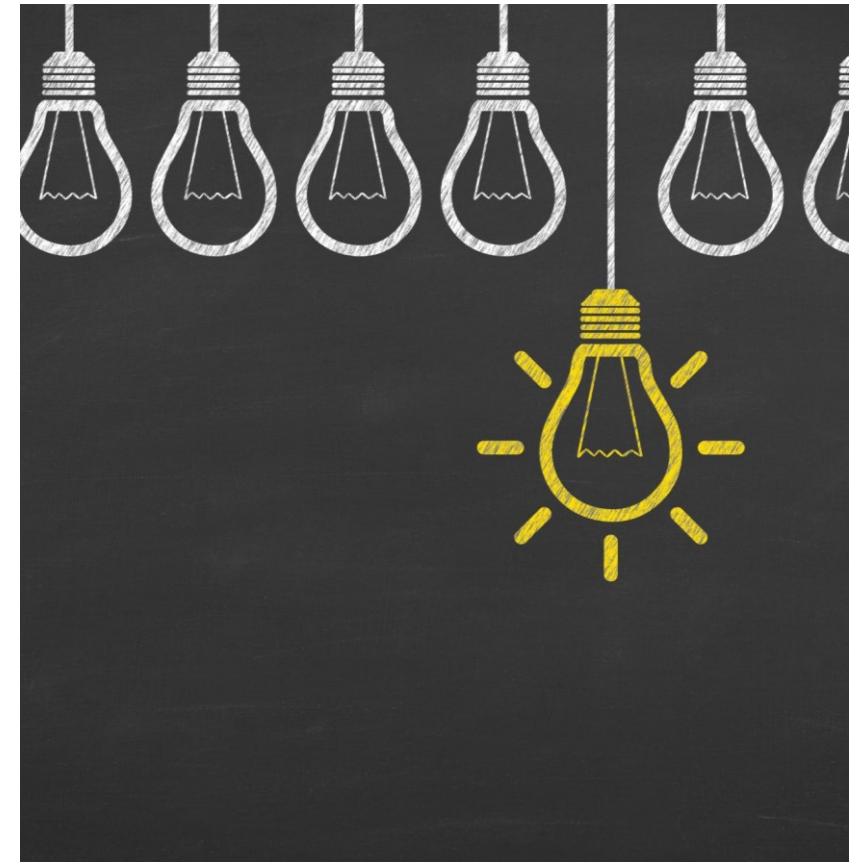
Setting the scene –  
policy and research

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# Relevant theoretical ideas: career development

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- Career guidance for Social Justice (Hooley, Sultana et al. 2021)
- Psychology of Working theory (Duffy, Blustein et al. 2016)
- Sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2020)
- Sociological theory (Scurry et al, 2020, Hodkinson 2008)





# Relevant theoretical/policy ideas: decent work

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- ILO Working for a better future (ILO, 2019)
- Eurofound Job quality measures (Eurofound, 2021)
- Taylor Review (Taylor et al., 2017)
- The Good Work Movement (Jones & Kumar, 2022)
- CIPD Good Work Index (Wheatley, 2022)



# What do you know about 'good work'?

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- A quick quiz
- Example activity



# How good is your job quiz?

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- Another example activity (do after this session)
- Complete the quiz based on your current or recent job.
- <https://goodemploymentweek.co.uk/quiz>
- What do you think of your results?
- Are the questions asked in the quiz important?



# Example questions:

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15%

*Secure Work*

I have a written employment contract setting out the hours I work.

I am contracted to work a minimum of 16 hours per week

My work provides me with a sufficient income each month

Next →

- Secure work
- Flexible work
- People Management
- Engagement & voice
- Health & wellbeing
- Equality & diversity

# Research findings about young people

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# Recent research: Young people and precarious work

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## **The impact of Covid-19 on Young Workers in England**

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Young people navigating insecure work in  
Greater Manchester during the Covid-19 pandemic

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**Authors**

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Productivity Research Centre, Faculty of Business and Law,  
Manchester Metropolitan University.**

April 2022

# Research questions

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- 1) what are the consequences of precarious work for young people?
- 2) how are young people's needs met (or not) through precarious work?
- 3) how do young people resist and make meaning of precarious work?
- 4) how did young people's experience of precarity evolve over time during the pandemic?

# Methodology

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- 21 young people interviewed twice during 2021
  - Age 18-30 years
  - Identifying as having a current/recent precarious work status
  - Living and working in Northcity.
- Qualitative longitudinal research (Neale, 2018)
- Biographical interviews (Merrill & West, 2009) including a focus on needs (from PWF/PWT) (Blustein, 2019)
- Thematic analysis both inductive and deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2021)



# Research guided by a 'human needs' lens from PWT/PWF

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- (i) the need for survival & power - associated with work providing the means to survive and the adaptive capacity to control resources;
- (ii) the need for social connection and contribution – work is a major context to develop and sustain relationships. It can also connect to community and wider society;
- (iii) the need for self-determination – scope for deep engagement in work, yielding a sense of autonomy and competence.**

# Self-determination needs: critique and resistance

*And for the jobs that already exist to be less awful [LAUGHS]... Yeah, to be more regulated in how you treat staff...I can't see it happening because, I mean I could get on my soap box about the government... and businesses...and how they keep their costs low. Alexa (T2).*

*I've weathered the storm quite well... I've had so many jobs and I always manage to find something new...I struggle to understand...people that say there's nothing out there. Adam (T2).*

# Self-determination needs: control and optimism

*I've got like quite a lot of control for myself because...I know the road I want to go down...I don't think the pandemic has impacted me too much in terms of future job prospects, it's more of like opportunities now ... Nina (T2).*

*Rejection is hard... but it's even harder to take when you don't have food in the fridge...they need to make workplaces more accessible, and you know have more flexible types of interviews. Cherelle (T2).*

*But [the carer role] was...an amazing job. You don't realise how hard it is... Sometimes I was so exhausted I was literally crying in the break cos my feet just hurt so bad...when you go back home you realise that it's just all so worth it. Alice (T1).*

# Self-determination needs: career identity and choice

*...your persona and your self is so tied into your creations that... basically if you're told... 'you can't do that anymore'... it's a very vulnerable place that you make art from so I think it's difficult... Simone (T2).*

*I've been unable to find work in my environmental background because there's less jobs and then the jobs that are there have thousands of applicants...Maybe that's impacted my future... Tom (T1).*

*I am anti-work; I really mean it. Because I have not felt any kind of positive mental or emotional developments or physically...working doesn't enable me to feed myself properly... when I do have time off, I am exhausted... I would like to never work again. Cherelle (T2).*

# Some conclusions

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- Young people resourceful in meeting needs and had a clear awareness of labour market injustices but none turned to political or collective action.
- Areas of particular interest
  - (1) the role of temporal uncertainty
  - (2) mental health acting as a barrier to accessing decent work
  - (3) reflexivity and work identity
  - (4) awareness of collective nature of work, and of un/fair employment practices**

# Student experiences of work

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Eileen's PhD research & current project

# Student Working Lives

## What's going on?

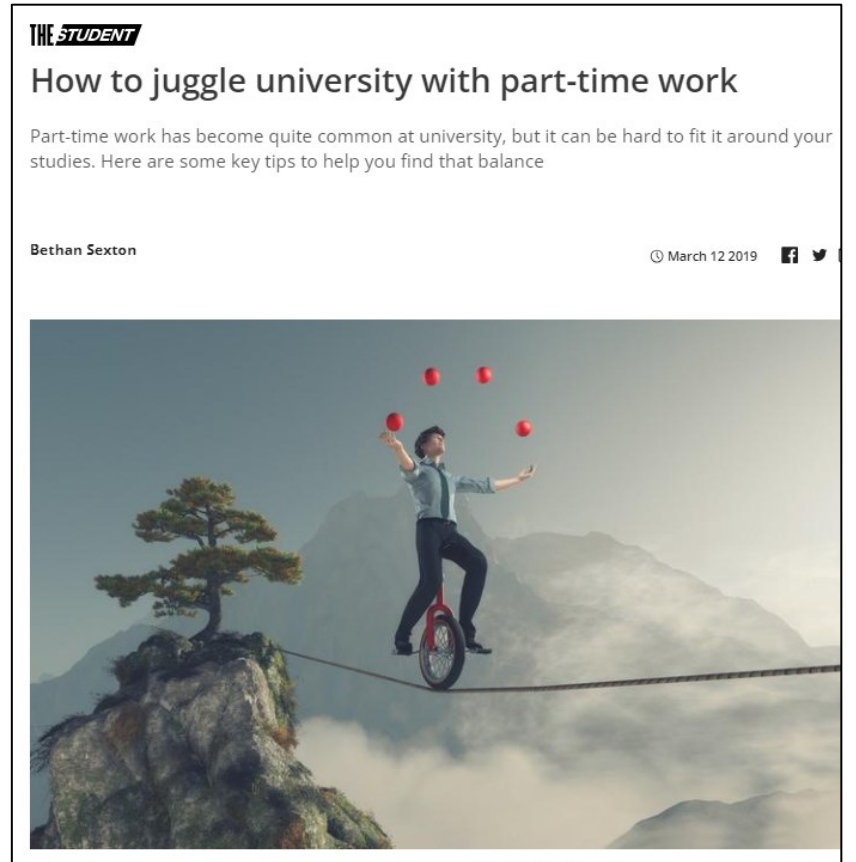
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- Wider context – political, HE, social
- Empty classrooms, mental health issues
- Literature – boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994), socialisation of students through work (Rydzik & Kisson, 2022); career capitals & employability (Tomlinson, 2017) etc
- Other current projects – UCLan quantitative survey; ESRC (Kirsty Finn) [Young Womens' Working Lives](#) project

# Working students

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- My PhD explored student experiences of work
- Cost of living crisis, funding shortfall & precarious labour market have increased vulnerability of students
- Are their woes taken seriously?
- Do they accept compromising work conditions as a temporary necessity? A rite of passage?
- They are the leaders, managers, policy-influencers of the future (as well as consumers and voters now)
- How can we best support them?





# 'Legal and psycho-social literacies'

- Shared concerns and priorities with Social Policy and HR academics in Business School – led to discussions about employment rights and employability learning and an article for the IEP journal (Christie et al, 2023)
- The notion of legal and psycho-social literacies emerged as a useful way to consider critical consciousness. A possible way to act upon findings from Fiona's research.

## EMBEDDING GOOD WORK AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS IN EMPLOYABILITY

Employment rights are fundamental to the notion of 'decent' or 'good' work. But to what extent do employability professionals embed these ideas in their practice?

In this article, we introduce the concepts of legal and psycho-social literacy, which could empower employability professionals to (1) develop and use their knowledge of good work and employment rights (2) help their clients to evaluate and recognise good work and what this means for them, and (3) help educate employers about how to create sustainable and inclusive work for their employees.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DECENT WORK?

There is no shortage of useful debates, measures, and discussion about 'good' or 'decent' work. Internationally, together with economic growth, 'decent work' is a core United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). There are four pillars associated with the goal: 1) employment creation/ access to work; 2) rights at work; 3) social protection; and 4) social dialogue. Principles of dignity, equality, fair income, safe working conditions and worker voice underpin these pillars (ILO, 2019).

In the UK the term 'good work' is more commonly used, with influential reports like the Taylor Review (2017) helping to define good work as well as recognise the erosion of working conditions in some parts of the economy. For example, zero hours

contracts and the platform economy. Notably, while national employment legislation has stalled, devolved regions and nations have stepped in to stimulate good work over and above any UK-wide employment regulation. Across the nations of the UK, the concept of decent work has been borne out in the Good and Fair Work Movement. This has emerged via regional employment charters, relevant professional associations, i.e. the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), as well as through the work of trade unions. For example, the CIPD's annual Good Work Index (Wheatley, 2022), which surveys thousands every year, identifies 7 core characteristics of good work: 1) pay and benefits; 2) employment contracts; 3) work-life balance; 4) job design and the nature of work; 5) relationships at work; 6) employee voice; and 7) health and wellbeing.

Across all definitions utilised in measures, issues emerge relating to objective versus subjective notions of good work, which are helpful to reflect upon. Getting familiar with some of the measures and terminology can assist employability professionals' own competence in integrating this knowledge in their practice, giving them tools to think about: 'What is decent work?' and how is it relevant to their own practice.



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**GMCA** GREATER  
MANCHESTER  
COMBINED  
AUTHORITY

**ANDY BURNHAM**  
MAYOR OF  
GREATER  
MANCHESTER

# Greater Manchester context

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- 2.9 million residents
- Greater Manchester Apprenticeships and Careers Service
- Youth Guarantee Policy
- Devolution of Adult Skills budget
- Drivers for retention of skills in relatively buoyant economy (but with inequalities)
- Good Employment Charter



# What is the The Good Employment Charter?



The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter is a voluntary membership and assessment scheme that aims to **raise employment standards across GM**, for all organisations of any size, sector or geography.

# Characteristics of Good Employment



Pay



Secure Work



Engagement & Voice



Flexible Work



Recruitment



People Management



Health & Wellbeing

# Learning about Good Work

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“In Greater Manchester we want to help our university students and graduates to understand what good work looks like. We want you to be empowered, have high expectations and challenge employers who do not offer good work.

We also want you, as future managers and leaders in the city region, to know how to create good work.

By learning about what good employment looks like, you will be in a better position to make informed choices about who you want to work for and how you want to work.



# A Guide for Students and Graduates

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- Builds on a resource for schools & colleges
- Explains each of the charter characteristics of good employment
- Suggests questions students can ask about work
- Suggests some actions
- Challenges in working with community stakeholders & policy... e.g. challenging 'agency' discourse, delays!

<https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/resources-for-education/>

## Universities and Higher Education:

A guide to good employment for students and graduates



# Some considerations...

- Questions to ask their employer? Or to ask themselves **about** their job?
- At what stage is it OK for students & graduates ask these questions? Does the old advice about not asking questions about money/Ts & Cs in a job interview still stand?
- What if they realise they are not in a 'good job'? What can they do about it?

A snapshot...

## Engagement and Voice

### Questions you might ask:

- Is there a relevant trade union or membership body I can join to give me advice and support if working independently?
- Do I have a supportive network of people working in a similar way to me?
- Who can I talk to if I am unhappy about anything to do regarding work?
- If doing gig platform work, how does an employer monitor what I do? Am I happy with their mode of surveillance?

## What can you do to make your job 'good'?

'Good work' can depend on a reciprocal relationship. Think about what kind of employee you are and how to make the most of your working self, your role and your relationships at work.

## Your working self

- Find out what is expected of you, for example, dress code, behaviour, time management, showing initiative and behave appropriately.
- Don't be afraid to try new things – you won't always get it right, but you can learn as much from mistakes as you can from successes.
- Keep a check on your own health and wellbeing at work and speak up if you have any problems.





## Universities and Higher Education:

A guide to good employment  
for tutors

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# A supporting practitioner resource

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- **Presentation deck** - This slide deck can be used as the base for a lesson – containing background on the topic, information on the Good Employment Charter, and the implications for employability.
- **Activity decks** – quizzes, group activity to pitch a compelling case for charter membership, scenarios, etc to stimulate discussion and action

<https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/resources-for-education/>

# What would you do in the following scenarios?

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# Activity - What would you do in the following situations? Consider individually and in pairs/groups

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- Categorise answers under
  - Definitely OK
  - OK but not ideal
  - Not really OK
  - Definitely not OK

## Scenario 1: Attending an Assessment Centre

**You have dyslexia and have been invited to attend an Assessment Centre for a graduate role. You are really worried about this. What can you do?**

- I. Contact the HR team and ask them if any adaptations can be made for you.
- II. Just don't turn up and don't tell them.
- III. Turn up and hope for the best.

## Scenario 2: Interview expenses

**You travelled to another city for an interview for a graduate job. You are unsuccessful and when you ask about interview expenses, you are told that only successful applicants can claim expenses. What do you do?**

- I. Shrug your shoulders and put it down to experience.
- II. Review the information you had received before the interview to double-check this was included. If it was in the small print and you hadn't noticed, make a decision that you will always check this kind of detail for any future applications (and potentially not attend interviews if no expenses available).
- III. Take to GlassDoor and write a damning review of the employer's bad practice.
- IV. Go to the Careers Service and ask them if this is normal practice in the Graduate recruitment market and if there are ways to avoid such a thing happening to you again.

## Scenario 3: Release fee from graduate scheme

**You have signed onto a graduate programme that includes two months training before starting with a company. After completion of the training, you decide this role is not for you and you are really unhappy and homesick. You discover there is a clause in contract which means you have to pay a fee to release yourself from the scheme. What do you do?**

- I. Just leave and hope they don't chase you for the fee.
- II. Re-visit the contractual information you signed on commencement and arrange to speak to your line manager/other appropriate manager about what is negotiable regarding the fee if you leave now.
- III. Re-visit the contractual information and consider options to continue with the role in the hope it will improve.
- IV. Reassure yourself that at least you have completed the training successfully, pay the fee, leave and cut your losses. Ensure you learn from this experience and are fully clear of contractual obligations in any future role.
- V. Seek some legal advice, eg., from an organisation such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

## Scenario 4: Adjustments not made for disability

**You are neurodivergent and have been successful in securing a graduate role. On starting the role you met with the HR team and discussed what reasonable adjustments can be made for you and possibilities for funding through government Access to Work funds for additional support. After six months, your boss tell you that you will not be kept on as you have not met the probation requirements. None of the ideas discussed with HR on arrival have been acted upon, and you are surprised that you are going to lose your job. What do you do?**

- I. Leave the premises straight away and threaten legal action.
- II. Ask your boss if the probation could be extended on proviso the adjustments are put in place for you and review progress in six more months.
- III. Approach the HR team to ask advice on whether due process was followed as none of adjustments requested had been implemented.
- IV. Seek advice from a relevant organisation or trade union about what your options might be.

## Scenario 5: unreliable zero hours work

**You are a student working in a zero hours' contract hospitality job. Although as a student you are happy to do casual work, you are getting frustrated with your working conditions. It is not uncommon for you to be asked to work with less than 24 hours notice, and on occasion you have turned up to do agreed hours to find out that you are not needed (and therefore won't be paid for those hours). What can you do?**

- I. Decide to leave the job, and ignore messages from company asking you to work.
- II. Tell your boss that this is poor practice and you will leave if they don't start to handle zero hours workers better.
- III. Talk to your fellow workers about these issues, to find out if they share your frustrations. As a group ask for a meeting with your boss to discuss working arrangements and how they might be better organised for mutual benefit.
- IV. Complain to anyone who will listen but don't do anything about it and continue with the job.





# What next?

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- Embedding the resources in our own teaching & encouraging others to do so
- Please feel free to use, adapt and share the resources!
- We would love your feedback
- NICEC article (forthcoming?)
- More conceptual paper – longer term aim

## Universities and Higher Education:

A guide to good employment  
for students and graduates

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Thank  
you!

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