

# Getting on

What progression  
looks like for low-paid  
workers today



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# FOREWORD

Jobs transform people's lives. We know that getting people into work is a critical service our members provide for hundreds of thousands of people every week of the year. The recruitment industry also facilitates people's progress in the jobs market. It's clear that productivity, progression and skills are themes that will dominate the UK political agenda in this Parliament. The new government has already made its first major intervention with the new National Living Wage and has declared its intention to improve productivity and achieve full employment. Getting people into employment is not just essential for the general health of the UK labour market, it also benefits individuals on a very personal level to have a fulfilling job.

The recruitment industry fuels the UK jobs market. We also believe that good recruitment drives business growth and prosperity. A successful labour market is created when all stakeholders understand the challenges and opportunities that employment holds for working people in all kinds of jobs: permanent, temporary, full-time, part-time, interim, contractor and agency workers. We have conducted this research to specifically address the issue of progression for low-paid workers. We looked at the care, hospitality, industrial and retail sectors but our recommendations are relevant to low-paid workers in all areas of the economy.

Unfortunately British society seems to hold a negative opinion of some low-paid jobs and sometimes of the people who hold them too. However, these jobs are necessary in many sectors and often suit the people who do them. Our members see every day how a low-paid job can be a stepping stone in a long fulfilling career. People in low-paid positions are not a homogeneous group. The needs and motivations of the people who choose to undertake low-paid, often entry-level work are often specific to them, their personal circumstances and their own personal career ambitions.

Working in a low-paid job can open up opportunities to progress by providing experience and development within a specific sector. This report explores the challenges faced by the people in these jobs who want to progress. It also reveals that although employers and Jobcentres both believe they provide suitable advice and guidance on how to get on, many of the workers we spoke to disagreed. This highlights the importance of harnessing the expertise of the recruitment sector to help workers progress.

Jobs transform lives. That's why we at the REC want to work in partnership with government and other stakeholders to build the best jobs market in the world, helping people in all areas of the labour market – including those in low-paid work – to get on in life.

**Kevin Green**  
Chief Executive

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The organisational assistance and considered responses you all provided are very much appreciated.

This research was conducted and authored by Dr Diana Beech, Senior Researcher at the REC.

# LOW-WAGE JOBS AREN'T NECESSARILY ALWAYS BAD JOBS.

TINA MCKENZIE, PEOPLEPLUS NI

# 01

## INTRODUCTION

Much of the recent public and political debate around low-skilled, low-wage work has positioned low-paid jobs as 'bad' jobs. As a Demos investigation into low-wage jobs has revealed, jobs that are neither well paid nor a source of creativity tend to be no longer esteemed by the wider British culture.<sup>1</sup> This does not, however, negate the fact that we still need people to do these jobs, since they fulfil some of the most important functions in our society: hospitals still need to be cleaned, people still need to be cared for and food products still need to be packed and sent to our stores. Moreover, as the uptake figures for these jobs appear to show, more and more people in Britain are taking on low-paid employment. Thanks to rising numbers of job openings following the recent 'jobs boom', the UK now has a larger proportion of low-skilled, low-paid jobs than virtually any other Northern and Western European country.<sup>2</sup>

As it stands today, more than one in five workers in Britain can be classed as being in low-paid work. This means that more than 5.1 million employees, or 22% of the total UK adult workforce, receive less than two-thirds of the full-time median gross adult earnings for their work – equivalent to £7.69 an hour.<sup>3</sup> This is, interestingly, more than the current National Minimum Wage, which is set at £6.50 an hour for workers over the age of 21, and the National Living Wage to be introduced in April 2016, but less than the current UK Living Wage campaign, which estimates that workers require £7.85 an hour nationally or £9.15 an hour in London to be able to meet their basic needs. Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has revealed that one in every three low-paid workers in Britain is aged between 31 and 50 and is, therefore, allegedly in the prime of their working lives.<sup>4</sup> With low-skilled, low-wage jobs making up a considerable share of the current UK labour market, then, exploring the opportunities and challenges that these jobs hold for employees is crucial to understanding their role and value to people's lives and the prospects they hold for progression at various transition points in workers' careers.

At the REC, we believe that recruitment agencies can – and do – play an active role in this process, not just by getting people into work, but also by helping them to progress throughout their careers, so we wanted to test this by speaking to low-paid workers and learning about their experiences of career progression first-hand. Our intention is to shed some necessary light on the 'real' value of low-skilled, low-wage jobs in the UK – not just with regard to their place in the UK labour market, but also in connection with the pay and progression of the workers who choose to assume them and the potential of these jobs to transform people's lives.

1 Goodhart, D. (n.d.) *Low status jobs: for 'failures and foreigners' only?* Blog post. Demos. Available at: [www.demos.co.uk/blog/lowstatusjobs](http://www.demos.co.uk/blog/lowstatusjobs).

2 Woodruff, L. (2015) *It's time to give Britain a pay rise and improve our low-wage economy.* Blog post. 11 February, Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: [www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2015/02/give-britain-pay-rise](http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2015/02/give-britain-pay-rise).

3 This figure is based on the UK median of £11.56, published in the 2013 ONS *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*.

4 Ainsley, C. (2015) *10 facts you need to know before the general election.* Blog post. 26 February, Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: [www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2015/02/10-facts-you-need-know-general-election](http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2015/02/10-facts-you-need-know-general-election).

This report seeks, therefore, to uncover what factors underpin workers' decisions to undertake low-skilled, low-wage employment, as well as identify some of the key opportunities and challenges that low-paid, entry-level jobs can give rise to when it comes to progressing in the UK jobs market. This report also examines what support is needed to help low-paid workers to progress in their careers and gives serious consideration to the question of who should be providing this guidance and assistance.

At the REC we recognise that businesses and recruiters have lots of responsibilities and that they are always looking for opportunities to improve themselves – so we hope that this report contributes to that desire. Equally, we recognise the economic and societal benefits that can be brought to the UK as a whole when considering career and pay progression for everyone, and we hope this report will help the government to think about the productivity challenge facing the low-paid sectors of the UK labour market.

## Methodology

This report is largely the result of qualitative research. As well as interviews with selected REC members and relevant stakeholders, the main body of the report draws on focus group discussions held with workers engaged in the hospitality, retail, care and industrial sectors. We chose to focus on these four sectors because low-paid jobs make up a large part of their workforce and, as such, we felt that the experiences of workers in these sectors will best represent the sentiments of low-paid workers in other employment sectors as well.

We also decided to opt for a qualitative approach to this report, as we felt it would allow us to hear the 'full' experiences and ideas of agency workers and recruiters, and allow us to delve deeper into any specific issues that may arise. Most importantly, we felt that using qualitative insights would enable us to pull out examples of good practice more easily and also enable us to recommend change wherever needed. This report presents candidates' responses exactly how we found them and we have tried not to interpret or read too much into their comments.

The focus groups we convened took place in different locations around the UK and include:

- one focus group with hospitality workers (London)
- one focus group with retail workers (London)
- one focus group with care workers (London)
- two focus groups with industrial workers (Dudley and Leicester).

The focus groups were kindly organised by REC members and they comprised a good gender and age balance. It is also worth noting that roughly half of the focus group participants were not UK nationals.

In addition, the report draws on the responses from two of the REC's *JobsOutlook*<sup>5</sup> surveys conducted in June and July 2015, as well as findings from

<sup>5</sup> The REC's *JobsOutlook* tracking survey reports the responses of 600 employers questioned about their hiring intentions over the next quarter and the next year. Respondents are drawn from across the public, private and non-profit sector, and from across a range of industries and sizes of organisation.

other external studies. Quotes from the qualitative research are provided throughout this report. The results of the *JobsOutlook* surveys are also appended to the report.

In terms of structure, the report begins with a general overview of low-paid jobs in the UK and their prevalence in the hospitality, retail, care and industrial sectors. The main body of the report then provides essential insights into the experiences of low-paid workers in all four sectors in this study. These cross-sector insights are followed by a summary of the challenges and opportunities facing workers in low-paid jobs who wish to progress in their careers. The report concludes with recommendations to government, REC members and other key stakeholders about what can be done to help workers who wish to progress out of low-skilled, low-wage employment.

## Low-paid jobs: the context

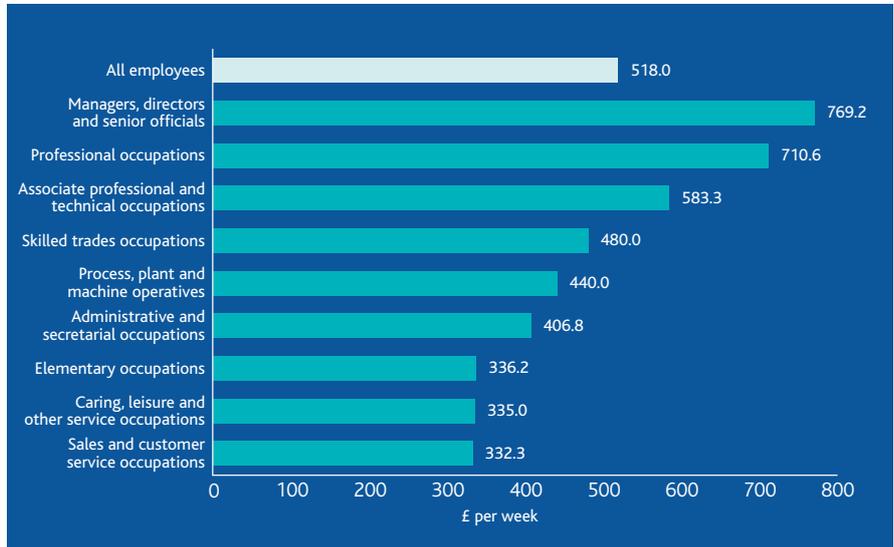
In this report we specifically explore the role and value of low-skilled, low-wage jobs in the hospitality, retail, care and industrial sectors in the UK, and the challenges and opportunities that these jobs hold for workers in each of these four sectors in terms of pay and career progression. We have chosen to examine these specific sectors because, as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has already highlighted, the retail, catering and care sectors alone currently employ almost 6 million workers in Britain and account for about a quarter of all employment in the entire UK economy. A large proportion of workers in each of these three sectors is employed in lower-level and low-paid occupations, with jobs in these sectors accounting for over half (54%) of all low-paid jobs in the UK.<sup>6</sup>

According to the latest figures from the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), the median full-time gross salary in the UK is currently £518 a week. Clearly paying under this threshold are sales and customer service occupations (£332.30), caring occupations (£335), elementary occupations – which include a wide range of hospitality jobs (£336.20) – and process, plant and machine manufacturing occupations (£440).<sup>7</sup>

6 Devins, D. et al. (2014) *Improving progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: [www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/employment-progression-skills-full.pdf](http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/employment-progression-skills-full.pdf).

7 It should be noted, however, that these figures represent basic salaries only and, therefore, exclude any potential additions such as tips, commission or bonuses.

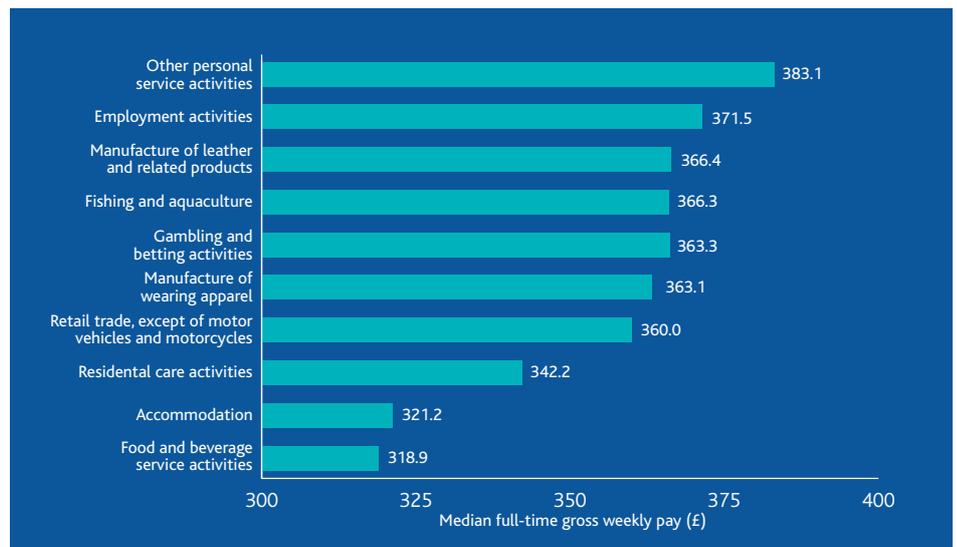
**FIGURE / 1**  
**MEDIAN FULL-TIME**  
**GROSS WEEKLY EARNINGS,**  
**BY MAJOR OCCUPATION**  
**GROUP, UK, APRIL 2014**



Source: ASHE, April 2014

Looking more closely at the lowest-paid industries within these wider occupational groups, we can see that food and beverage service activities top the lowest-paid industry group in Britain at the moment, with the median full-time gross pay in this sector currently at £318.90 a week. Workers engaged in residential care activities report median full-time gross weekly earnings of £342.20, while those engaged in general retail trade fare slightly better at £360. Workers engaged in the manufacture of textiles are currently earning around the median of £363.30 a week.

**FIGURE / 2**  
**THE LOWEST-PAID**  
**INDUSTRY GROUPS**  
**IN THE UK**



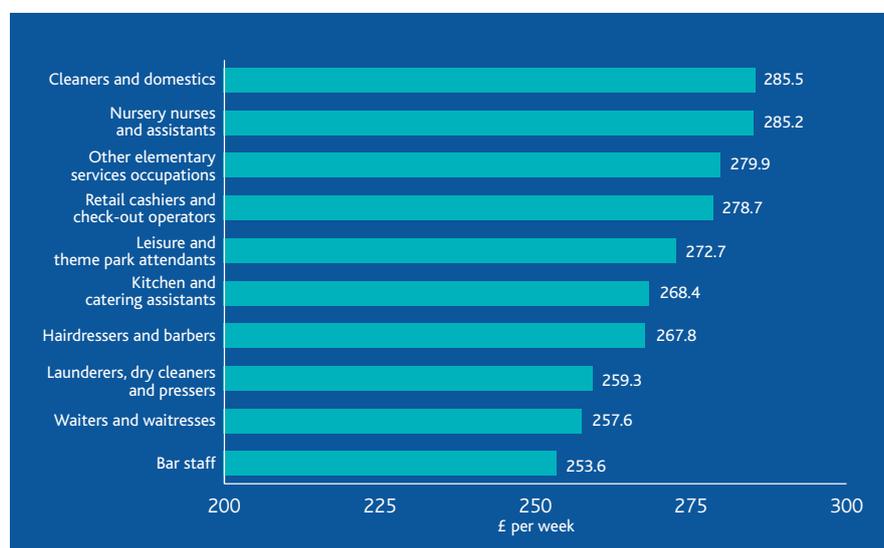
Source: ASHE, April 2014

## Hospitality

When it comes to breaking down these industry groups even further, we can see that hospitality workers feature prominently amongst the lowest paid workers in the UK, with bar staff earning a median full-time gross salary of £253.60 a week, closely followed by waiters and waitresses earning £257.60 a week. Kitchen and catering assistants receive, on average, a weekly salary of £268.40, while cleaners and domestics earn £285.50.

Hospitality is nonetheless one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the UK labour market. According to the 2014 ONS Labour Force Survey, over 803,000 people currently work in restaurants in the UK, representing a 30% increase in staff numbers from 2009. A further 281,000 people work in hotels, while another 340,000 are employed in pubs, bars and clubs, reflecting the growth of the UK's casual dining market.<sup>8</sup> The labour turnover rate in the hospitality sector is also one of the highest in the UK economy, averaging about 20% in 2013 compared with the national average of 13% that year.<sup>9</sup> According to People 1st, this employee retention problem costs the sector £274 million annually.<sup>10</sup> This high turnover rate can be explained in large part by the attractiveness of hospitality jobs to those in transitory periods of their lives – such as students fitting the work in around their studies, or people travelling from place to place.

**FIGURE / 3**  
THE LOWEST-PAID  
OCCUPATIONS IN  
THE UK



Source: ASHE, April 2014

8 People 1st. (n.d.) *The skills and productivity question: hospitality and tourism sector*. London: People 1st. Available at: [www.people1st.co.uk/Research-policy/Research-reports/The-Skills-and-Productivity-Problem](http://www.people1st.co.uk/Research-policy/Research-reports/The-Skills-and-Productivity-Problem).

9 Devins, D. et al. (2014) See above note 6.

10 People 1st. (n.d.) See above note 8.

## Retail

Also featuring amongst the lowest-paid occupations in the UK are retail cashiers and check-out operators, taking home a median full-time gross weekly pay of £278.70.

According to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, the retail sector in Britain currently employs over 3 million people and this figure is expected to increase to 3.2 million by 2020. The retail workforce is dominated by customer service assistants, employed at the low-skilled, low-wage end of the scale, and these people account for almost half of the total retail workforce.<sup>11</sup> The Resolution Foundation has previously suggested that 1.5 million retail workers in Britain are representing 30% of the total low-paid workforce in the UK. The retail sector has also proven itself particularly attractive to students and young people in recent years, with 40% of full-time student employees working in wholesale and retail positions,<sup>12</sup> as they can be particularly attracted to certain brands as well as the discounts they receive.

## Care

The care sector is another of the UK's fastest growing employment sectors, having grown by 2.5% per annum over the ten years between 2002 and 2012 – that's faster than the entire UK economy grew in that same period.<sup>13</sup> At the end of 2012, just under 4 million people in the UK were employed in care work, with the majority of low-paid workers on non-standard contracts – including part-time, temporary and zero-hours contracts. In 2014 the government's Migration Advisory Committee found that 19% of all low-skilled workers working in care homes and as home carers are migrants.<sup>14</sup> The Centre for Employment Studies Research (CESR) also found that nearly three-quarters (72%) of care workers work for private sector care providers, while over one in ten (13%) are employed directly by public sector care providers. A further 13% work in the not-for-profit sector.<sup>15</sup>

## Industrial

Since traditional industrial work still remains one of the UK's lowest-paid occupation groups, it is particularly pertinent that it is also included in this study. The Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI), in fact, issued a warning in 2014 that general industrial and manufacturing work is in danger of becoming a 'rump' sector in the UK labour market, with the decline in manufacturing pay threatening to make the sector smaller and less productive. It also found that

11 UKCES. (2015) *Sector insights: skills and performance challenges in the retail sector*. UKCES Evidence Report, July. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/sector-insights-skills-and-performance-challenges-in-the-retail-sector](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sector-insights-skills-and-performance-challenges-in-the-retail-sector)

12 Whittaker, M. and Hurrell, A. (2013) *Low pay Britain 2013*. London: Resolution Foundation. Available at: [www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/low-pay-britain-2013/](http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/low-pay-britain-2013/)

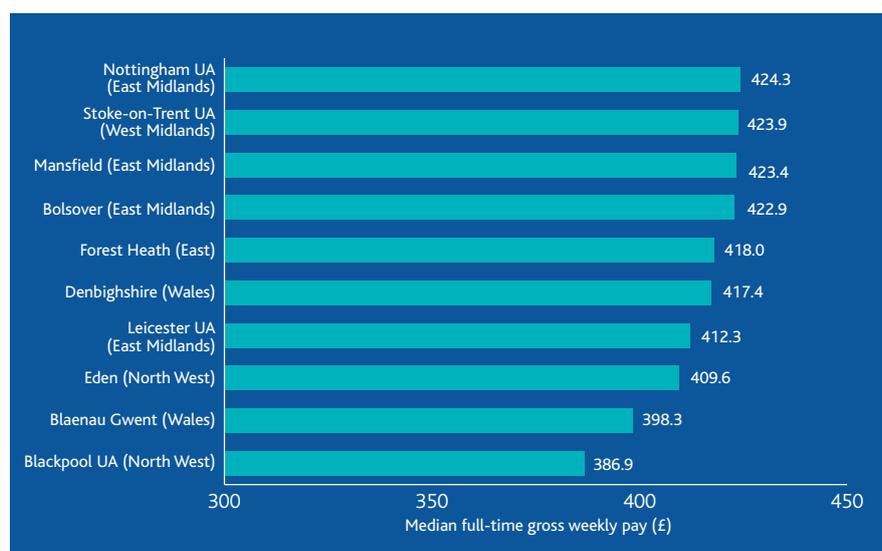
13 UKCES. (2012) *Sector skills insights: health and social care*. UKCES Evidence Report 52, July. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-social-care-sector-skills-insights](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-social-care-sector-skills-insights)

14 BBC News. (2014) *Low-skilled workers at risk of exploitation*. 8 July. Available at: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28205968](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28205968)

15 Moore, S. (2013) *Low pay in care work – the importance of hours*. Presentation at South West TUC Annual Conference. Available at: [www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/swtuc\\_annual\\_conference\\_low\\_pay\\_in\\_care\\_work\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/swtuc_annual_conference_low_pay_in_care_work_presentation.pdf)

the majority of these jobs are situated in the north of England and the Midlands, testifying to the continued geographical imbalance of low-paid manufacturing work in the UK.<sup>16</sup> This helps, perhaps, to explain why seven out of ten local authorities with the lowest earnings in Britain are presently to be found in the north, or the East and West Midlands.

**FIGURE / 4**  
THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
WITH THE LOWEST  
EARNINGS, BY PLACE OF  
RESIDENCE IN GB



Source: ASHE, April 2014

Further to this, it is worth acknowledging that our increasingly digitalising world has meant that many retail jobs have now blurred into the industrial sector through the predominance of warehouse work for online stores, for example – rendering it almost impossible to talk about the retail sector as distinct from the industrial one and, thus, further justifying its inclusion in this study.

**A lot of people are shopping online now and that means that retail businesses are moving into warehouses and distribution centres, and even into office work. Retail jobs now include a lot of manufacturing jobs, distribution jobs and even logistical support jobs. So we're starting to see the sectors merging.**

Richard Tomlinson, Xpress Recruitment Ltd, Edinburgh

### Cross-sector observations

Low-skilled, low-wage jobs come in a variety of forms. In retail, the majority of entry-level positions involve an element of customer service, sales or shelf-stacking. In the industrial sector, workers could find themselves on the production line, picking, packing, operating machinery and meeting daily production targets.

<sup>16</sup> University of Sheffield News. (2014) *Manufacturing pay in the UK continues to decline while pay for city bankers soars*. 8 January. Available at: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/manufacturing-pay-in-the-uk-continues-to-decline-while-pay-for-city-bankers-soars-1.338338](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/manufacturing-pay-in-the-uk-continues-to-decline-while-pay-for-city-bankers-soars-1.338338)

In the hospitality sector, there are myriad entry-level professions, ranging from kitchen and bar work and cleaning to front-of-house reception work. While in the care sector the majority of low-paid jobs clearly revolve around the core act of tending to others, the opportunities to specialise in different care needs are vast – be it working with children, the elderly, those with disabilities or those with mental health issues.

It is therefore important to recognise from the outset that workers in low-paid positions are not a homogeneous group of people, and that the needs and motivations underpinning people's decisions to undertake low-paid, often entry-level work are specific to them, their personal circumstances and, in many cases, their own personal career ambitions. In certain sectors, there are ingrained hierarchies, which force people to start at the bottom and work their way up the career ladder, so starting out in elementary positions is often part and parcel of the progression process. In other cases, however, people may choose to remain in low-skilled, low-wage employment because it suits their circumstances and they may currently have no personal aspirations to progress in their careers. It is worth acknowledging here that some of the workers we spoke to indeed, fell into this second category, displaying purely functional relationships with their jobs – with no immediate intentions to progress out of their low-paid employment.

**I like my job. I'm not a morning person so the night shifts I work suit me quite well. I get to live the lifestyle I want and it gives me money to pay the bills.**

Anna, Metals Production Plant Worker

**I can't complain. I'm given a good, clean place to work in and I receive a decent wage with the chance to save some money each month. I'm in a good situation right now and I have no plans to change it.**

Martyna, Warehouse Worker

**Entry-level jobs are very important jobs for those who struggle with their skills, and they give these people opportunities to gain skills and to move up. But we have to remember that some people are comfortable staying in these jobs for a very long time because they're happy in them. Some people are in fact comfortable in their jobs at the entry level and we need to show that, in these cases, low-skilled, low-wage jobs aren't necessarily always bad jobs.**

Tina McKenzie, PeoplePlus NI

The majority of the workers we spoke to, nevertheless, had plans to move out of their low-paid jobs some day in the future. The following sections of this report, therefore, provide an overview of the prospects and barriers to progression facing workers in low-skilled, low-wage jobs, drawing largely on the perspectives of the focus group participants we spoke to in the hospitality, retail, care and

industrial sectors, as well as interviews we conducted with selected REC members and other relevant stakeholders. Although this report focuses on delineating the key characteristics of low-paid employment in four distinct, pre-selected sectors, we believe that a number of the challenges and cross-cutting issues identified in this study apply equally to low-paid workers in other sectors and industries. The following sections of the report are structured around the seven core issues we identified in our discussions, namely:

1. Access to training
2. Existing experience and skillsets
3. Career opportunities and pathways
4. Personal attributes and disposition
5. Working environments
6. Pay and rewards
7. Brand/employer reputation

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LADDER.**

**ANDY, METALS PRODUCTION PLANT WORKER**

**02**

**ACCESS TO  
TRAINING**

Our conversations with workers across all four sectors revealed that training is important for workers in low-paid positions to enable them to meet the demands of their jobs efficiently and effectively. In the care and hospitality sectors, in particular, training and development is an integral part of low-paid work, as workers are not only unable to carry out their duties without it, but they can also find themselves unable to progress on to higher-level jobs if they are lacking the basic skills they are expected to have acquired by assuming elementary work first. In the hospitality sector especially, it was clear from our discussions with workers and REC members that there can be no better training than just getting out there and immersing yourself in the work.

**Being thrown in at the deep end is the only way you can learn in this industry. You can't be pushed to the edge in a school or a college environment. You have to get out there and try the job for yourself.**

Marco, Apprentice, Blue Arrow, London

However, from speaking to hospitality workers who were clearly passionate about the success of their industry, it was apparent that they felt training cuts, together with shortcuts and bad practices in the workplace, are to blame for the poor reputation of low-paid jobs in their sector, as well as for many workers' unsuccessful attempts to progress on to higher-level positions. The workers we spoke to felt that this situation would be helped if there were clear sets of checks and balances along the hospitality career pathway to ensure that training is properly given and expected standards are being achieved.

**When I was a waiter, as part of my hospitality training back in the day, I was professionally trained by the chef in the kitchen. Now it's all just about taking out the plates and bringing them back again.**

Dan, Senior Consultant, Blue Arrow, London, and Former Restaurant Manager

**The problem is that there are no real waiters anymore, just plate carriers. Real waiters should be able to carve fish or meat at the table and know all the cuts. They should know what to recommend to diners and what ingredients go into each dish. Nowadays, if you ask a waiter what's in a certain dish, more often than not they'll just point you back to the menu. There's just no professionalism there anymore. It's a profession that's fading away.**

Alessio, Chef

**Problems are also occurring because far too many people are going straight into places as a chef de partie without any commis chef experience behind them. This is because some of the big chain companies just get their chefs to microwave pre-prepared food and that's enough to earn them a title. But then these chefs are moving on without having acquired the necessary skills and talents that they need for the next stage. There are just no intermediate standards in the industry anymore. You might think you're ready to step up to the next level but in actual fact, you're not – you find yourself lacking the basic skills and the training you need.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

Conversations also revealed concerns that some people who want to be chefs are actually being put off from following their dreams because of the high start-up costs involved for training and equipment. It was suggested that the excessive bureaucracy at both the lower and higher levels of the hospitality sector can act as a deterrent to people considering a catering career.

**We need to be concentrating on bringing those people into the sector who really want to be chefs. Because of the huge start-up costs it entails and the fact you have to undergo a lot of training, some people are put off from joining us, and there needs to be more encouragement out there to persuade people to follow their dreams to become professional chefs.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

**It's all about paperwork nowadays. At the lower levels, there's too much emphasis on proving yourself on paper before you even set foot in a kitchen, when it's what you do in the kitchen that really matters. It's the same at the higher levels when opening a restaurant. Nothing changes. There's a mountain of paperwork and it gets you questioning if it's really all worth it, whatever level you're at.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

The workers we spoke to in the care sector also shared the sentiment that the best training they can get for their work is by going out there and doing the jobs themselves. However, because of the varied nature of their work, it can be advantageous for care workers to undertake formal training sessions before they can carry out the different jobs on offer. Our discussions with agency care workers, nevertheless, revealed that non-essential training can often be unpaid and that workers may have to make temporary pay sacrifices in order to do it. It was apparent from our conversations that there are distinctions between what is considered essential and non-essential training by employers, and the differences between the two can sometimes be unclear for workers. The care workers we spoke to lamented the fact that the training that is offered to them is virtually always client-focused, aimed at meeting the service users' needs rather than the

career progression needs of the workers themselves. This sends out a clear signal to employers and government bodies to consider tailoring training courses with the career development of workers in mind if we are to ensure a successful and sustainable health care system for the future.

**Shadowing is important in this job. That's how you learn. With flexible hours you should be able to fit in more formal training around your job and studies, but it rarely works out like that. You're expected to take days off for it.**

Maïke, Former Residential Support Worker

**You get in-house training when you're on placements, but you never get anything that aids your own personal development. Plus, permanent staff are more likely to get proper training; temps don't.**

Hyginus, Care Home Support Worker

For retail workers, by contrast, it is not essential to undertake extensive training before being put on the shop floor. However, challenges arise because the retail workers we spoke to work with a variety of different brands and products on a daily basis, and they told us that the key to reaching their daily sales targets is often closely related to how knowledgeable they are about the goods they are selling. Conversations with retail workers revealed that they would clearly appreciate more in-work training to help them to increase their productivity levels – and thus help them to meet their daily targets – and also to help to protect them against causing injuries to others with products that they have not been properly trained to use. However, like the care workers we spoke to, the retail workers also felt strongly that this training should be paid for by either the employers or the agencies they work for and it should not have to come at the sacrifice of a day's earnings for them, which is currently the case for many of the sales assistants that we spoke to.

**You can get training sometimes but it is always unpaid. I think it's important to undertake training – especially to stop you from feeling like a fish out of water when working with new brands. But because this means it stops me getting paid for a day's work, I'm often reluctant to undertake it.**

Lois, Sales Assistant

**I think we'd definitely benefit from more practical training, like showing us how to adapt techniques. After all, skincare and make-up selling techniques are different from fragrance selling techniques – and haircare is different again. I'm always nervous when I get requests from customers to straighten their hair or curl it with a new appliance in case I burn them because I'm not used to it. This can be a major problem because it could**

**entail a lawsuit if you go ahead and burn someone just because you're not trained properly in different products.**

Sorcha, Sales Assistant

In contrast to the day-to-day work of temporary retail assistants, it was apparent from our discussions with both sets of industrial workers that we spoke to that their daily work was less varied, so their training needs were more limited to learning about the machinery that they have to operate in the workplace. They nevertheless highlighted the risks that could be created if this training is not given effectively – especially if it is given by non-native English speakers who may struggle to convey information clearly, or if it is given to new overseas workers, who might have difficulties fully understanding the machine operating instructions they are given. Our discussions with the industrial workers, therefore, helped to emphasise the importance of employers taking responsibility for putting workers in safe working environments and minimising risks through sound training provisions.

**Non-native English speakers pose a particular risk in my job because they don't always understand machine operating instructions properly and this can be detrimental to their own health, as well as those of others around them. By putting people who don't speak much English in these jobs, you're putting them and others at risk of injury, or worse.**

Andy, Metals Production Plant Worker

**People who don't have a good command of the English language shouldn't be in positions of responsibility when there are considerable risks involved.**

Nkembi, Metals Production Plant Worker

Our discussions with industrial workers also highlighted the need for employers and recruiters to make efforts to ensure that workers fully understand the jobs they are taking on at the outset and the associated risks and hazards of their work. One of the workers we spoke to actually drew on his 25 years' experience of industrial work to suggest that employers and agencies make use of visual information and training materials at the beginning of a placement so that candidates are clear about what is expected of them before they agree to take a job on.

**Recruiters need to be honest with us from the start to let us know what we're getting ourselves in for, and not just give us a vague job title that doesn't relate to the job itself. It would be good if recruiters would sit prospective workers down and show them a video of what they'll be doing in their new job – that way it will overcome any potential language barriers for non-native speakers and all workers will know what to expect if they accept the position on offer.**

Andy, Metals Production Plant Worker

The need to ensure workers' proficiency of English was, perhaps unsurprisingly, also a major feature of our conversations with the migrant workers who took part in our focus group discussions – the majority of whom are evidently using their current low-paid jobs to improve their English language competencies. Discussions with these workers revealed that they believe the key to their career progression in the UK is, in the main, connected with their ability to improve their English. However, with such a high proportion of their colleagues also being non-native English speakers, they said that it can also be difficult for them to improve their English as quickly and as efficiently as they would like in the workplace. As such, many of them are open to the idea of – and actively looking for opportunities for – improving their English through courses and additional training.

**I originally went into the agency wanting an office job, because that's what I used to do back in Poland. But they told me that my English wasn't good enough, so they kept offering me warehouse jobs instead. I now understand that I have to do these jobs first and use the opportunity to improve my English. Then I can try to look for an office job again in the future.**

Alina, Warehouse Worker

**I would like to advance my English with an English language course because it's not my first language. But I know this will cost me about £700 a year and I just can't afford it.**

Adrian, Metals Production Plant Worker

**I would appreciate further opportunities to improve my English for free. It would be great if employers or agencies would offer courses to help people like me to progress.**

Laura, Warehouse Worker

**Sometimes our working environment isn't conducive to learning English when all the Polish people tend to stick together and speak in Polish. I'm Polish but that's not why I'm here. I want to learn English and it annoys me when they all stick together.**

Kataryna, Metals Production Plant Worker

One of the REC members we spoke to raised the possibility that agencies and employers can actually help migrant workers to acquire the English language skills that they need to realise their potential. He, too, sees improving migrant workers' English language abilities as the key to unlocking their productivity in the workplace and, ultimately, speeding up their career progression – allowing them to move on to undertake the medium-to-high-skilled jobs that many of them have already been trained for in their countries of origin. This logic could, of course, also be extended to apply to all workers in the UK, regardless of nationality, by

helping them to improve their basic numeracy and literacy levels or even to acquire job-specific skills and expertise.

**As recruiters, we could be helping foreign workers with their English – for example, it would be great if we could set up a scheme with a local college for our temporary workers so we could sell it to big companies to add benefit to the workers we provide. It would speed them up in their progression. We could even get someone from the college to be on site an hour before the workers’ shift – paid in part by us and in part by the company we recruit for. Surely this would benefit everyone concerned.**

Neil Cook, Encore Personnel Services, Leicester

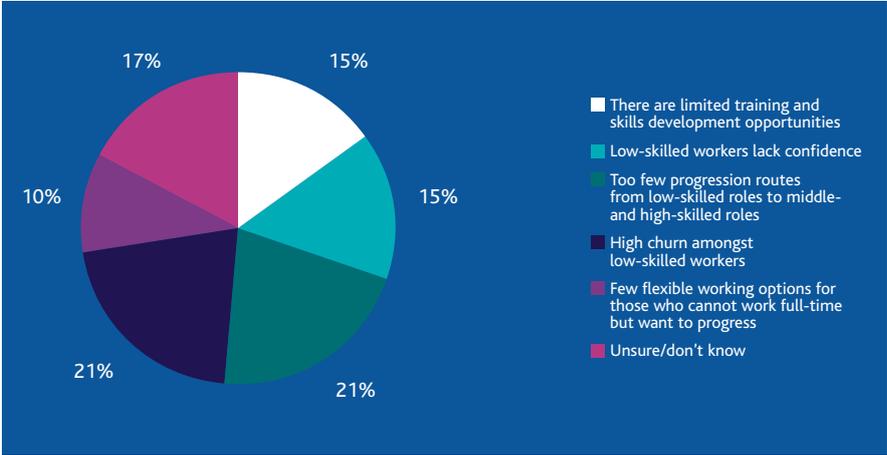
It is also worth mentioning here that, although low-skilled, low-wage work in the industrial sector can be repetitive in nature, workers do have opportunities to undertake training to experience other types of work should they want it. One temporary agency worker we spoke to with over 25 years’ experience in the sector acknowledged that these opportunities may not always be obvious, but they are there if you want them. He explained nevertheless that this can rely on workers taking the initiative themselves to seek out these opportunities for new training options, so recruiters and employers could definitely be doing more to make low-paid workers aware that possibilities do exist to acquire new skills and take on new responsibilities.

**It’s down to us as individuals to push ourselves if we’re ever going to stand a chance of climbing the ladder in industry. We need to broaden our horizons to ensure that we don’t get stuck doing the same thing for the rest of our lives. Although I’ve been working in the same sector for the past 25 years, I’ve gradually tried to work my way up. I haven’t been doing the same thing all this time. I took a forklift truck driving course a few years back, for example, which took me away from working on the machines all day and this made my working day far more varied. I’m now realising it’s time for me to move on again. There’s always something you can be learning.**

Andy, Metals Production Plant Worker

Interestingly, an REC survey conducted with 200 employers revealed that 15% of them thought that limited training and skills development opportunities were the single most important factor contributing to poor career progression for low-skilled workers. Our conversations with workers from across all four sectors in the study certainly revealed this to be true, as insufficient training can be seen to pose barriers to progression in the care and hospitality sectors, while it can also pose risks and hazards to workers in retail and industrial jobs. In retail especially, a lack of training can be seen to hamper workers’ productivity levels, and the experiences of migrant workers also confirm that poor literacy or numeracy skills can hold people back from realising their full potential.

**FIGURE / 5**  
IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT  
IS THE SINGLE MOST  
IMPORTANT FACTOR  
CONTRIBUTING  
TO POOR CAREER  
PROGRESSION  
FOR LOW-SKILLED  
WORKERS? [SELECT ONE  
RESPONSE ONLY]



**RECRUITERS NEED  
TO TAKE TIME TO  
GET TO KNOW US  
AS INDIVIDUALS.  
THEY NEED TO  
UNDERSTAND  
WHAT NEW THINGS  
WE CAN BRING.**

**BARBARA, METALS PRODUCTION PLANT WORKER**

**03**

**EXISTING EXPERIENCE  
AND SKILLSETS**

Discussions with low-paid workers from all four sectors in this study revealed that their ability to do their jobs well often depends on them having existing experience and particular skillsets and, in the case of care workers, an existing propensity to make a difference to the lives of others. All but one of the group of agency retail workers that we spoke to, for instance, had a background in the performing arts (be it dance, music or theatre) and they credited this with their ability to 'perform' well in their jobs and enhance their productivity in terms of acquiring sales and meeting targets. One of the focus group participants we spoke to even made a firm connection between the performing arts and the retail sector, explaining how performers need retail jobs in order to support themselves while they train and attend auditions, while the retail sector also needs performers in order to interact effectively with the public and generate increased sales.

**There's a mutual reliance between performers and the retail industry. They both need each other for their success.**

Alex, Sales Assistant

More generally, however, from the attitudes and demeanour of the retail workers we spoke to, it became apparent that anybody with people skills and a flair for social interaction would be an asset to the retail sector and would be able to progress in their careers. As the focus group participants themselves confirmed, retail jobs do not require traditional academic qualifications and are well suited to those with a yearning for a front-of-house position.

**There are opportunities out there for everyone in retail. It's all about presenting yourself. If you are enthusiastic, presentable, friendly and have a good attitude then you're going to make it, even without any qualifications. Retail doesn't require good GCSEs or A-Levels – all you need is a good character and to be good with people. I'm sure if someone like that, even with a period of unemployment behind them, were to walk down any high street in the UK waving their CV, there would be someone who would snap them up.**

Richard Tomlinson, Xpress Recruitment Ltd, Edinburgh

Similarly, from our discussions with care workers, it is apparent that the care sector relies on low-paid, elementary jobs being undertaken by people with a natural desire and inclination to care for others and to make a difference to wider society. For the care workers we spoke to, it is clear that their jobs represent much more than a means of earning a living for them. However, some of the workers suggested that the sector can sometimes take advantage of their goodwill by putting them in positions where they feel compelled to extend their working hours or even to work overtime without pay.

**I like caring for people and I don't need money or pay to do so.**

Raymond, Support Worker

**I actually used to work in retail for over 20 years, but I ended up caring for my late mother when she was ill and elderly. This gave me a taste for care work and the impetus I needed to change my career. I realised from caring for my mother that this is where I belong.**

Eugene, Part-time Support Worker

**In this sector, people can take advantage of your good nature and your passion for your job. Once I had just completed a 24-hour shift with a service-user when I realised my replacement wasn't going to turn up. So I ended up staying another two hours because I just couldn't leave the person I was caring for on their own. In this job, you're often put in positions which play on your strong sense of empathy and morality – you know you have to stay because you just couldn't live with yourself if you didn't. So, you end up doing far more than you technically have to, and far more than you're actually paid for.**

Kristina, Domiciliary Care Worker

**There's a big talent pool in care. People join the sector because they can work flexibly around their own lives. But you have to remember that people working in the social care sector don't tend to do it for the money – for the majority, it's a vocation.**

Tina McKenzie, PeoplePlus NI

Despite the vocational nature of their work, it was also clear from our conversations with care workers that they still often have to prove to employers that they are serious about entering the profession in the first place. The workers suggested there is still a need for workers to demonstrate previous experience of care work, as well as a personal dedication to the act of caring, but this can pose a problem for new entrants to the sector because they often do not have the necessary professional references to start them off. It can also pose problems for those who have only previously cared for elderly relatives because they may well find their main personal reference unable to testify to their work because of illness or even death.

**Sometimes employers don't count your voluntary experience – like caring for a family member or similar – so you need to be persistent to persuade them that this is really what you want to do. You always need to qualify your interest in care.**

Maïke, Former Residential Support Worker

**Getting references can be a problem because for care work you usually need two references from a company and one personal reference. Obviously it's hard to get professional ones if you've never done a care job before.**

Gift, Residential Support Worker

**Getting into care can be a bit more difficult for new entrants. Carers looking for work have usually been unemployed for some time because in a lot of instances they have been caring for relatives full-time, either elderly or young children or indeed both. What we need to do is to teach these people to recognise their skills and to label them correctly for the job market. It's all about interpreting their skills and encouraging them.**

Tina McKenzie, PeoplePlus NI

As much as the care and retail sectors rely on the existing characteristics, skills and experiences of the workers assuming low-paid jobs in these fields, it is also apparent from our focus group discussions with industrial workers, in particular, that many of the workers in this sector are not being given the opportunity to draw on their previous experience and skillsets and bring these to the jobs in hand. This appears to be especially true in the migrant worker context – many appear to bring with them specialist skillsets, yet explained that their existing talents are not being fully recognised or appreciated by recruiters or employers. Various migrant workers taking part in our focus group discussions revealed that they had previously worked in medium to high-skilled jobs in their home countries – including as secondary school teachers, beauticians and business administrators – but this experience is not always being used by agencies and employers here in the UK.

**I have two master's degrees, which I earned back in Poland. But I've found recruiters haven't taken these into account at all.**

Barbara, Metals Production Plant Worker

**I was a high school teacher back in Poland, and I wanted a team leader job here, but they [agencies] just didn't consider it. I guess I'm an immigrant. I know my place. My qualifications aren't worth anything here. In Poland I could work in a high school. Here I can't even get a nursery job. Believe me, I've tried.**

Milda, Warehouse Worker

**I am a qualified beautician back in Poland but I found my qualifications aren't transferable here. They're just not worth anything. I've stopped mentioning them to any new agencies I go to.**

Kasha, Warehouse Worker

**They [employers] don't listen to you or take your CV seriously. They'll take your CV and put it on the table, but they don't look at it. Nobody here has taken my previous experience or qualifications into consideration.**

Alina, Warehouse Worker

**Recruiters need to take time to get to know us as individuals. They need to understand what new things we can bring. They need to understand that we want to use our existing qualifications. What is needed is more experienced recruiters – recruiters who understand the knock-on effects of these jobs on our lives.**

Barbara, Metals Production Plant Worker

So, whereas some low-paid jobs clearly benefit from and even rely on existing skillsets, others are evidently missing out on the unique experiences and qualifications that workers can bring to the tasks in hand. From our discussions, it is evident that migrant workers, in particular, are not being given the opportunities that they need to use their existing skillsets by recruiters and employers. To aid their career progression, then, more work needs to be done at the point of entry to their careers here in the UK to facilitate the transferability of their existing qualifications and experience. Leaving workers feeling discontented with their positions and concerned about the poor match of their jobs to their existing skillsets clearly risks demotivating them to perform well in their occupations and, ultimately, lowering their productivity levels in the workplace. Ensuring that we make the best use of people's skillsets – including encouraging migrant workers to acquire the English language competences necessary to unlock their full potential – will ultimately serve to benefit the entire UK economy.

**The rise in productivity in the industrial sector is largely due to the Eastern European market. We have seen workers come over here and they have driven up the targets through their 'can do' attitude. Eastern European workers are generally switched on, they're challenged, presentable, savvy and target-driven. They've set the bar high, and they continue to set it ever higher – and if you can't keep up with this then you'll fall behind. That can pose a particular problem for other workers, who sometimes just don't share the same work ethics.**

Neil Cook, Encore Personnel Services, Leicester

**WORKING IN  
RETAIL HAS OPENED  
UP SOME NEW  
OPTIONS FOR ME  
THAT I DIDN'T  
KNOW I HAD  
BEFORE.**

ALEX, SALES ASSISTANT

**04**

**CAREER OPPORTUNITIES  
AND PATHWAYS**

It was apparent from our focus group conversations that most workers across all four sectors are using their low-paid jobs to enable them to acquire new skills to allow them to achieve their future career aspirations – be these within the same sectors or within other industries and occupation groups. In the care and hospitality sectors, in particular, the workers we spoke to clearly believe that undertaking low-paid, elementary work is essential to them progressing on to higher-level positions within their sectors. Workers in these two sectors are, therefore, more inclined to view their career pathways vertically, seeing their current low-paid jobs as just the first step on the ladder to future careers in these sectors. This hierarchy of progression, inherent to hospitality especially, was also confirmed in conversation with an REC member, who emphasised that those with vital elementary positions today will make the best leaders in the sector of tomorrow.

**Those in low-skilled hospitality jobs today will make the knowledgeable HoDs (heads of department) of tomorrow. It's like a GP becoming a specialist. In order to move up in your career and build up a specialism, you need to understand how all the constituent parts work first. The point is that you find your strengths and, once you make it to HoD stage, then you'll be able to empathise with the people who do the job all the time at the grassroots – just like you used to do.**

Salvatore Fernandez, Antal International

In spite of the hierarchical nature of progression in the hospitality sector, interestingly, none of the focus group participants we spoke to reported having been directed towards a career in catering by either Jobcentre Plus or careers advisers at school. The agency workers we spoke to actually said that their best source of career advice had come from recruitment agencies, as they felt that they tend to have better knowledge of the specific 'ins and outs' of the hospitality sector and understand exactly what it takes to progress into higher-level positions in the industry.

**I had a careers adviser come in to visit me at my school once but my experience wasn't very good. They recommended that I become an engineer even though I had told them that my hobby was cooking and baking! It's lucky that I already knew what I wanted to do and had a passion for hospitality, else I would never have known to enrol myself straight into catering college after school.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

**The best advice I received came from the agency. They told me how I could progress from being a kitchen porter via an apprenticeship.**

Marco, Apprentice, Blue Arrow, London

## NATASHA'S STORY

Natasha is working as a kitchen assistant at the moment, on a temporary contract, in London. She has high hopes of making it in the hospitality sector. She eventually wants to become a pastry chef, but she knows that she needs to gain the necessary skills and experience that will take her there. She said she's been taking the initiative and teaching herself to work with pastry at home for the past three years, but she knows that 'this just isn't enough' to take her to where she wants to be. So, while she's training to be a chef at college, she's taking the opportunity to gain hands-on experience of the industry in her role as a kitchen assistant, as well as receive 'invaluable career guidance' from the agency that recruits her. Natasha said that her experience of her work so far has given her 'a good feeling' about her eventual career choice and 'an essential confidence boost', particularly when receiving compliments from her employers that she does the job well. Natasha said: 'I see my current job as a step I have to take to achieve my dream of becoming a pastry chef.'

From our discussions with care workers, in comparison, it appears that career progression in the care sector is not always so evident and that advice on progression prospects remains contradictory. This is often because, although there are opportunities to specialise in different care areas, the job openings are just not there for low-paid workers to move into. As a result, the care workers we spoke to reported incidences of them feeling stuck in their career pathways and unsure what their next career move should be. New entrants to the sector, similarly, reported difficulties in getting help and assistance getting started in care work.

**I just don't know where to go now. I've been trying to progress in my career for the past five years or so. Unless you get a degree from a university, you can get stuck for 10–15 years in the same kinds of jobs like I have. It would be great to get some agency support for part-time study to enable us to get the NVQ Level 4 that will enable us to move on.**

Kristina, Domiciliary Care Worker

**It's okay to get into the sector but it's difficult to get on to the next level job. I'm currently doing a master's in social work to improve my chances of progressing. It can be difficult to sell your experience in care to move on to something like care managing, so you need that little bit extra like a degree to move yourself forward.**

Maike, Former Residential Support Worker

**I'm clear I want to move into a field supervisor role. I know I want to remain in the field and I don't want to be hidden away from it all in an office job, but I'm still finding it difficult to progress. I'm using my current work to meet people and to aim for better pay in the future, but the problem is that I just find myself working in the same roles all the time, and not having any opportunity to progress. It's impossible to move up. I need help and support.**

Kristina, Domiciliary Care Worker

**It's a problem getting started – especially getting a DBS check done. You can't get a placement without one, but you also have to pay for it up front and this can be hard when you don't have any money coming in. I've heard that you can get this done for free at Jobcentre Plus, but nobody told me about this when I was looking for work.**

Khadar, Learning Disability Support Worker – recently experienced a period of unemployment

It was apparent from our discussions with the care workers that there is a great deal of complexity surrounding the topic of career progression in the care sector. The workers we spoke to clearly believe that they need additional qualifications in order to progress into higher-level jobs. However, conversations with recruiters in the field revealed that the openings just do not exist in care to facilitate successful career progression, although more opportunities are expected to arise in the future.

**The problem is that the higher-status roles just don't necessarily exist in care, regardless of how much training or specialisms you have. Plus, the budgets are just too tight to introduce new roles in the sector. The pyramids in the care sector are very, very tight. For example, you can have 35 care workers but just one senior coordinator and one branch manager. And if the senior coordinator and the branch manager aren't going anywhere, there's no chance of promotion for any of the lower-level care workers. Opportunities only really open up when someone leaves. That said, we are all aware that the need for care will grow considerably over the next decade, which will increase the need for additional staff and additional branches. These staffing solutions will include senior coordinators, branch managers and even regional managers, and as a result this will open up additional promotional opportunities for these additional staffing requirements.**

Steve Morgan, Bailey Care Services, Melksham

**There needs to be much clearer career progression in care, and there needs to be more clarity as to how you can get the experience that is required.**

Kristina, Domiciliary Care Worker

## MAIKE'S STORY

Maïke has been a residential support worker for quite some time and has recently moved into work as a recruitment consultant for Randstad Care, London. Her dream is to become 'an expert in support work one day'. She wants to use her past experience in the care sector to become a social worker and hopefully even a social researcher later in life. She said that despite all her experience of caring, she feels she needs to get a master's degree to go on to progress in the sector. Maïke said: 'Nobody is really willing to take a chance on those who just want to do care work. You have to demonstrate your commitment to care in other ways – like putting yourself out there and taking a degree in it.' Maïke said she's been 'lucky' to get a bursary for her studies, but she explained that 'it doesn't cover everything'. She also said: 'Even doing a master's degree still won't guarantee me a job because people don't like to hire newly qualified social workers. A master's degree only really gives you the basic minimum requirement you need to go further in care.'

It therefore appears that there are just not enough senior-level job vacancies for lower-paid care workers to move into, despite their skills, experience and qualifications, explaining why most of the low-paid workers we spoke to feel trapped in their current occupations and are left feeling they have insufficient experience. If the government really wants to establish an effective and sustainable care service, it clearly needs to address the whole of the care workforce and ensure that there are feasible career options out there for workers in this sector.

Despite the bleak outlook for progression in the care sector, it should nonetheless be noted that the industry does offer workers the chance to build up specialisms in certain areas. Although progression opportunities still remain limited and workers should be made aware of the realities of progression in this sector, these chances to specialise can still allow workers to vary their day-to-day tasks and maintain optimism that they are progressing towards something worthwhile.

**I'm currently studying on a four-year part-time degree course in psychology while I am working full-time as a special educational needs teaching assistant. I eventually want to work in child therapy or do social care work with young people, so my current job is giving me essential experience for this.**

Wade, Special Needs Teaching Assistant

**I've just come from the youth work sector. I hope this has given me transferable experience for work in the social care sector. My current job fits into my eventual plan to run an organisation helping young people all round, including young offenders and those with disabilities. I've already started to make formal arrangements for this.**

Kenneth, Mental Health Support Worker

**I'm a TA at the moment in a primary school, but I'm hoping to work in a special educational needs school in the future. I'm using my current position to learn mentoring skills. I also want to gain counselling skills training and eventually get a degree or diploma in social work.**

Alice, Special Needs Teaching Assistant

**In care, you can continually better yourself. I'd encourage care workers to become more educated about the sector because it's so vast and expansive. It's not simply about caring for old people. There are opportunities to specialise in areas like dementia, learning disabilities, mental health, etc... Each of these issues requires different care needs. So, there's a broad spectrum out there and I'd encourage workers to enhance their skillsets. This way they'll become more employable. And it adds spice to what you can do in the future. Knowledge will always move you on in any organisation that you work for.**

Steve Morgan, Bailey Care Services, Melksham

Contrary to the hospitality and care sectors, where low-wage jobs appear to be seen as part and parcel of the progression process, the workers we spoke to in the industrial and retail sectors, interestingly, tend to view career progression more horizontally – seeing their current entry-level jobs as opportunities to acquire skills and experiences that can be transferred across sectors, rather than specifically as preparation for higher-level jobs within the same industries. Very few of the industrial workers we spoke to, for example, see their careers advancing within manufacturing, yet it is clear that they are still using their current positions to acquire essential transferable skills that will set them up for careers in other industries and professions. The skills that are seen as particularly important by the industrial workers we spoke to are opportunities to assume leadership and responsibility and the chance to improve personal fitness in preparation for future managerial and physical work.

**I think my job is important for my career plans because it's good experience to become an active leader in the future. In this job you receive proper training for all sorts of different things and this must count for something.**

Milda, Warehouse Worker

**I want to be a soldier one day and I see this job as essential to improve my general fitness. It's hard work and I am constantly working out on the job.**

David, Warehouse Worker

Similarly, very few of the retail workers we spoke to aspire to future higher-level careers in the retail sector, but this is principally because the vast majority of them are aspiring to make it in the performing arts industry. That said, however,

a lot of the workers we spoke to still recognise the potential of their current retail work to open up new career routes for them should their preferred career paths in the creative industries fail. This demonstrates the possibility of low-paid retail jobs to open up workers' eyes to new options and career prospects that they perhaps would not have otherwise considered.

**Working in retail has opened up some new options for me that I didn't know I had before. I might go for a head office job for one of the big beauty companies if my dance career fails and I know that I could now at least show some experience of their brands.**

Alex, Sales Assistant

**I'm currently studying for a science degree. I don't yet know if I want to go into research or enrol on a graduate programme instead. If I opt for the latter, this will definitely be a PR or marketing programme for one of the beauty brands I've worked for, as I now have experience of their products.**

Chloe, Sales Assistant

**We need to be asking what it is we mean by progression and how do we define it? There's a tendency for people to think progression has to be vertical, but a horizontal move can be equally beneficial to a worker – especially a horizontal move within an organisation but across sectors. People who gather experience in different areas are more likely to move up because they've seen different areas of a business; they know how they all work; they know how they fit together. This knowledge gained by moving across sectors sometimes comes before moving up to a different level.**

Rachel Smith, CBI

For the retail workers who are now considering a possible 'back-up' retail career as a result of their current entry-level positions, they clearly appreciate the varied career options the sector opens up for them. For example, the workers we spoke to like the fact that they could continue to work widely in the field or choose to specialise in certain areas and develop loyalties with particular brands. They explained that this can be beneficial to people currently in the process of working out where they want to go in their careers, as they can use their current jobs to experiment with different brands, products and even stores. They also said that working with a wide range of companies in their current positions can open up opportunities for them for future, permanent employment prospects, as brands and companies get to know them and perhaps develop loyalty towards them.

**Alex and I are both considering going into make-up artistry so our current jobs give us a great opportunity to suss out different brands. It's a good way of getting a taste of it before committing to any one company.**

Lois, Sales Assistant

**This work makes you well networked. I've even received offers from a few different brands to work full-time for them. But I'm keeping these offers on the back-burner because I'm waiting to see if I've got a place at drama school this autumn first. If not, I'll definitely consider taking one of them up on it.**

Sorcha, Sales Assistant

**Our jobs give us unique insights into how different stores work as well, not just the brands they sell. So they also open up possibilities for future in-house store work.**

Chloe, Sales Assistant

**There's the advantage that if you perform well for a brand over time, these brands can become loyal to you. You can build up trust with a brand and they'll specifically ask for you, so you're basically guaranteed more work. Personally, I avoid being put on to new brands. I prefer to take advantage of a brand's loyalty towards me and stick with what I know.**

Millie, Sales Assistant

**In retail, it's really all about being in the right place at the right time. The retail sector encompasses some of the biggest companies in the UK, so you have every opportunity to progress if you want to.**

Richard Tomlinson, Xpress Recruitment Ltd, Edinburgh

## ALEX'S STORY

Alex has been trying to make it as a professional dancer ever since he was 17 years old. To support himself while he dances and goes to auditions in London, he works as a temp in retail, selling fragrances and cosmetics for some of the world's leading brands in stores like Harrods and Selfridges. After suffering the recent disappointment of not making it through the auditions for the cast of a West End musical, Alex said he's slowly coming to realise that in the dance world he's 'trying to fit into a bracket that's getting smaller and smaller' and he's 'trying to make it in a world that's ever tougher to compete in'. He said: 'This recent setback has sent me spiralling into a world of working out what I should do if I don't make it in dance. I don't like the prospect but I have to face it – it might be a very real possibility for me now.' Alex explained that ideally he wants to act instead, because it doesn't have a set lifespan like dance does, but he knows that 'it's also a tough industry to crack'. He said that his recent experience of working with various cosmetic brands in his retail job has given him 'a great opportunity to try things out and experiment with different products', so he would now seriously consider working for a head office of one of these companies or become a make-up artist for one of the brands. He said: 'In this job you can gain new knowledge from every brand you work for. You can become an expert on certain brands and products, and you're always building up your knowledge. It's really unique to have such an understanding of so many brands in the industry. My ultimate dream would be to use this knowledge to work as a make-up artist at the Cannes Film Festival!'

It is also clear from our discussions that the majority of workers in the industrial and the retail sectors had found their jobs either by approaching agencies directly themselves or via word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and colleagues. None of the industrial or retail workers we spoke to reported receiving useful career guidance from any sources outside their social networks and they even revealed that they had had negative experiences with Jobcentre Plus in the past. This leads us to suggest that more work could be done by employers and recruiters alike to offer advice to workers about possible career progression pathways in these sectors.

**I went to the Jobcentre when I was looking for a change of career but they were not helpful at all. They just told me to go over there, to one of the PCs they had in the corner, and search for a job myself. They didn't give me any guidance at all.**

Kristina, Warehouse Worker

**I didn't go to the Jobcentre because a friend told me they just give you a lot of leaflets and leave you to go and read them all yourself. There's no actual help there.**

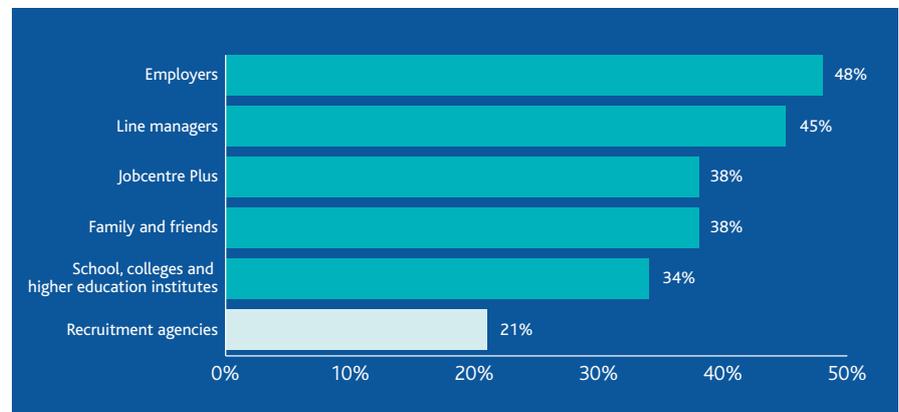
Milda, Warehouse Worker

The JCP varies a lot locally – some people think it could be improved, some have good relations on the ground. Some struggle with slower and more bureaucratic processes than they are used to in the private sector. Some large employers also tell us that the delivery can be patchy. The DWP’s primary objective is still ‘jobs first’: they need to concentrate more on supporting individuals in work to get better jobs.

Ian Brinkley, The Work Foundation

Moreover, the experiences of the agency workers we spoke to across all four sectors in this study do not tally with the results of a survey we conducted with 200 employers, who felt that they, themselves, are quite effective at giving careers advice’ to people (48%), closely followed by line managers (45%) and Jobcentre Plus (38%). Only 21% of employers thought that recruitment agencies are effective at giving people advice on career progression. The positive experiences of the hospitality workers with their recruitment agency, in particular, illustrates that recruiters are not getting the credit they deserve from employers for the useful careers advice they are giving to workers and the potential they have to guide candidates throughout their working lives.

**FIGURE / 6**  
IN YOUR VIEW,  
HOW EFFECTIVE ARE  
THE FOLLOWING  
INDIVIDUALS OR  
ORGANISATIONS  
AT GIVING PEOPLE  
ADVICE ON CAREER  
PROGRESSION?



**YOU NEED  
TO BELIEVE IN  
YOURSELF AND  
BE CONFIDENT. IF  
YOU PUT YOUR  
MIND TO APPLYING  
YOURSELF,  
THEN YOU'LL BE  
SUCCESSFUL.**

**RICHARD TOMLINSON, XPRESS RECRUITMENT LTD**

**05**

**PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES  
AND DISPOSITION**

Workers in all four sectors in our study recognise the strong correlation between their attitudes and appearances in the workplace with their chances of getting promoted. In the case of the temporary agency workers we spoke to, in particular, they closely associated their conduct and mannerisms with the prospect of receiving an offer of a permanent contract from the company at which they are placed. Both sets of industrial workers we spoke to, for one, realised that the best chance they have of progressing in their careers is remaining pleasant and friendly in the workplace and actively looking like they are enjoying the work.

**I see my job as just the beginning. It's the first step on the ladder for me because I want to get a permanent contract one day. Only by smiling and looking positive will the managers notice you and give you a permanent contract.**

Milda, Warehouse Worker

**I've won two awards in my job for excellent customer service. Being friendly and polite can definitely get you noticed, and it's nice to feel appreciated.**

Barbara, Metals Production Plant Worker

The retail workers we spoke to also raised the point that new entrants to the sector need to maintain an air of experience about them to ensure that they are not prejudged by employers as incompetent and can therefore enhance their prospects of being guaranteed to be asked to return for future assignments. They explained that this often requires initiative and determination on their part, but it is worth it to ensure that you do not just get given menial tasks to complete.

**A lot of companies don't like receiving new entrants because they think they're going to be rubbish and will just stand there not knowing anything. I've found that many brands don't know that the agency is sending new people to them, so when you get there, they expect you to know what you're doing. Then you just have to take the initiative and get on with it so they don't find out otherwise.**

Alex, Sales Assistant

**As a new starter, it can be frustrating because if people know you're new, you don't get to work with the make-up. You just have to stand there at the side like a spare part.**

Lois, Sales Assistant

**As a new person, you always get given the bad jobs like cleaning and tidying up.**

Olivia, Sales Assistant

**You need to believe in yourself and be confident. If you put your mind to applying yourself, you'll be successful. There's no better industry in the world to boost someone's confidence than retail. Workers start to feel good about themselves when they put a smile on someone's face and make people happy.**

Richard Tomlinson, Xpress Recruitment Ltd, Edinburgh

Perhaps more so than in other sectors, however, the retail workers we spoke to revealed they have an added need to appear smart and approachable in the workplace, not just to interact effectively with customers but also to uphold the image and reputation of the brands that they work for. The agency workers we spoke to, who all work in the beauty industry, emphasised the need to look immaculate in their dress and physical appearances just to be assured of continued assignments. They explained that ensuring they meet industry standards can be time-consuming and costly, especially for female workers. This also suggests that, although retail jobs only require a positive attitude, it is still important that recruiters and employers invest time in matching people's characters to the companies and brands that they will be promoting to avoid any potential mismatch of expectations.

**It takes a long time to get ready for the job, especially for the girls, because we're expected to wear a full face of make-up and have perfect hair – and that takes a long time. It's horrible getting up extra early in the morning and having to go through all of that rigmarole, even before finding out if you're actually going to be working that day or not.**

Lois, Sales Assistant

**To do this job you have to already have an ingrained passion for the products and the lifestyle. You have to care about your appearance.**

Alex, Sales Assistant

**In retail certain brands have an image attached to them and you need the right people to fit them. You're not going to be able to sell make-up if you've never worn make-up in your life, for example. Unfortunately the retail sector can be pretty bad at prejudging individuals, so it's all the more important that we, as recruiters, match the personalities to the brands.**

Richard Tomlinson, Xpress Recruitment Ltd, Edinburgh

Discussions with low-paid workers in the hospitality sector similarly revealed that visibly demonstrating determination and drive to succeed in front of employers can be advantageous when it comes to being considered for future progression opportunities.

**When I was a night porter, I made sure I did voluntary work in the kitchen alongside this. I funded this by part-time bar work as well. But I believe this helped me to progress from being a porter to a kitchen assistant, because my employers saw me taking the initiative and actively trying to gain further experience.**

Marco, Former Kitchen Porter

Our focus group discussions with agency care workers revealed that they, too, share the same concerns over their demeanour in the workplace and the necessity to appear positive to ensure continuity of work. This is, interestingly, in spite of the fact that agency workers are essential to the UK care industry, as they provide vital support to existing services.

**Agency workers need to smile everyday just to ensure that they will be asked back and will get another job.**

Rosalie, Mental Health Support Worker

**It can be emotionally draining. But you always need to pretend to be positive in this job – to put a good face on – else you're not going to get any more work.**

Maike, Former Residential Support Worker

**Agency workers are absolutely important to the care industry. The UK care sector could not deliver on its expectations without the support of agency staff. Many care homes are heavily reliant on agency staff to fill gaps in their services. These come about through a lack of recruitment in the area, staff sicknesses, staff holidays, etc. – basically all the normal things for which temporary agency staff are a saving grace.**

Steve Morgan, Bailey Care Services, Melksham

In addition, our conversations with both sets of industrial workers revealed the need to be physically fit as well as appearing positive. The workers we spoke to described their industrial jobs as physically demanding – therefore making it difficult to progress and reap rewards for those who are not in good shape or good health. It is clear from talking to the two focus groups that you need to be young and agile to do a lot of industrial-based work successfully and to meet the ever-increasing targets. Those with good fitness levels can, therefore, be seen as better placed to progress in their work and earn bonuses. This underlines the important role that recruiters have to play in ensuring that workers fully understand the

physical demands of a role from the outset, so that they can make an informed decision about whether to take up the role or a temporary assignment.

**I do the picking in the warehouse. This means I'm responsible for getting the products off the shelves and putting them on trollies. Some days I can walk more than 20km just doing this, and then there's all the lifting. You need to be fit.**

David, Warehouse Worker

**Sometimes the work can be dangerous, when you're operating machinery or working with chemicals. You need to be alert all the time. You can't afford to be tired.**

Andy, Metals Production Plant Worker

**It can be very tiring when you find yourself on your feet steaming and pressing [clothes] all day. It's hot work and it's exhausting.**

Kristina, Warehouse Worker

**[The industrial workforce] is generally a young workforce which is physically fit. It can be a challenge for anyone older to keep up.**

Neil Cook, Encore Personnel Services, Leicester

**IT'S NICE TO  
KEEP GETTING  
ASKED BACK TO  
WORK HERE WEEK  
AFTER WEEK. IT  
SHOWS YOU'RE  
APPRECIATED. IT  
SHOWS YOUR  
JOB COUNTS.**

**ALINA, WAREHOUSE WORKER**

**06**

**WORKING  
ENVIRONMENTS**

As comparisons between the two focus groups of industrial workers show, working conditions are an important factor in promoting workforce satisfaction and can play a key role in boosting the drive and motivation of staff to progress and perform well in their jobs. The warehouse workers we spoke to, for example, liked the camaraderie in their place of work and the unique opportunities they have to learn from each other. The more established workers particularly appreciated being asked to use their knowledge and experience to help new starters in the job, and the majority of focus group participants were able to cite examples of when they had received praise from the management for their efforts. It is clearly important for temporary agency workers to feel valued in the workplace and there was a clear sense that being asked back for repeat assignments adds to their own personal feelings of self-worth and purpose in their jobs.

**It's a multicultural environment. You have people here from Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, so you get to learn other languages all the time from your colleagues as well as English. Everyone's friendly. It's a nice place to work.**

Alina, Warehouse Worker

**Because I've been working here for over a year, I often get asked to teach new people how to do things – particularly those who don't speak English very well. That can be a nice feeling – to be trusted to help someone.**

Milda, Warehouse Worker

**It's also nice to keep getting asked back to work here week after week. It shows you're appreciated. It shows your job counts.**

Alina, Warehouse Worker

**The managers here do praise you and that's a nice feeling. It's also nice to see the management connecting with the staff like this. It's good for our morale and I guess it's also good for the managers to know that they can trust their workers.**

Milda, Warehouse Worker

By contrast, the metals production plant workers we spoke to were not so enthusiastic about their place of work. They evidently do not share the same opportunities to interact with their colleagues in the workplace and did not speak highly of their working conditions. Praise from their managers seems non-existent, as do in-work benefits, and the workers seem disillusioned with their day-to-day experiences. One temporary agency worker even cited an incident of foul play from

another permanent employee of the plant where she works, explaining that they had tried to prevent her from reaching her daily targets. When she reported this incident to her supervisor in the plant, she said that she found there was no formal grievance procedure and nobody took her issue seriously. It is a condition of REC membership that every member agency has in place a formal complaints procedure to deal with any problems that may arise and we suggest that employers also put in place similar grievance procedures to assist their workers and enhance workforce morale.

Moreover, the metals production plant workers we spoke to expressed frustrations about the fact that everybody in the plant could be working for different pay and conditions, as their salaries and schedules are dependent on the agency through which they are employed and the length of time they have been in service. Obviously Agency Workers Regulations (AWR) apply. Nevertheless, the workers said that this knowledge does nothing for staff morale and impinges on any possible sense of camaraderie that could develop amongst the workforce. This suggests that employers would be wise to put effective HR systems in place to manage their staff effectively and to help temporary agency workers, in particular, to feel equally valued in their positions, ultimately adding to their productivity.

**It's isolating. Everyone works on their own, at their own machines.**

**Nobody talks. You have to adopt an 'each to his own' mentality to survive.**

Barbara, Metals Production Plant Worker

**It's important to feel appreciated but our supervisors seem to forget this. Employers should give their staff more recognition for what they do and praise them if they do something well. A simple 'thank you' goes a long way and those are the things that make you go home feeling good with a smile.**

Barbara, Metals Production Plant Worker

**They [the managers] didn't take the complaint seriously. They are clearly not bothered about workplace ethics and staff contentment.**

Kataryna, Metals Production Plant Worker

**Some agencies pay better than others for the same job with the same company. Our salaries depend on the agency we got the job through and also the name of the job we're given.**

Nkembi, Metals Production Plant Worker

From comparing the attitudes of the two industrial focus groups, then, it is evident that ensuring a pleasant working environment and putting in place procedures for good practice and management can go a long way in helping workers to increase their productivity levels and to enhance their own skillsets through interaction with their colleagues and supervisors. Employers will already

be aware of their obligations under the Agency Workers Regulations (AWR), but it is often helpful to ensure that workers also understand the implications of the AWR. This will help to ensure that temporary agency workers feel as valued as the permanent employees with whom they work, ultimately helping to avoid any potential disputes and feelings of insignificance that can impact on a worker's commitment to the job in hand.

Similarly, the different experiences of the two sets of industrial workers show there are clear connections to be made between workers' experiences with recruiters and the way they feel about their jobs. Ensuring a good match of candidates to the jobs on offer appeared vitally important in this sector. For example, the focus group of warehouse workers had nothing but praise for their recruiters, who they said took time to get to know them and to help them, whereas the focus group of metals production plant workers said their experiences over the years with various agencies was less good. They reported being particularly frustrated with the fact that recruiters did not appear to understand fully the realities of their jobs and working conditions.

**I was shocked at just how helpful the agency was when I went to them. The staff there went over and above what I had expected them to do. They even drew me a map telling me how to get to the warehouse for my interview. This was much different from what any other agency has ever done for me before.**

Kristina, Warehouse Worker

## SPOTLIGHT ON GOOD RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

'I don't have to do it, but I regularly go in to the warehouse to undertake the same work as our temps do. I don't tell them I'm going in, and many think I'm just a new guy in the warehouse, but I want to get a feel for what it's really like for them. I want to know where I am placing my workers and what work they're being asked to do.'

'I'm also on site every week in an official capacity to make sure that the workers see me. This is important because some of our workers are not confident enough in English to pick up the phone to call the office, and sometimes it's also impractical to expect them to travel into the centre of town to come into the office themselves. We have a policy with those companies that employ 10–50 of our temps to allow one of our consultants to go in to the company once a week to hold "temp surgeries" – this way we can ensure that our workers know they have a chance to come and see us with any issues they may have.'

Neil Cook, Encore Personnel Services, Leicester

Our discussions with workers across all four sectors in this study also revealed the importance of employers considering workers' well-being in the workplace for heightening their job satisfaction levels and also their comfort and productivity. The retail workers we spoke to were particularly frustrated with the expectation that female workers often have to wear high heels in order to be guaranteed

work on the shop floor. They said that they found wearing high-heeled footwear especially impractical and they raised concerns about the impact of this upon their own health.

**A lot of the brands we work for require the girls to wear high heels – they won't employ you if you don't. And then they expect you to stand in them all day. It's agony, and it's bad for your feet and back.**

Joanna, Sales Assistant

The retail workers also said that they found it unfair that they are expected to wear high heels, smart, fashionable clothes and expensive make-up to work on a daily basis, but that they do not get any help from their employers or agencies to buy these items.

**Factory workers get tools provided and the protective clothing they need for their work, but we don't get any help for the clothes and make-up we're expected to wear.**

Alex, Sales Assistant

The care workers we spoke to similarly expressed frustrations about potential hazards to their own health in the workplace. Conversations with the care workers revealed that they are not often given the opportunity to work in a safe environment because of preconceived ideas that employers have about their abilities, and also the working practices of the care homes that they are sent to. In some cases, workers reported not being given the appropriate equipment to use and in others they reported finding themselves faced with a dilemma of whether to risk their own health by adopting the bad practices of some of the care homes they work in. Moreover, agency staff in the care sector reported frequent failures of care homes to inform them of potential risks from service users, which have put them in potentially dangerous and upsetting situations.

**We're not provided with sufficient equipment to do our jobs – be it rubber gloves to wipe up mess or aprons to protect our clothing. It's like we're second-class citizens or something.**

Kenneth, Mental Health Support Worker

**And even if we do have the equipment, we're encouraged not to use it – like hoists, for instance. There might be a hoist there but the permanent staff member you're working with might encourage bad practice and tell you not to use it. This can cause bad backaches for us. It's a double-edged sword – it's either going in there trying to encourage good practice and risking not being asked back again, or adopting their bad practices and coming back to the job but running the risk of damaging your own health and well-being.**

Gift, Residential Support Worker

**I was once put to work one-on-one with a male service user who had mental health issues, but I was not given enough information about him before I started – with no risk assessment at all. So, I quickly found myself in a very difficult and dangerous situation.**

Hyginus, Care Home Support Worker

**It's like they expect you to be psychic as an agency worker, but we're not. We need information about who we're going to be dealing with and we're often not given enough information – if any at all – about our clients.**

Maike, Former Residential Support Worker

Further to this, owing to the nature of their work, care workers can often find themselves restricted in their work by applications for essential DBS checks. This can be a particular cause for concern for the unemployed seeking work in this sector, since applying for these checks entails lengthy delays and can often come at a cost to the aspiring workers themselves.

**DBS checks aren't transferable from job to job and new DBS checks take time to get, so this can sometimes put you off moving to a new job.**

Hyginus, Care Home Support Worker

**All the paperwork and applications could mean you're facing a further two months of unemployment while you wait for your clearance to come through, and you could even have to pay for it yourself.**

Maike, Former Residential Support Worker

**The time from the date of applying for a job to the date you start a job is longer in care than in any other sector. This is because of the time delay in passing all the checks and getting the necessary certificates. The need for compliance in this sector makes it very difficult for you to start quickly. It requires patience and dedication.**

Maike, Former Residential Support Worker

The agency workers we spoke to in the hospitality sector also expressed frustrations over some aspects of their working environments. For them, it is clear that their main hazard comes from the long hours that they are expected to work when on assignments. Conversations with the hospitality workers revealed that they work considerably longer hours than low-wage workers in other sectors, yet they may not always be sufficiently remunerated for the hours they work. The workers explained that any overtime is often worked for free. They also said that hospitality shifts, although lengthy, are not always guaranteed, so some workers take on a variety of assignments to ensure themselves enough earnings to live on. This means that workers' efforts to increase their salaries can sometimes leave them tired and unable to perform to the best of their abilities, thus reducing their

productivity. Workers and employers should, however, both be aware of their responsibilities under the current Working Time Regulations to protect the health and safety of the UK workforce.

**In hospitality there is the problem with shift-stacking. This is where workers line up multiple shifts in a row with different companies, so they could end up working over 60 hours a week. Hospitality employers have told us that because of this staff are exhausted on shift and perform less well. Employers can combat this by offering people more substantial and predictable hours.**

Shaun Rafferty, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

**The hospitality sector is probably the most difficult for workers. In hospitality, the average hours are very low – a bit like in care. You could find yourself with two or three events to work on over a three-day period, but then you could find yourself with nothing at all for the next five days. So this means that average weekly hours in this sector are between 15 and 20 hours a week and that's quite difficult to sustain you.**

Tina McKenzie, PeoplePlus NI

**The hours in hospitality can be atrocious. Considering the long hours you have to work, chefs don't really get that much money. For example, you could easily find yourself working a 70–80-hour week, but you'll still only get paid for your contracted 40 hours. In other sectors you would get paid for your overtime, so we should be asking ourselves, why isn't the industry standard higher in hospitality? Why does the hospitality sector pay so low?**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

WHEN YOU  
HAVE MONEY,  
YOU HAVE MORE  
SATISFACTION. BUT  
WHEN YOU HAVE  
MORE FLEXIBLE  
HOURS, YOU ALSO  
HAVE MORE TIME  
FOR YOUR FAMILY  
AND OTHER THINGS  
YOU APPRECIATE.

BARBARA, METALS PRODUCTION PLANT WORKER

07

PAY AND REWARDS

Our focus group discussions revealed that many workers in low-paid jobs do have opportunities to supplement their weekly earnings. The warehouse workers we spoke to, in particular, are happy with their weekly wages. They said that this is largely because of the fact that they receive monetary bonuses if they meet their daily targets, giving them added opportunities to supplement their set pay. The industrial plant workers, too, revealed that they could supplement their earnings by working overtime if they want it, giving them the added flexibility to control their weekly salaries.

**The bonuses are good. You can receive an extra £50 a day if you work hard enough. These bonuses, providing you make your targets of course, make it possible for you to put some extra money away in the bank each month.**

Kasha, Warehouse Worker

**I find there are always opportunities to work overtime when I want them, but I think that can depend a lot on the company that you work for.**

Alina, Metals Production Plant Worker

**The industrial sector mainly relies on entry-level, minimum-wage jobs. But there are always opportunities for overtime and shift enhancement, so you can find that your wages can often come out higher than stipulated on paper.**

Tina McKenzie, PeoplePlus NI

Further to this, the migrant workers amongst the industrial workers that we spoke to had themselves observed that there are notable differences in perceptions between their own positive attitudes towards their pay and those of their British colleagues, who they said are more inclined to see their salaries as insufficient to meet their basic needs, suggesting that the way in which workers regard pay and rewards can be closely related to cultural attitudes and perceptions.

**The British people at work don't understand us. They complain about the pay and say they find it difficult to live on each month. But the Eastern Europeans like me are happy with the money we get and we find it more than enough to live on. We even manage to save some!**

Alina, Warehouse Worker

The retail workers we spoke to were also engaged in target-driven work but, unlike the situation for the industrial workers, they explained that the rewards for meeting these targets can often be disappointing. The effect of this is that the temporary agency workers feel they have little opportunity to increase their pay, while they know that permanent employees do receive commission for their

sales and can thus supplement their income. Our conversations with the workers revealed that this knowledge can sometimes create tensions between permanent employees and temporary agency workers, since the temporary workers we spoke to said they feel that permanent employees of a company sometimes attempt to take their sales pitches for their own personal profit.

**I was once given a £500 daily target and I was worried about meeting it. But I ended up making £1,900 that day. I received no thanks at all for doing this, but at the time that didn't matter to me because I was just so pleased at the outcome – considering I had started the day worried sick about it. Looking back on it now, though, I realise it was disappointing not to receive any acknowledgement of my efforts whatsoever.**

Giorgio, Sales Assistant

**I once sold £2,000 worth of goods on one day working for a company but, despite getting a 'thank you' from the manager, I was still only paid the usual £50 for my hard day's work. I received no commission because I was just a temp, and not even a one-off token of thanks. This left me feeling disappointed.**

Lois, Sales Assistant

**The permanent staff where you're placed can often be unhelpful towards you as a temp because they ultimately want the commission for the sale themselves. This teaches you to be more assertive. I don't blame them, though. I used to have a permanent contract working for a company myself, but I gave it up because I got quite a low hourly rate and this made me reliant on getting commission to top up my salary. But, of course, commission isn't always guaranteed because it all depends on your sales on the day. I much prefer my current temporary contract. At least I know how much I'm getting each week and don't have to rely on sales.**

Lois, Sales Assistant

It is also important to note that not all low-paid workers view rewards in their jobs as being purely in monetary terms. The warehouse workers we spoke to, for one, appreciated the other bonuses that they receive in terms of free tea and coffee in the workplace and a subsidised canteen. They said that this makes them think more highly of the company that they work for.

**We are finding that benefits in kind such as being fed at work are seen as positive. If something is cashable then people worry that it affects their benefits or is swallowed up by their overdraft. With things like food, by contrast, or season tickets for travel or childcare vouchers, people feel they're actually getting something out of it.**

Shaun Rafferty, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

It is equally noteworthy that some of the low-wage industrial workers we spoke to were, interestingly, willing to sacrifice their already mediocre pay levels if it meant their jobs would bring them additional personal benefits instead. These were cited as more freedom, flexibility or simply the chance to do something they enjoy. This shows that even at the low-skilled, low-wage level, workers are not only seeing progression in monetary terms, but also in ways that suit their lifestyles and personal ambitions.

**What's important for me is how I feel about a job, not the money I get from it. I would easily take £6.50 an hour if I liked a job – and that would be doing something fun and exciting; something interesting; something where I can make a difference.**

Milda, Warehouse Worker

**It's true, when you have more money, you have more satisfaction. But when you have more flexible hours, you also have more time for your family and other things you appreciate, so then you have more happiness.**

Barbara, Metals Production Plant Worker

## ANDY'S STORY

Andy has worked in the industrial sector in Dudley for over 25 years. He's currently on a temporary contract working at a local metals production plant. He has gradually increased his skillset over the years by doing things like learning to drive a forklift truck, which he says has helped him to vary his day-to-day work. Before taking his current job, Andy had a permanent contract with another metals company in the area. However, Andy decided to quit his permanent contract because, even though it paid better than his current job, it involved a longer commute to work and longer working hours once there. All of this added up to him having far less time to spend with his children. The crunch time came for him when his son turned round to him one day and asked him if he was still his dad because he hardly gets to see him anymore. Andy was so upset by this and it made him realise that 'there's more to life than money'. He said: 'Getting £1,000 a month doesn't mean anything to me if I have to sacrifice the rest of my life and my kids for it. I'm actually happier now that I have £400 a month less but I get to spend more time with my sons.' Andy now has firm plans to undertake an HGV driver training course to enable him to move into haulage and logistics. He feels that becoming a delivery driver will give him the freedom and flexibility he now needs. He said: 'It feels like the next logical step for me to make – I started out driving forklift trucks, now it's time for lorries.'

Moreover, the sentiments of the industrial workers tie in neatly with those of the care workers we spoke to, who also defined the rewards of their job as the knowledge that they have helped someone and improved their day-to-day life.

**It's great when you see such an improvement in others and you know you've been a part of it. You can get no better reward than that. Sometimes it's the most difficult clients you get that end up giving you the most joy.**

Wade, Special Needs Teaching Assistant

**I once saw a client recover after suffering a stroke. After about a year of working with her she made dramatic improvements. I was proud to be part of her recovery process.**

Kristina, Domiciliary Care Worker

The agency care workers we spoke to revealed that there are no prospects for them to receive bonuses in their work and that it is also difficult for them to receive personal acknowledgement for their efforts because of the team-working nature of their jobs and the pressures that understaffing puts on the sector. For this reason, it appears particularly pertinent that care workers are able to see outside the box when it comes to evaluating rewards for their job and that they do not just view these in monetary terms.

**You don't receive any bonuses at all in this trade, only when you recommend a friend to the agency. Plus, we're not allowed to accept gifts from service users or their families.**

Eugene, Part-time Support Worker

**Part of the reason we're not rewarded is because we work in a team and that makes it hard for any one person to receive a bonus or even just a simple 'thank you'.**

Alice, Care Home Assistant

**Understaffing in the care sector creates a problem. It makes it difficult for any one person to be thanked for what they do.**

Wade, Special Needs Teaching Assistant

By contrast, from our discussions with hospitality workers, the prospects they have to achieve other non-monetary rewards from their low-paid work appear vast. The agency workers we spoke to clearly appreciate the additional opportunities that their work can bring to them, such as the chance to attend a special event or to travel to a place that they wouldn't otherwise go to. Their personal experiences and career trajectories show that the hospitality industry is a truly global industry, which enables people to consider working abroad as part of their career paths.

**In hospitality, you really do have opportunities to 'access all areas' if you're working at special venues or events – such as catering for a major sporting event or for a concert. You wouldn't otherwise get to go to these things, let alone go backstage, so working at them can bring real privileges.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

**I've been a chef for the past 20 years. I'm from Italy originally and I've travelled around the world in my job. It's been a great ride so far!**

Alessio, Chef

**The magic about hospitality is that there are always going to be opportunities. As more nations around the world become prosperous, there are always going to be new restaurants and hotels popping up, and they are always going to be in need of expertise and knowledge. The hospitality sector is one of the only constantly growing industries in the world. By working in the sector, people have a unique opportunity to travel, to experience new cultures, and to learn new languages. Jobs in this sector can hold promise of an exciting journey and an adventure.**

Salvatore Fernandez, Antal International

Another way that hospitality workers view rewards in their occupations is through the opportunities that they have to cook for famous institutions or people, and through the opportunities they have to leave their mark on the industry. All of these occasions have visibly boosted the confidence of the hospitality workers we spoke to in our focus groups, and can be used as selling points to take the workers further in their careers.

**In my opinion, some of the proudest moments in this job come from who you cook for. It's a good selling point when looking for future work.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

**My proudest moment was when I worked in Selfridges Oyster Bar for four months, about two years ago. I was scared at the beginning because of its prestige and good reputation, and also because I'd never cooked in front of people before. But doing this job increased my confidence as a chef and I actually came to enjoy it.**

Alessio, Chef

**When I was a sous chef, I was given a range of ingredients and told to make something from them. I ended up making a paella dish. Eventually the couple who ate it asked to see the chef who made it. I was obviously nervous about going through with this, but the couple ended up**

complimenting me on the meal and they tipped me directly because they were well aware that if they tipped the waiting staff, I likely wouldn't see any of the money. This really was an uplifting experience for me, and the best thing was that the restaurant then kept that dish on the menu, so I left behind a lasting legacy.

Matt, Consultant, Blue Arrow, London

**PEOPLE SHOULDN'T  
BE ASHAMED  
OF HAVING A  
LOW-SKILLED JOB.**

SALVATORE FERNANDEZ, ANTAL INTERNATIONAL

**08**

**BRAND/EMPLOYER  
REPUTATION**

Despite often being characterised as 'bad' jobs, our focus group discussions with workers from all four sectors in this study revealed that the majority of workers are proud of their work and recognise the potential it holds for them to progress in their careers. The workers' positive attitudes towards their jobs could largely be seen to be down to the reputation of the brand or the company that they work for. Most notably, for the focus group of warehouse workers we spoke to, there was clearly no sense of embarrassment about their low-paid jobs, with many of them actually praising the company for which they work for its good reputation in the local area.

**Everyone here knows it's a good place to work. It's a nice feeling to say you work somewhere with a good reputation.**

Kinga, Warehouse Worker

Similarly, it is clear from the conversations we had with the group of sales assistants in the retail sector that they, too, could find a reason to feel proud of their jobs because they enjoy working with certain brands and in certain stores. The workers we spoke to said they use the good reputation of these companies to elevate their own social status amongst friends, and they also feel that by latching onto the good name of some companies, they will increase their prospects of future employment.

**I'm perfectly happy to talk about my work to others and tell them what I do. It can be made to sound really glamorous. All I need to do is tell people I work in Harrods or Selfridges and that generally goes down well. People are impressed.**

Alex, Sales Assistant

**I'm pleased I did this. I can now approach companies and say I've worked for certain big brands in famous stores. The job definitely opens doors and it should hopefully enhance my employability in the future.**

Chloe, Sales Assistant

The experience of these agency workers illustrates that there are certainly positive experiences to be had in low-skilled, low-wage retail jobs and that the negative press the sector receives is not always commensurate to the real-life worker experiences in this sector.

**There's sometimes a stigma around low-skilled jobs and it's mainly a British thing. People feel they are no good for their street cred. It's understandable in a way – we've all done it and laughed at our friends stacking shelves in supermarkets when we were younger. This hasn't helped the image of these jobs when in actual fact they are very honourable things to be doing.**

Neil Cook, Encore Personnel Services, Leicester

**The problem with the retail sector is that it just had bad press all the time. All you hear about are the anti-social working hours and the poor pay. Plus the papers constantly seem to be reporting on big businesses that have gone into administration month after month, which gives retail the reputation that it is just not as secure as some of the other sectors, and this puts people off.**

Richard Tomlinson, Xpress Recruitment Ltd, Edinburgh

The reputation of the catering profession can, however, be seen as a double-edged sword for workers in the hospitality sector. On the plus side, the hospitality workers we spoke to feel that being a chef generally has a good reputation and is a well-respected career choice, largely thanks to the recent popularisation of the industry via major TV series such as *MasterChef*.

**It can be a good chat-up line telling people you're a chef!**

Matt, Consultant, Blue Arrow, London

**The TV coverage of chefs has been a good thing because it brings us prestige that we wouldn't otherwise have – particularly since a lot of good chefs are usually shut away and you never actually get to see what they can do.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

However, the hospitality workers we spoke to also recognise that the popularisation of cooks has brought many unskilled people into the industry. This has left some of the chefs feeling that their hard-earned skills are being undermined by inexperienced workers who have just entered the sector because it is a fad.

**Thanks to a rise in cookery shows like *MasterChef*, there are now a lot of unprofessional people in the kitchen, who think they know what to do just because they've seen it on the TV, and it's bringing our profession down!**

Alessio, Chef

**I've worked for some big businesses in recent years, which have to bring things in like croissants because their staff just don't have the skills or expertise to make them themselves. As a chef, this is disappointing to witness.**

Anna, Pastry Chef

In addition, the hospitality workers we spoke to recognise that the good social standing of chefs has come at the expense of other catering professions, which they feel are now looked down on by wider society, despite being essential to the wider catering industry.

**The downside of all the TV coverage is that there's now more respect out there for chefs than there is for kitchen porters, or waiters and waitresses.**

Ritchie, Branch Manager, Blue Arrow, London

**The work [of a kitchen porter] is backbreaking, but when you tell people what you do then their reaction is always 'is that all?' Or they ask you when you are going to get a proper job.**

Marco, Apprentice, Blue Arrow, London

**There's a lack of appreciation for small catering jobs too. These are often scoffed at and you never receive gratitude for doing them.**

Duban, Chef

**The key is getting people to change their perception of these jobs. People shouldn't be ashamed of having a low-skilled job. A bank clerk provides a service, just like a car mechanic provides a service, and both of them are generally well respected for the services they provide. People like waiters, housekeepers and kitchen porters also provide a service, but this type of service is generally looked down on. Why is this? Why should this be any different? At the end of the day being a waiter, a housekeeper and a kitchen porter is a necessary, valuable service just like all the rest. The main challenge is getting people to feel proud about their low-wage jobs.**

Salvatore Fernandez, Antal International

**VERY FEW JOBS ARE  
INTRINSICALLY BAD.  
WHAT IS A BAD JOB  
TO ONE PERSON  
COULD BE A GOOD  
JOB TO ANOTHER.**

SHAUN RAFFERTY, JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

**09**

**CONCLUSION**

From the qualitative research conducted to produce this report, including focus group discussions and interviews with members and stakeholders, we conclude that:

**Working in a low-skilled, low-wage position is an integral part of many people's career paths.** In the care, retail and hospitality sectors in particular, elementary jobs are seen as necessary ways to enable workers to acquire the skills they need for more advanced managerial or supervisory roles. People who go on to have higher-level, higher-wage positions in these sectors have often started out in lower-paid jobs.

**Working in a low-skilled, low-wage job can also open up opportunities to progress horizontally within a specific sector.** While widely perceived to be 'generalist' positions, low-skilled, low-wage jobs can be used by candidates to experiment with different aspects of their respective sectors and then use the opportunities they provide to specialise in a certain area. Developing a wide skillset also sets workers up for managerial positions, for which it is integral to empathise with the employees they will eventually supervise. Horizontal progression within low-paid jobs could, therefore, stand workers in good stead for higher-level positions in the future.

**Low-skilled, low-wage positions are particularly attractive options for those without qualifications or employment experience.** Often the only prerequisite for progression for workers in all four sectors is a positive attitude and a friendly appearance, making low-skilled, low-wage jobs widely accessible to a large section of the population.

**People can support themselves through low-skilled, low-wage jobs while they are trying to progress in other aspects of their lives.** This is particularly the case for workers enrolled on college or university programmes in pursuit of relevant qualifications. It is also the case for workers with children, who appreciate the often temporary and flexible nature of these jobs to allow them time to spend with their families.

**Working in a low-skilled, low-wage job can open up career options which people have perhaps never considered before.** This is of particular benefit to those pursuing a career in more precarious, creative industries (such as music, dance or theatre), where they may not be guaranteed to secure employment. Working in a low-paid, elementary job is also a key way to entice people to aspire to a higher-level position in a particular field, as many of the chefs we spoke to, for example, were inspired to enter the catering profession after having worked as waiters during school holidays.

As well as the clear distinctions that emerged between the four sectors in this study, conversations with the research participants suggested that low-skilled, low-wage jobs can offer distinct opportunities for people at various transition points in their working lives:

### **For new entrants to the sectors**

For young people entering the jobs market, working in a low-skilled, low-wage position can:

- Help them to gain varied and often necessary work experience in preparation for future higher-level positions. In the retail, care and hospitality sectors in particular, it can provide them with a clear pathway to obtaining the future position that they aspire to.
- Enable them to earn an income while studying for work-related qualifications or, in the case of hospitality, also open up opportunities for them to work while travelling and gaining worldly experience.
- Offer them the opportunity to experiment with different types of work within a sector and use the opportunity to get a taster of different jobs, products or workplaces.
- Allow them to supplement their salaries with bonuses, especially in the industrial sector, where the work is particularly tailored to the young, fit and agile.

### **For those who want to progress**

For people looking to progress in their careers, low-skilled, low-wage positions can:

- Offer them the opportunity to specialise in a niche area of their sector to advance their prospects of progression into specialist areas of work facing skills shortages.
- Allow them to develop a wide, horizontal skillset within a sector to facilitate prospects of promotion into a supervisory or managerial role.

### **For the unemployed**

For the unemployed seeking to get back into work, low-skilled, low-wage jobs can:

- Offer an easier route back into employment because many low-paid, elementary positions rely on personality rather than qualifications or previous experience.
- Facilitate their entry back into the jobs market because many low-skilled, low-wage jobs do not require a lengthy application process or entail a tough interviewing stage. (However, this is not the case for jobs in care.) Many of these jobs can be obtained by approaching stores, cafes or factories directly and asking if they have any vacancies.
- Provide them with the kick-start to their careers that they need, as they can quickly acquire new skills and experiences to start to rebuild their CVs.
- Offer them a quick way to start earning money again.

## Opportunities and challenges

Although low-skilled, low-wage positions clearly bring advantages to workers at different stages of their working lives, our conversations with low-paid workers also highlighted some of the challenges that workers can face in these positions in terms of career progression.

### Working hours

Low-skilled, low-wage jobs can be integral to a career path in many sectors, but they may entail long working hours – especially in the industrial, care and hospitality sectors as a result of shift-working patterns. This has also become a feature of the retail sector owing to the recent demand for 24-hour supermarkets and petrol stations. These long hours can impact on workers' abilities to spend time with their families or pursue other activities and interests.

### Training and development

Despite not requiring qualifications or previous experience, low-paid, entry-level jobs often require a considerable amount of in-work training to ensure that workers acquire the skills that will allow them to progress in their careers and to be more productive and effective for their employers. In some cases, workers can be expected to undertake non-essential training without pay during working hours and this can be stressful for a worker when having to choose between the prospects of enhancing their skillsets on the one hand and increasing their immediate earnings on the other.

### Progression prospects and careers advice

In the majority of sectors, there are opportunities for both vertical and horizontal progression out of low-paid jobs, but these pathways can be hidden, and opportunities for workers to unlock these hidden progression prospects can often depend on their own initiative and drive, as well as on honest careers advice. Employers currently believe that they offer this information to workers and services such as Jobcentre Plus continue to act as a source of careers advice. However, low-paid workers do not find this advice effective or sufficient to meet their needs and more needs to be done to help them learn about career pathways and options in their respective sectors. This is particularly true for people already in employment, who may be looking for advice on progression.

### Openings and risks

Low-paid jobs can be a useful entry point into the UK labour market; however, it must be borne in mind that there may be less job security in these positions, because of the temporary nature of some of the work, and that some people may not like the reputation of the company or the type of work they are undertaking. Temporary jobs may also be particularly useful for those wanting to progress in other aspects of their lives, such as students or those trying to make it in other

more precarious industries. However, it is important that all workers get treated the same way by employers – with the same pay, working conditions and hours.

### **Variety versus monotony**

Although many low-paid jobs offer people the chance to experience different tasks, companies or working environments, the nature of some low-skilled work can also be monotonous, particularly in the industrial and retail sectors, where workers may find themselves operating the same machinery every day or standing for long periods in isolation with no customers. To encourage workers in these positions, it is imperative that workers are made to feel valued by employers showing appreciation for their efforts.

**Very few jobs are intrinsically bad. What is a bad job to one person could be a good job to another; the key is to try to match hours and duties to a person's circumstances.**

Shaun Rafferty, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

**A GOOD FIRST  
CONVERSATION  
FOR AN EMPLOYER  
TO HAVE WITH  
A WORKER  
IS WHETHER  
THEY WANT TO  
PROGRESS OR NOT.**

RACHEL SMITH, CBI

**10**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Below are the actions that we think should be taken to build on the findings of this report and to mitigate some of the challenges we have identified within our research for low-skilled, low-wage workers to progress. These recommendations recognise that recruitment agencies, employers, government and other key organisations can all play a part in ensuring that low-paid workers can benefit from their occupations and are supported and empowered by their work and the opportunities that it holds for them.

## Recruitment agencies

**Having a job is always better than being out of work. Entry-level, often lower-paid jobs help people get a foot into the labour market and can act as a springboard to better-paid work. So recruiters of these jobs are doing good work and they need to remember that.**

Lena Levy and Rachel Smith, CBI

Recruitment agencies play a vital role in putting people into essential positions. They can act as the first port of call for many workers. In this respect, recruitment agencies must continue to provide workers with detailed information on their rights to avoid any potential worker exploitation at the low-paid level. This is already a duty in law and is also required by the REC's code of professional practice.

### Recruiters should:

- ALWAYS take time to understand their candidates, particularly their previous experience, qualifications and career motivations. This will ensure a better jobs match and ease workers' potential frustrations with their positions.
- Provide workers with clear information about potential job vacancies, including appropriate job titles and detailed job descriptions to avoid workers experiencing any potential disappointment or worry.
- Consider producing visual materials for their workers, such as videos or illustrated leaflets, particularly for companies for which they regularly recruit.
- Make efforts wherever possible to understand the work that is being offered to the candidates and the tasks that they are expected to undertake in their jobs. Going into a company and experiencing the jobs being recruited for can provide useful insights to ensure a better candidate–job match, as well as enhance workers' perceptions of recruiters themselves.
- Encourage workers to develop their skillsets to equip them for future career progression. This could, for example, include partnerships with companies and local education providers to offer essential training to workers before or after their shifts. This will not only facilitate the workers' progression but also give the agency's staff an added value to the employer.

- Make efforts wherever possible to remain visible and to be available to workers, so that they know where to turn in case of any issues they may have, and broker issues between worker and employer as appropriate.

## Employers

**A good first conversation for an employer to have with a worker is whether they want to progress or not. It's important that businesses allow this conversation to happen and for them to be honest with their workers at the start about their prospects for progression. This way, both parties will know where they stand.**

Rachel Smith, CBI

The way in which employers recruit, train and ultimately treat all their workers, whether permanent or temporary, is vitally important, to enhance both their own feelings of self-worth and productivity levels. Employers should be doing their utmost to ensure that workers understand how their role fits within an organisation and their prospects for progression. If in-placement training is necessary for workers to carry out their jobs properly, employers should consider paying workers for their time, especially if they have to undertake this training in working hours. To ensure a happy workforce, employers should also make efforts to ensure a pleasant working environment. Workers clearly appreciate small touches, such as free tea and coffee provisions, and it is also important for them to know that any grievance they may have will be taken seriously by senior management teams. By treating temporary and permanent staff in the same way and offering similar incentives to both, such as bonuses, employers could do a lot to ease workplace tensions and boost the confidence of low-paid, temporary workers in particular. To ensure high levels of productivity from agency workers, it is imperative that they know their employers see them as people and not just as a 'churnable', replaceable commodity.

### Employers should:

- Consider providing agency workers with the training they need for their jobs and pay them to undertake this, especially if they are sacrificing a potential shift for it.
- Display trust in new starters and get them started on the job properly as soon as possible to help develop their confidence and productivity levels quickly. It is not conducive to attracting and retaining staff if new starters are going to be used predominantly for menial, tedious and unpleasant tasks.
- Take time to understand their workers and set up regular performance reviews to help them understand their progression opportunities. Appraisals and awards can also help to raise worker satisfaction levels and give them added incentives to boost productivity.

- Make efforts to create a pleasant working environment that considers the workers' health and well-being.
- Consider offering workers added benefits, such as free tea/coffee provisions, subsidised canteens, bonuses and discounts, or help with travel, childcare and equipment.
- Ensure there are sufficient mechanisms to deal with staff complaints for employees and workers at all pay levels.
- Reconsider using online application processes for low-skilled, low-wage positions, since these can unfairly filter out those with no qualifications or with long periods of unemployment.
- Review current hiring procedures and the way in which flexible staff are sourced and managed.
- Work with representative bodies in their sector to actively promote careers in the sector – in particular, by raising awareness of progression opportunities.

## Government

Low-skilled, low-wage jobs provide vital services to British society. The government should be acting to protect workers who assume these occupations, while also taking steps to facilitate their progression into higher-level positions in the future in order to raise UK productivity levels. Cuts in government funding were cited in all sectors as disadvantaging low-skilled, low-wage workers from gaining the training and experience they need to progress in their careers. In the care sector in particular, which is vital to government, much work needs to be done on workforce planning to ensure that companies have the staff they need.

### The government should:

- Evaluate the rollout and impact of Universal Credit and take special care to understand how it affects those at the low-skilled, low-wage levels.
- Do more to enforce the National Minimum Wage and Working Time Regulations to ensure that low-paid workers are not being exploited, and seriously consider the repercussions of the forthcoming National Living Wage on the care sector in particular.
- Provide employers with guidance on their rights and obligations regarding low-paid and, particularly, temporary workers.
- Ensure that any proposals to changes in funding structures do not limit opportunities for low-skilled, low-wage workers to acquire the skills that could advance them in their careers.
- Continue to invest in apprenticeships to get people into entry-level positions.
- Consider allocating employer-led funding to training for workers aspiring to assume jobs where there are distinct skills shortages, such as in haulage and logistics.
- Adopt a balanced approach to immigration to allow companies to source the candidates they need.

- Figure out an attractive and sustainable career pathway for vital sectors such as care to enhance public services and fill any skills shortages.

## Jobcentre Plus

Low-skilled, low-wage jobs provide workers with an easy route into the UK labour market. They are particularly beneficial to getting new starters onto the career ladder, as well as getting people out of long-term unemployment. In this context there is definitely scope for organisations providing work experience and career advice to work more closely with recruitment agencies to identify the realities of low-skilled, low-wage positions and to help people to unlock the potential to progression.

### Jobcentre Plus should:

- Encourage its staff and particularly its 'work coaches' to fully understand the jobs on offer. This way they will be able to convey the right messages to workers, provide information on possible career paths and boost the aspirations of jobseekers.
- Research and understand potential career paths in individual sectors by working more closely with recruiters and employers.
- Facilitate the training that recruiters and employers say is required in areas experiencing skills shortages.
- Try to be more aspirational about conveying the opportunities of progression that low-skilled, low-wage jobs hold to new entrants, particularly in sectors such as retail, care and hospitality, where candidates are often expected to assume lower-paid jobs before progressing up the jobs ladder.
- Work more closely with recruitment agencies to ensure a better match of candidates to the positions on offer.
- Work more closely with recruiters as well as schools and colleges, particularly those offering specialist courses in hospitality and retail, to provide essential career guidance to new entrants, as well as scope out opportunities for work experience in these sectors.

## Press and media

**In the press and in the media, there's always bad news about the care sector. This has had an adverse impact on the industry's image and attracting would-be trainees. Consequently, recruitment has become a real challenge. People will be put off if the incentives are just not there.**  
Steve Morgan, Bailey Care Services, Melksham

Difficulties with attracting and retaining workers to low-skilled, low-wage positions in all the sectors in this study are not helped by the fact that the wider societal attitude towards these occupations is often pejorative and disparaging.

Negative perceptions of these jobs are highly influenced by media stories, which focus on the instability of the retail sector, for example, or report on shoddy care practices and the failures of the NHS. The power of the media to improve public perceptions of certain professions has, conversely, also been proven by the hospitality sector, which has seen the status of chefs soar as a result of popular cookery programmes. If the media were to publicise the positive sides of lower-level, elementary professions in this way, it would do a lot to promote respect for low-paid workers and, in turn, increase their self-worth. The government could also take the lead in this area to ensure wider societal respect for low-skilled, low-wage occupations.

**The media should:**

- Harness its potential to shed a positive light on low-skilled, low-wage occupations to improve the public perception of these jobs.
- Focus on the positives that low-skilled, low-wage workers bring to our society, rather than only the negative stories.
- Demonstrate appreciation for low-skilled, low-wage workers to promote respect for their work in wider society.

# APPENDIX

The following two questions were asked as part of the REC's *JobsOutlook* tracking survey – the first question was from June 2015 and the second from July 2015. The total sample size was 200 employers.

1. In your view, on a scale of 1–5 (with 1 being not very effective and 5 being very effective), how effective are the following individuals or organisations at giving people advice on career progression?

	Employers generally	Line managers	Schools, colleges and higher education institutes	Jobcentre Plus	Recruitment agencies	Family and friends
0 – don't know	6%	6%	13%	30%	27%	7%
1 – very ineffective	2%	0%	7%	2%	3%	2%
2 – quite ineffective	11%	9%	20%	12%	22%	28%
3 – neither effective nor ineffective	14%	12%	8%	8%	27%	23%
4 – quite effective	48%	45%	34%	38%	21%	38%
5 – very effective	19%	28%	18%	10%	0%	2%
Net effective	67	73	52	48	21	40
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

2. In your view, what is the single most important factor contributing to poor career progression for low-skilled workers? [select one response only]

(a) There are limited training and skills development opportunities	15%
(b) Low-skilled workers lack confidence	15%
(c) Too few progression routes from low-skilled roles to middle- and high-skilled roles	21%
(d) High churn amongst low-skilled workers	21%
(e) Few flexible working options for those who cannot work full-time but want to progress	10%
(f) Unsure / don't know	17%

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