

Question: “Are the aims and purpose of Jobcentre Plus (JCP) sufficiently ambitious?”

Expertise

1. I, Tony Wall, am a Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University in the UK and a Distinguished Professor in Viet Nam. I am the Principal Investigator for a national-scale project called “Empowering Ethnic Minority Youth in Vietnam to Re-Vision the Future of Decent Work” (“Re-WORK”) funded by the British Academy¹. I share findings from this research and engagement programme which explored the employment experiences of certain groups in society who are typically least able to access and participate in Decent Work².

Introduction

2. This evidence relates specifically to the question: *Are the aims and purpose of Jobcentre Plus (JCP) sufficiently ambitious?* It draws specifically on the project indicated above.
3. The Jobcentre Plus website states that it aims “to help people of working age find employment in the UK”. On gov.uk, there is a slightly expanded aim, where JCP “helps people move from benefits into work and helps employers advertise jobs. It also deals with benefits for people who are unemployed or unable to work because of a health condition or disability”³.
4. This submission essentially argues that the JCP’s aim is not ambitious enough, and that instead, it should be aspiring to raise national standards and expectations of employment by aiming to “help people of working age find **decent work**” and “help employers advertise **decent jobs**”.

Shifting from employment to decent work

5. Employment does not automatically lead to improved quality of life or economic growth, and some working conditions may not be mentally or physically safe or positive (for example, the precariousness of gig working). Recent evidence suggests that around 1 in 10 of the UK workforce are “likely to be stuck in low-paid, insecure or otherwise uncertain work” and have been since tracking began⁴. Similarly, in the UK, “around two-thirds of working-age adults in poverty actually lived in a household where someone was in work... The poverty rate for part-time workers was nearly triple that for full-time workers (22% compared with 8%)”⁵.
6. Decent Work is a special category of employment which “sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men”⁶. Or in other words, a type of work with “fair

¹ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/youth-futures-empowering-ethnic-minority-youth-vietnam-vision-decent-work/>

² <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/vietnam-digital-economy>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments-for-work-pensions/about>

⁴ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/nov/almost-one-ten-uk-workers-increasingly-trapped-precarious-work>

⁵ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2025-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/decent-work-faq-making-decent-work-global-goal>

income, job security, personal and professional development, freedom to express concerns, and equality”⁷.

7. Evidence now confirms that Decent Work is highly spatial⁸ – it reflects regional differences in pay, the geographic variation of certain industries and roles, as well as the characteristics of those jobs in terms of pay, job security, and occupational and organisational culture (which influence possibilities to express concerns, and practices for diversity, inclusion and equality).
8. At the same time, employment, welfare, and education policies cannot be seen in isolation from one another. There is evidence that when isolated, policies can interact to undermine each other⁹. Importantly, because of the spatial nature of Decent Work, JCP needs to develop strong local intelligence of opportunities, but these must be aligned to national investments in jobs and careers to stimulate wider conditions (i.e. wider national policy will always constrain what is possible at the JCP level).
9. Evidence suggests that other than broader economic development measures and conditions, vocational education is a particularly strong policy intervention associated with Decent Work¹⁰. JCP should develop a more significant role in facilitating or developing such opportunities in collaboration with local vocational education and training providers.
10. Evidence suggests that activities which promote employability empowerment¹¹ are associated with Decent Work, and so should be targeted. These include activities which can demonstrate the functions to enhance an individual’s (1) self-awareness, confidence, and a belief in changing their livelihood situation, (2) contributions to collective action in relation to improving their livelihood situation (e.g. collaborating with friends or family to learn or create new opportunities), (3) abilities to influence others in relation to their livelihood situation, and (4) connectedness between disparate social contexts to understand own skills and enable additional learning (i.e. across family, community and work contexts).

Recommendation

11. Raise the ambition of JCP from “helping people of working age find employment” to “helping people of working age find **decent work** in the UK” and “helping employers advertise **decent jobs**”.
12. Practically, this means re-considering all of JCP’s activities in terms of the extent to which they support employability empowerment, such as enabling people to translate skills developed in one sphere of life to another. These capabilities have a strong association with Decent Work and so provide a strong basis on which to re-assert a new, ambitious aim for JCP.

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⁷ Wall, T., Ngo, N.T.H., Luong, P.M., Ho, T.T.H., Hindley, A. (2024). ‘Decent Work’ as a higher education policy myopia: an ecosystem framework for policy-making, *Studies in Higher Education*. 49 (12), pp 2396-2410.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2306355>.

⁸ Wall, T., Ngo, N., Foster, S., Luong, P., Ho, T., Hindley, A., and Stokes, P. (2024) The spatialization of Decent Work and the role of employability empowerment for minority ethnic young people in emerging economies. *PLoS One*, pp. 1-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0297487>.

⁹ Wall, T., Ngo, N.T.H., Luong, P.M., Ho, T.T.H., Hindley, A. (2024). ‘Decent Work’ as a higher education policy myopia: an ecosystem framework for policy-making, *Studies in Higher Education*. 49 (12), pp 2396-2410.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2306355>.

¹⁰ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/policy-interventions-for-minority-ethnic-young-people-and-decent-work/>

¹¹ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/policy-levers-for-empowering-decent-work/>