# Decent Work in Wales

A qualitative research project exploring the experiences of low-paid workers in Wales

*research conducted in collaboration with*

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**OXFAM**

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# Decent Work in Wales

1. **Executive Summary**

   **1.1 Introduction**

This report provides summary findings  and analysis of qualitative research undertaken for Oxfam Cymru on the question of what makes "Decent Work", especially for women, in Wales. This report describes the methodology used, the characteristics of the participants and the key findings. The report follows [research by Oxfam Scotland](#) which took a more wide-ranging approach to looking at Decent Work[1].  Some of the methodology used by Oxfam Scotland has been adopted for this research.

The report is qualitative and does not seek to present statistically reliable findings.  It does, however, identify trends and patterns in the responses of participants and - where possible - participants with different characteristics.

   **1.2 Methodology**

Six focus groups were held between April - June 2017. The purpose of the focus groups was to hear the experiences and aspirations of low-paid female workers in Wales, with a view to identifying barriers to the labour market and using findings to inform development of employment strategies and initiatives.  Focus groups had the following structure:

- A "Storytelling Exercise" in which Participants were asked to provide a brief history of their employment, and to identify the good and bad points
- An exercise which asked participants for their responses on what is important to them on the five key themes related to working conditions: pay, terms of employment, the organisation/company, health and safety, and work/life balance.
- A more detailed look at 26 specific factors which could add up to "decent work" under the five themes[2].   These are set out in Annex 1 below.

   **1.3 Demographics**

48 people took part in the focus groups, 46 female and 2 male, all aged over 18. Groups took place in 6 communities across Wales: 2 in the Valleys, 1 urban, 2 in cities and 1 in a rural area. The majority of respondents lived in urban settings although over half could be said to be in peripheral economic areas.

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[1] Decent work for Scotland's low paid workers; a job to be done; Francis Stuart, Hartwig Pautz and Sally Wright 2017

[2] These were the same themes used in the Oxfam Scotland research.

5 focus groups were conducted in English, and 1 was conducted in Welsh. Half the participants were in work at the time of the focus groups. Almost all participants in work were in low paid, often insecure work. Over a third of participants were graduates and relatively few had no identifiable qualification.

### 1.4 Findings

Recurrent issues in story-telling about important, positive and negative experiences of work were:

- The challenges of **balancing work with caring responsibilities**, in particular childcare, was identified as an important element of work in itself, and a frequent illustration of positive and negative employment experiences
- Similarly, **job satisfaction and work being worthwhile** and having meaning in line with people's values emerged as an important theme, and was illustrated through both positive and negative experiences
- Interestingly, **pay and conditions** were recognised as being of fundamental importance and used to illustrate the benefits of positive work, however in contrast they were not flagged as primary negative features
- **Interpersonal relationships and a good social environment at work** featured clearly, with social aspects of work being recognised both as important and as a positive feature of employment. Conversely, the quality of management was reflected as a negative experience. This shows the primary importance of work paying sufficiently well to help meet basic requirements to all groups.

These are similar but not identical to the main findings of the Scottish work on what made decent work for women. The additional issue identified in Wales about job satisfaction may be explained by the high proportion of third sector employees in the Welsh research.

Demographic variables did not offer firm conclusions on the importance of different variables, apart from age. This is mostly due to the small sample size.

Of the identified five "decent work" themes the ones that were felt to be most important in the issues identified by respondents were:

- Terms of Employment
- Pay
- Work/life balance (and paid holidays is clearly seen to help here)
- The ethical nature or value of their work

Detailed discussion of the factors which all contribute to "decent work" also align with the priority themes, however were sometimes expressed in different ways by participants. Out of 210 total votes on factors which affect decent work, the top five choices account for only around a third of the total votes cast. This adds weight to the finding that there is no single, or top factor that is deemed most important by participants and that "decent work" is made up of interactions between numerous different factors.

## 2. General Methodology and Demographics

### 2.1 Purpose

Six focus groups were held in April, May and June 2017. The purpose of the groups was to hear the experiences and aspirations of low-paid female workers in Wales, with a view to identifying barriers to the labour market and using findings to inform the development of employment strategies and initiatives.

### 2.2 Structure of focus groups

The research in the focus groups had several strands whose findings are described through this report:
- The first was a "Storytelling Exercise" where participants were asked to provide a brief history of their employment and to identify the good and bad points.
- The second was an exercise which asked participants for their responses on what is important to them on the five key subjects related to working conditions.
- The third delved into this area in more detail and looked at 26 specific factors which could add up to "decent work" under the five main headings. These were the same factors as used in the Oxfam Scotland research.

### 2.3 Demographics

The focus groups were delivered in accordance with agreed diversity among different types of geographical area. One group was to include male as well as female participants (the rest were to be female only) and one was to be conducted in Welsh (with the rest in English). 48 participants took part (46 female, 2 male). The geographical locations of the focus groups were as follows:

| Type of area | Location | Language | Gender | No of participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valleys | Neath, Dulais Valley | English | Female | 8 |
| Valleys | Penywaun, Cynon Valley | English | Female | 7 |
| Urban | Caernarfon | Welsh | Mixed | 7 (5 women, 2 men) |
| City | Swansea | English | Female | 8 |
| City | Newport | English | Female | 12 |
| Rural | Llandrindod Wells, Powys | English | Female | 6 |

**2.4 Participants**

The breakdown for participants across the six groups as a whole was as follows:

2.4.1 Participants by area type

| Area type | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| Valleys (2 groups) | 15 |
| Urban | 7 |
| City (2 groups) | 20 |
| Rural | 6 |

2.4.2 Participants by current employment activity

| Employment activity[3] | Number |
|---|---|
| Working | 24 |
| Not working | 21 |
| Prefer not to say | 3 |

2.3.3 Participants by employment status

| Employment status | Number |
|---|---|
| Registered carer | 2 |
| Employed (salary not stated) | 1 |
| Employed £0-£5k | 4 |
| Employed £5k-£7k | 1 |
| Employed £7k-£15k | 6 |
| Employed £15k-£20k | 7 |
| Employed £25k-£35k | 2 |
| Prefer not to say | 3 |
| Retired | 1 |

[3] For the purposes of this research, officially recognised carers and self-employed are included as working.

| Self-employed | 1 |
|---|---|
| Unable to work | 3 |
| Unemployed | 17 |

### 2.4.4 Participants by age

| Age | Number |
|---|---|
| 18-24 | 8 |
| 25-33 | 8 |
| 35-44 | 10 |
| 45-54 | 12 |
| 55-65 | 8 |
| 65+ | 1 |
| Prefer not to say | 1 |

### 2.4.5 Participants by education

| Education level | Number |
|---|---|
| Prefer not to say | 11 |
| GCSE | 10 |
| HNC | 2 |
| A'Level | 8 |
| University | 17 |

### 2.4.6 Consideration of variables

We were able to examine responses by the following variables:

- Location
- Age
- Employment status
- Educational qualification

Taking into account the small sample size for this research, and the small number of men (n=2) in the research group, a breakdown by gender is not possible.

Two other factors which were not explicitly identified as demographic variables, but were prominent in qualitative responses were :

- Caring responsibilities for children, although many did volunteer information around family responsibilities
- Wider family income, although a few participants did volunteer information.

Given that participants volunteered information about these factors, this would suggest these factors are worth recording and investigating in any further research undertaken in this area.

### 2.5.Methodological limitations

One of the issues that the research analysis has identified was the difference in findings between strands 2 and 3. Despite asking similar questions on broadly the same topics, they often produced quite different results. This is partly the result of the way questions were understood, and partly the result of the interactions between different elements of "decent work". It has made identifying headline findings from elements of the report challenging. However, this is likely to be indicative of the complex nature of understanding "decent work" and its relationship with individual circumstances.

On those questions which developed as a group discussion there was a risk that people voting or making choices later in the group may have been influenced by what others said. In particular, focus group facilitators reported that those not working did on occasion follow those who were working.

# 3. Employment: positive and negative experiences

Recurrent issues emerged throughout this section of the focus groups:

- The challenges of balancing work with caring responsibilities, in particular childcare, was identified as an important element of work in itself, and a frequent illustration of positive and negative employment experiences.
- Similarly job satisfaction and work having meaning in line with people's values emerged as an important theme, and was illustrated through both positive and negative experiences
- Interestingly, pay was recognised as being of fundamental importance and used to illustrate the benefits of positive work, however in contrast these were not flagged as primary negative features
- Interpersonal relationships also featured clearly, with social aspects of work being recognised both as important and as a positive feature of employment. Conversely, the quality of management was reflected as a negative experience.

## 3.1 Important factors for work

One of the first discussions covered the issues respondents were felt to be important for work in general.  These were dominated by four main groups of issues described below.

### 3.1.1 The social aspects to work

"I like being in a place where you can talk and be yourself.  I like office work – in the shop and in the factories I found it harder, it was a very controlled environment, they timed you when you went to the loo: there was a little light above the door which went on as the lock went down!" (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"Jobs get you out of your home and widen your horizons.  If you haven't got one, you are quite isolated.  Even if you're just a volunteer, then you get to know about things, find out about jobs – you've got to be in it to win it!  A good work-life balance is important though.  It's not all about pay." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"I can't say what my worst job is right now because work gives you a purpose." (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys*)

### 3.1.2 The ability to link work with caring responsibilities

 "I gave up work to care for my terminally ill Dad and moved back to Wales.  I haven't worked since and I have good qualifications but childcare is too expensive and difficult. I am a single mum to 2 children and when I can work is determined by my children which is why I became self-employed" (*Participant, Penywaun, RCT*)

"The thing that would put me off working now is the fact that my son is so young, I don't want to miss out on anything, on his important years. Once he's in school I can think about my career again; and childcare is too expensive for us to afford now... My

partner has a full time job, I have considered getting a part time job, but childcare is too expensive for that." (*Participant, Newport*)

"The charity/company is very accommodating; I took a sabbatical year when I had 'burn out' (very long hours, for instance, four weeks with 90 and 100 hours a week). On the sabbatical I thought about children and decided that I had to stop and make it happen; this may be detrimental to my career but I want it." (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys*)

### 3.1.3 The need for decent pay

"All my work decisions have been driven by my need for money.  I have left jobs either because of bad employers or bad money.  What I love about working is going out to support people and volunteering.  I hate management; they don't live in the real world." (*Participant, Newport*)

"I love being able to make [my own] money and support my family through my work." (*Participant, Newport*)

"I haven't worked for years.  To work, I would need to really want to do the job and be better off than I am at the moment.  It would be brilliant if the wages would pay the rent!" *(Participant, Swansea)*

### 3.1.4 A sense of job satisfaction

"In my home I was not encouraged to work by my family because of cultural issues.  I was married young. If it was not for inspirational women in my life who encouraged me, I wouldn't be where I am now." (*Participant, Newport*)

"I have high job satisfaction, even if the politics (with a small 'p') can be frustrating, driven by politicians rather than the community, and the job is precarious (I'm currently facing redundancy)." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"[The supermarket and manufacturing company jobs were] dead end jobs for me, there was nothing to achieve, so I went to college and did a computer degree and got a job in business banking." (*Participant, Newport*)

## 3.2 Positive aspects of work

The discussion also covered the positive aspects of respondents' current or most recent work.

### 3.2.1 The social aspect of work

"I like the work I do as it's with people, and I love people." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"The best thing is that you are very well supported through crises – if your child's ill, it's OK, you can just go.  The other people are good here.  I'd rather work here than in an office where there was lots of backbiting." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"The good points were that I met some lovely people and I really felt that I was making a difference to the people I did spend time with.  I also had some really good

colleagues and working close to home was also a really good positive." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"In these rural areas people say 'You're a nice person', and you get promoted and start to feel valued. You can still lose your job but people will remember you and support you" (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys*)

"It's a fabulous job because of the people" (*Participant, Penywaun, RCT*)

### 3.2.2 Job satisfaction and feeling that work had meaning

"I absolutely adore my job, I love the community and I moved here because there is a lovely community spirit. Even though people don't work here they help each other. I have loved all the children and I hope I have made a difference in their lives." (*Participant, Penywaun, RCT*)

"What I like about work is the social aspect of it… You make friends for life through work. The pay is nice too and it's nice to know that you have earned the pay rather than been given to you." (*Participant, Penywaun, RCT*)

"I worked for [a national charity]. I loved it. I loved being able to build people up for months and seeing the results. It was rewarding." (*Participant, Newport*)

"I get a lot out of making a difference in a life. I like being valued, coming away and saying 'I did a good job today'." (*Participant, Swansea*)

"I really enjoyed it [working for a fostering network] – I got to help people, I got to see what I was good at. I enjoyed the travelling, staying away from home with someone else cooking and looking after me – but it wears thin after a while". (*Participant, Swansea*)

### 3.2.3 Making enough money to provide for one's family

"I enjoy getting good money from working and really enjoy working with children, I find it rewarding and this is the most important element for me as long as it feeds me." (*Participant, Newport*)

"I worked in a respite home for elderly people. I loved the caring, doing activities with the residents and having fun. The staff team were a real bonus." (*Participant, Swansea*)

"It's my safe zone and it pays the rent." (*Participant, Caernarfon*)

### 3.2.4 Managing work with bringing up children

"Generally, I have been very happy. Teaching has been my idea of a good job. It's ideal with having children because you all have the school holidays." (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys*)

"I loved having my own business, being self-employed, because it offered me more flexibility and better hours. It was also more rewarding seeing my kids develop and achieve so much." (*Participant, Newport*)

### 3.3 Negative aspects of work.

The discussion also covered the negative aspects of respondents' current or most recent work. Recurrent themes included:

#### 3.3.1 Quality of management

"The bad points of my previous experiences of work has been the management/senior staff; for example, at [my last job], the manager cared more about the money coming through the doors than the animals[4] or staff". (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"I worked in lots of cafes and an old people's home, [a] factory which I hated – I hated the bosses there, they were arrogant. The people were nice. I was a cleaner there and the management looked down on you." (*Participant, Penywaun, RCT*)

"I earnt my best money when I was at [the second] supermarket, but the management was bad and inflexible; for example, being a minute late was made a big deal out of; they had no perspective." (*Participant, Newport*)

"It was an awful experience... [The manager] never asked you to do anything, she ordered you! She was a bully. She brought her personal problems into work." (*Participant, Swansea*)

"I had a woman boss. She tried to stop me from getting maternity benefit when I became pregnant. That was unpleasant." (*Participant, Swansea*)

"I got a job in a factory making clothes; I loved it...but the boss always kept me at the bottom." (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys*)

#### 3.3.2 A lack of job satisfaction

"I worked for a year as a receptionist for [a local authority department]. I hated the job; being cooped up in an office all day... I just couldn't stay." (*Participant, Swansea*)

"The short-termism of funding is a bad point about this job, and the socio-economic factors that you can't do anything about. It's hard to listen to stories about benefits sanctions, knowing you can do nothing about it." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"I would regularly do 60 hours weeks and really loved helping people with mental health problems – you could see real changes in people and I got some people out of the system. But it was really frustrating seeing things happen and not being able to do anything about it, or not being listened to when you say that something has to change." (*Participant, Swansea*)

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[4] The job was at an animal sanctuary

"My worst job would be the job I have right now – cleaning. I'm good at it but I am asked to do way more than the time I have to do it in. It's not fulfilling at all. If work is a big chunk of my life, I've got to like it!" (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys)*

### 3.3.3 Poor conditions at work

"Once I got pregnant, there was no safeguarding support available when I was working with vulnerable people and that was a hazard, being pregnant. I was offered office work instead but I didn't want to be stuck in an office, and I loved the challenge of working with people, so I gave it up." (*Participant, Newport)*

"Things that bother me about my work is politics, bad pay, short staffing, poor resources and bureaucracy." (*Participant, Newport)*

"I left [a clothing retailer] after a year because the pay was too low (£1.50 an hour). Also, there were people who were on more hours than me and they made me work harder than they did. It wasn't fair." (*Participant, Swansea)*

"I went to work in another job but the targets were impossible. I only lasted eight months at that, then I left with no other job to go to. But I couldn't stay there, the senior manager was really inexperienced." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley)*

"The bad points of my previous job was that I was gaining little job satisfaction based on the systems put in place; the conflicts between providing a valued service to help people against achieving targets; I found the process meaningless." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley)*

"The negatives are around the company; they've been cutting our benefits over time such as reducing the overtime rate." (*Participant, Caernarfon)*

"Now I also do homecare for a local company. I've been there a year and I'm on a "zero hours" contract. I can do between 20 and 40 hours for them… you're paid house to house, it's not so bad for me as they're mostly in the village next to the village where I live. They don't pay petrol for the first seven miles; the management are sly." (*Participant, Caernarfon)*

### 3.3.4 The difficulty of balancing work with childcare

"There are lots of women doing men's jobs, so it's great. But it's the worst industry [corporate entertainment - festival/circus etc.] for women with families and the pay is not good." (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys)*

"The challenge at the moment for me is that I have chosen to have a baby and I'm single. I'm not convinced my career is compatible with having small children." (*Participant, Llandrindod Wells, Powys)*

"There is a lack of understanding about childcare requirements." (*Participant, Penywaun, RCT)*

## 4 . Understanding Decent Work

### 4.1 Decent work

The participants were asked in two linked exercises for their views on what is important to them on the following five themes (which originated with the Scottish work) which impact on job satisfaction. These were:

- Pay
- Terms of Employment
- The Organisation/Company
- Health and Safety
- Work-Life Balance.

There is a clear correlation between the issues raised in section 3 and the themes explored in this section of the report.

### 4.2 Most important themes for "decent work"

42 out of the 48 participants took part in the process. 6 people from across 4 of the areas decided not to participate in this exercise for a number of different reasons. Participants grouped the factors identified within each theme, and identified the following as the most important to them:

| Factor | Votes |
|---|---|
| Able to pay bills (pay theme) | 27 |
| Ethical/moral considerations[5] (organisation/company theme) | 20 |
| Family time (work/life balance theme) | 19 |
| Holiday entitlement (terms of employment theme) | 18 |
| Flexible working (terms of employment theme) | 17 |

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[5] All focus groups were held/facilitated by community based organisations (churches, a community voluntary council, community organisations etc.).  Given the nature of these organisations and the people that they attract and support, this could be a factor in this relatively high figure.

### 4.2.1 Breakdown of theme by area type (most popular)

The location of participants was not a significant factor in their responses. One might have expected transport to be mentioned more by those in more peripheral areas but it was not a dominant theme.

| Area type | Most popular (votes) |
|---|---|
| Valleys | Able to pay bills (11/14) |
| Urban | Supportive colleagues (5/6) |
| City | Able to pay bills (9/16)<br>Family time (9/16) |
| Rural | Appropriate pay in relation to responsibilities (5/6 participants)<br>Holiday entitlements (5/6) |

### 4.2.2 Breakdown of theme by area (most popular)

| Area | Most popular (votes) |
|---|---|
| Dulais Valley | Holiday entitlement (7/8 participants)<br>Training opportunities (7/8) |
| Penywaun, Cynon Valley | Ability to pay the bills (5/6)<br>Consistent/reliable pay (5/6)<br>Equal pay for men and women (5/6) |
| Caernarfon | Supportive colleagues (5/6) |
| Swansea | Ability to pay the bills (6/7 participants) |
| Newport | Family time (7/9 participants) |
| Llandrindod Wells, Powys | Appropriate pay in relation to responsibilities (5/6 participants)<br>Holiday entitlements (5/6) |

### 4.2.3 Breakdown of theme by working v not working (most popular)

This shows the primary importance of work paying sufficiently well to help meet basic requirements to all groups.

| Employment status | Most popular (votes) |
|---|---|
| Working | Able to pay bills (9/17) |
| Not working | Able to pay bills (15/22) |
| Prefer not to say | Able to pay bills (3/3) |

### 4.2.4 Breakdown of theme by employment status (most popular)

It is not possible to draw definitive conclusions from these responses that one factor is more important for people depending on their employment status. The variety of responses by employment status indicates the complex nature of how participants understand "decent work" based on their own circumstances.

| Employment status | Most popular |
|---|---|
| Registered carer | Able to pay the bills (2/2) <br> Supportive company (2/2) |
| Employed (salary not stated) | N/A (only 1 participant) |
| Employed £0-£5k | Able to pay bills (2/2) <br> Consistent/reliable pay (2/2) <br> Ethical company (2/2) |
| Employed £5k-£7k | N/A (only 1 participant) |
| Employed £7k-£15k | Holiday entitlement (3/5) <br> Ethical company (3/5) <br> Good work colleagues (3/5) |
| Employed £15k-£25k | Holiday entitlement (6/6) |
| Employed £25k-£35k | Able to pay bills (2/2) <br> Holiday entitlement (2/2) <br> Ethical company (2/2) <br> Good working atmosphere (2/2) <br> Family time (2/2) |
| Prefer not to say | Able to pay bills (3/3) |
| Retired | N/A (only 1 participant) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Self-employed | N/A (only 1 participant) |
| Unable to work | Able to pay bills (2/2)<br>Family time (2/2) |
| Unemployed | Able to pay bills (6/14)<br>Flexible working (6/14)<br>ethical company (6/14)<br>family time (6/14) |

### 4.2.5 Breakdown of theme by age (most popular)

The breakdown by age shows more distinct differences. Those aged between 25 and 44 value flexible work and family time above other age groups, most likely indicative of the parenting responsibilities that many women might have at this age. Oxfam Scotland found similar findings although their much greater sample size allowed them to be more definitive[6].

| Age | Most popular theme |
|---|---|
| 18-24 | Able to pay bills (5/8) |
| 25-33 | Family time (6/7) |
| 35-44 | Able to pay bills (5/9),<br>Flexible working (5/9),<br>Family time (5/9) |
| 45-54 | Able to pay the bills (7/8) |
| 55-65 | Flexibility 5/8 |
| 65+ | N/A (only 1 participant) |
| Prefer not to say | N/A (only 1 participant) |

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[6] Ibid pp16-17

### 4.2.6 Breakdown of theme by education (most popular)

Educational attainment did not appear to be a key determinant of preference.

| Educational attainment | Most popular |
|---|---|
| Prefer not to say | Able to pay the bills (5/8), Family time (5/8) |
| GCSE | Able to pay the bills (5/9) |
| HNC | Able to pay the bills (2/2) Ethical company (2/2) Flexibility (2/2) |
| A Level | Able to pay the bills (5/8) Family time (5/8) |
| University | Able to pay the bills (10/15) |

## 4.3 Exploration of "decent work" themes in greater depth

The main points shared by participants fell under several broad headings that related to the pay, organisation/company and work/life balance themes.

### 4.3.1 Decent pay

"Everyone should be paid enough to enable you to experience life and culture, and not miss out." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"Why should people who work full time have to rely on tax credits? The work should give them enough." (*Participant, Swansea*)

"Two weeks before you get paid it's usually bread and milk." (*Participant, Caernarfon*)

"It's an achievement to see food in the cupboard because I've gone without it in the past." (*Participant, Caernarfon*)

### 4.3.2 Feeling Valued at work

"It's important to work somewhere where you can move around and be active, where there's an informed culture promoting this." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

"You want an employer that's into self-development, (who) will make you the best you can be." (*Participant, Caernarfon*)

"You want an organisation where the staff believe in the work; the organisation and staff have values; some worry more about how the organisation is perceived." (*Participant, Caernarfon*)

"Decent work would be where you don't have to feel guilty for taking holidays – in the factories everyone had two weeks off, all at the same time.  Now you're made to feel guilty if you take that long without looking at your emails or checking your phone." (*Participant, Neath, Dulais Valley*)

### 4.3.3 An understanding of employees' caring responsibilities

"There should be free childcare, or better childcare support.  There is no discount for people with multiple children which makes no sense to me!" (*Participant, Newport*)

"There needs to be more understanding of employees who have children...and their needs." (*Participant, Newport*)

"Family friendly policies are important too; to have that flexibility.  It makes you more loyal." (*Participant, Caernarfon*)

"There's something about supported employment for those who have physical impairments or mental health illnesses.  Getting employers to understand what it's like and to help manage the triggers in work." (*Participant, Caernarfon*)

## 5. "Decent work" factors

The five main themes influencing "decent work" (see section 4.1 above) were further broken down into 26 "decent work" factors (see Annex 1 for a full list).

### 5.1 Most popular factors

The focus groups were asked to vote on these 26 identified "decent work factors", plus those additional indicators that had been identified in the previous exercise for that particular focus group. Out of 210 total votes, the most popular factors in terms of number of votes attracted were as follows:

| Factor | Votes |
|---|---|
| Work that provides me with sense of purpose and meaning | 17 |
| Job security | 15 |
| Paid holidays and paid sick leave | 14 |
| An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt | 14 |
| Supportive colleagues | 13 |

There is relatively little difference between these preferences. The top five choices account for only around a third of the total votes cast, again making clear that there is no single (or even two or three) factors that are deemed most important by participants. This supports the findings evidenced in the Scottish research about the interlinked nature of so many of the different factors, and that this may well have led to different answers to similar questions.

### 5.1.1 Most popular vote by local area

| Local Area | Most popular vote |
|---|---|
| Dulais Valley | ● Work that provides me with a sense of purpose or meaning (5 votes) |
| Penywaun, Cynon Valley | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt (4 votes); and<br>● a job where there's not discrimination because of who I am (4 votes) |
| Caernarfon | ● Work that I believe is socially worthwhile (5 votes) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Swansea | ● Supportive colleagues (4 votes) |
| Newport | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt (6 votes) |
| Llandrindod Wells, Powys | ● Understanding children/family needs (4 votes) |

<u>5.1.2 Breakdown of voting by working v not working (most popular)</u>

No substantial difference between those in work and those not was identified.

| Employment status | Most popular factors |
|---|---|
| Working (105 votes) | ● Work that provides me with sense of purpose and meaning (10 votes)<br>● Paid holidays and paid sick leave (8 votes)<br>● Job security (7 votes)<br>● Supportive colleagues (7 votes)<br>● Work that I believe is socially worthwhile (7 votes) |
| Not working (80 votes)<br><br>*3 factors that were equally the most popular* | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt (6 votes)<br>● Job security (6 votes)<br>● Work that provides me with sense of purpose and meaning (6 votes) |
| Prefer not to say (15 votes) | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt (3 votes)<br>● Supportive colleagues (3 votes) |

## 5.1.3 Breakdown of voting by employment status (most popular)

| Employment status | Most popular factors |
|---|---|
| Registered carer | • n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Employed (salary not stated) | • n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Employed £0-£5k | • Available and effective representation to raise my voice within the workplace (3 votes)<br>• Work that provides me with sense of purpose and meaning (3/20) |
| Employed £5k-£7k | • n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Employed £7k-£15k | • Job security (2 votes)<br>• Work that I believe is socially worthwhile (2 votes)<br>• Flexibility in choosing my working hours (2 votes)<br>• Understanding children/family needs (2 votes) |
| Employed £15k-£25k | • Job security (2 votes)<br>• A job in which there is no discrimination because of who I am (2/15)<br>• Supportive colleagues (2 votes) |
| Employed £25k-£35k | • n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Prefer not to say | • An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt (3 votes)<br>• Supportive colleagues (3 votes) |
| Retired | • n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Self-employed | • n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Unable to work | • n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Unemployed | • An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt (6 votes)<br>• Work that provides me with sense of purpose and meaning (6 votes) |

| Those that preferred not to say | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt (5 votes)<br>● Family time (5 votes) |
|---|---|

### 5.1.4 Breakdown of voting by age (most popular)

These findings are in contradiction to those found in the earlier section on "decent work' (section 4.2.5) where people in the 25-44 age range rated the ability to juggle work and care as the most important factor. However, as votes were cast for a much wider range of factors the numbers cast for each one are now so small that they become less reliable.

| Age | Most popular factors |
|---|---|
| 18-24 (out of 30 votes) | ● Work that provides me with a sense of purpose and meaning (4 votes)<br>● Work that I believe is socially worthwhile (3 votes)<br>● Flexibility in choosing my working hours (3 votes)<br>● A job that is easy to get to from where I live (3 votes) |
| 25-33 (out of 35 votes) | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted without getting into debt (4 votes)<br>● Job security (4 votes) |
| 35-44 (out of 50 votes) | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted without getting into debt (6 votes) |
| 45-54 (out of 45 votes) | ● Supportive colleagues (4 votes)<br>● Work that I believe is socially worthwhile (4 votes)<br>● Work that provides me with a sense of purpose and meaning (4 votes) |
| 55-65 (out of 30 votes) | ● A supportive line manager (4 votes)<br>● Flexibility in choosing my working hours (3 votes)<br>● Understanding children/family needs (3 votes)<br>● Paid holiday and paid sick leave (3 votes) |

| | |
|---|---|
| 65+ | ● n/a (only 1 participant) |
| Prefer not to say | ● n/a (only 1 participant) |

<u>5.1.5 Breakdown of voting by education (most popular)</u>

| Education | Most popular factor |
|---|---|
| Prefer not to say (out of 50 votes) | ● Job security (5 votes) |
| GCSE (out of 40 votes) | ● Work that I believe is socially worthwhile (4 votes)<br>● Work that provides me with a sense of work and meaning (4 votes)<br>● A safe working environment free from physical and mental risk or harm (4 votes) |
| HNC (out of 10 votes) | ● Opportunities for promotion and career progression (2 votes) |
| A Level (out of 30 votes) | ● An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted without getting into debt (3 votes)<br>● A job in which there is no discrimination because of who I am (3 votes)<br>● Understanding children/family needs (3 votes) |
| University (out of 70 votes) | ● Regular and predictable working hours (8 votes) |

## 5.2 Additional factors identified

Putting these discussions into context with the 26 decent work factors that had already been identified, the participants in the focus groups identified the following additional factors:

| Additional factors | Location identified and votes |
|---|---|
| To be able to leave work at work - physically (literally) and mentally | Neath and Penywaun - 6 votes |
| Understanding children/family needs | Newport and Powys - 6 votes |

| | |
|---|---|
| Being paid enough to save and experience life and culture | Neath - 3 votes |
| Pay is appropriate to the work that we do | Powys- 3 votes |
| Ethical company | Swansea - 2 votes |
| Affordable childcare | Newport - 2 votes |
| Understanding religious needs | Newport - 1 vote |
| Being paid on time | Powys - 1 vote |
| Flexible working | Swansea - 2 votes |
| Sufficient/appropriate training for the job to keep you safe at work | Swansea - 1 vote |

# 6 Reflections and conclusions

6.1 The research went into depth on a range of factors associated with "decent work" with a relatively small number of people (nearly all women) spread across different locations. The locations were not the only variable: age, employment status and educational qualification were also clearly identified by respondents.

6.2 The majority of the respondents lived in urban settings although over half could be said to be in peripheral economic areas (including Llandrindod as a small rural town, two upper Valleys areas and Caernarfon as the most westerly town on the north coast). Despite this, peripherality, either in terms of transport or the limited nature of available jobs, was not expressed explicitly but that may be as much a function of the questions that were asked as what people felt.

6.3 The group had mixed levels of qualifications with over half having either A levels or a degree and relatively few having no identifiable qualification.

6.4 The group were mixed in age from 18 up to retirement age; this was the only variable where any clear trends could be seen in the research with those aged 25-44 clearly valuing work that allowed them to balance caring roles more; this fits into the age at which most women would be bringing up children (and the research tells us nothing about the extent that partners or other family help with these roles). Oxfam Scotland found similar findings although their much greater sample size allowed them to be more definitive[7].

6.5 The factors that respondents feel make for good work fall into four broad areas; however the balance between them did not come out consistently. It is not clear why that was the case although it may be down to being asked quite similar questions in different ways in stages two and three of the focus groups therefore very exact conclusions should not be drawn too confidently from this research.

6.5.1 The core factors that made for good work were seen to be

- A good social environment at work
- The value of the work and people feeling that their jobs were worthwhile
- The ability to balance work and other responsibilities
- Pay and conditions; this clearly included the ability to take paid holiday which was almost certainly linked to balancing work and caring responsibilities.

6.5.2 These are similar but not identical to the main findings of the Scottish work on what made decent work for women. Their top factors were:

- A supportive line manager
- Support to return to work after absence
- Additional benefits beyond pay
- Flexibility in choosing working hours

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[7] Ibid pp16-17

- A job which is easy to get to.

The Scottish factors are similar to the points about pay and conditions and work/life balance identified in this research; the additional point about job satisfaction may be explained by the high nature of third sector employees in the Welsh research.

6.5.3 On the flipside the factors that made the working environment worse were:

- A poor social environment at work where either socialising was difficult or respondents did not mix well with their colleagues (the former was much more prevalent)
- Boring or unfulfilling work
- Poor management, which often linked to boring work, and had in a number of cases led to respondents leaving work or changing jobs; this is the one issue which came up regularly which was not reflected in the positive side of comments although it is reflected in the 26 factors for "decent work".
- Poor working conditions which were explained as being poor pay and linked conditions such as leave entitlements

6.6 Of the identified five "decent work" factors the ones that were felt to be most important in the issues identified by respondents were:

- Terms of employment
- Pay
- Work/life balance (and paid holidays is clearly seen to help here)
- The ethical nature or value of their work.

Health and Safety issues were not raised at all which may be a reflection of the nature of the work that respondents were doing or that they had done.

6.6.1 In terms of the "26 key factors", the priority areas were similar if expressed in different ways and included

- Pay
- Sense of purpose to work (linked to the point about the value of their work)
- Paid leave (linked to work/life balance and pay)
- Colleagues and work relationships
- Job security (both these are linked to terms of employment)

In addition it would probably not be unreasonable to add "supportive management" as a key factor as its absence was expressed consistently as a negative.

# Annex 1 – "Decent Work" factors

These are the detailed "Decent Work" Factors that respondents discussed in the third and final part of the Focus Groups.

1. An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs, such as food, housing and things most people take for granted, without getting into debt
2. Being paid fairly compared to other similar jobs
3. Being paid fairly to senior staff
4. Predictable take home pay
5. Access to financial benefits beyond pay such as help with childcare and signposting to additional support such as tax credits
6. Paid holidays and sick leave
7. Job security
8. Regular and predictable working hours
9. Available and effective representation to raise my voice within the workplace
10. Opportunities for promotion and career progression
11. Access to suitable and convenient training opportunities
12. A job where there is no discrimination because of who I am
13. Ability to develop and use skills in current role
14. A supportive line manager
15. Supportive colleagues
16. Control and flexibility over how I deliver my work
17. Work that I believe is socially worthwhile
18. Work that provides me with a sense of purpose and meaning
19. Varied work
20. A safe working environment free from physical and mental risk or harm
21. Appropriate support to help employees return to work following absence due to injury or ill health
22. Enough time to do all the tasks required
23. Work that does not involve excessive working hours
24. Flexibility in choosing my working hours
25. A job that is easy to get to from where I live
26. An employer that does not have to expect me to arrive before or leave after my allocated hours or undertake unpaid time

# Annex 2 – Area Summaries

## Area Summary #1: Neath Valley

The participants were asked for their responses on what is important to them on the 5 subjects of pay, terms of employment, the organisation/company, health and safety, and work/life balance.

Upon grouping the factors identified within each theme, the Neath focus group identified the following as the most important to them:-

- Holiday entitlement (7/8 participants)

- Training opportunities (7/8)

- Feeling safe (6/8)

- Flexibility (6/8)

- Feeling valued and listened to (6/8)

- Ability to pay the bills (6/8).


**Voting**

The focus group were asked to vote on 26 previously identified "decent work factors", plus the additional 2 indicators as mentioned above.   All 8 participants were involved in the voting stage, culminating in 40 votes in total.  These were the most popular results:

- Work that provides you with a sense of purpose and meaning – 6 votes

- Paid holidays and paid sick leave – 4 votes

- Being able to leave work at work, both physically (literally) and mentally – 4 votes.


## Area Summary #2: Penywaun

The participants were asked for their responses on what is important to them on the 5 subjects of pay, terms of employment, the organisation/company, health and safety, and work/life balance.

Upon grouping the factors identified within each theme, the Penywaun focus group identified the following as the most important to them:

*One of the participants abstained from this process

- Ability to pay the bills (5/6 participants)

- Consistent/reliable pay (5/6)

- Equal pay for men and women (5/6).

## Voting

The focus group were asked to vote on 26 previously identified "decent work factors", plus the additional "work finishes at work" indicator that they had identified themselves.  5/7 participants were involved in the voting stage (two participants decided to abstain from this process), thus providing a maximum of 25 votes for this particular focus group.

- An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted without getting into debt – 4 votes

- A job where there is no discrimination because of who I am – 4 votes

- Available and effective representation to raise my voice within the workplace – 3 votes

- Supportive colleagues – 3 votes.

## Area Summary #3: Newport

The participants were asked for their responses on what is important to them on the 5 subjects of pay, terms of employment, the organisation/company, health and safety, and work/life balance.

Three participants abstained from this exercise and did not return, leaving 9 participants remaining.  Their departure was not due to the exercises nor the process but to family commitments within the same building.

Upon grouping the factors identified within each theme, the Newport focus group identified the following as the most important to them:

- Family time (7/9 participants)

- Appropriate training for work to be safe (4/9)

- Ethical company (4/9)

- Flexible working (4/9)

- Sick pay (4/9).

## Voting

The focus group were asked to vote on 26 previously identified "decent work factors", plus the other 4 that they had identified themselves.  9/12 participants were involved in the voting stage (as 3 participants had now left the process), culminating in a total of 45 votes available.  The most popular of results for this session were as follows:

- An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted without getting into debt – 6 votes

- Paid holidays and paid sick leave – 5 votes

- Job security – 4 votes

- Work that provides me with sense of purpose and meaning – 4 votes.


## Area Summary #4: Swansea

The participants were asked for their responses on what is important to them on the 5 subjects of pay, terms of employment, the organisation/company, health and safety, and work/life balance.

Upon grouping the factors identified within each theme, the Swansea focus group identified the following as the most important to them:-

*One person chose to abstain from this process.

- To be able to pay the bills (6/7 participants)

- Ethical company (4/7).


### Voting

The focus group were asked to vote on 26 previously identified "decent work factors", plus the other 3 that they had identified themselves.  7/8 participants were involved in the voting stage (one participant abstained), culminating in a total of 35 votes available.  The most popular of results for this session were as follows:

- Supportive colleagues – 4 votes

- An hourly rate or salary that is at least enough to cover basic needs such as food, housing and things most people take for granted without getting into debt – 3 votes

- Paid holidays and paid sick leave – 3 votes.

## Area Summary #5: Llandrindod Wells, Powys

The participants were asked for their responses on what is important to them on the 5 subjects of pay, terms of employment, the organisation/company, health and safety, and work/life balance.

Upon grouping the factors identified within each theme, the Powys focus group identified the following as the most important to them:-

- Appropriate pay in relation to responsibilities (5/6 participants)
- Holiday entitlements (5/6)
- To be able to pay the bills/living wage (4/6)
- Consistent/Reliable pay (4/6)
- Ethical company (4/6)
- Flexibility (4/6).

### Voting

The focus group were asked to vote on 26 previously identified "decent work factors", plus the other 4 that they had identified themselves.  All 6 participants were involved in the voting stage, culminating in a total of 30 votes available.  The most popular of results for this session were as follows:

- Understanding children/family needs - 4 votes
- Pay is appropriate to the work that we do – 3 votes
- Job Security – 3 votes.

## Area Summary #6: Caernarfon

The participants were asked for their responses on what is important to them on the 5 subjects of pay, terms of employment, the organisation/company, health and safety, and work/life balance.

Upon grouping the factors identified within each theme, the Caernarfon focus group identified the following as the most important to them:

*on participant decided to abstain from the process

- Supportive colleagues (5/6)
- The ability to pay their bills (3/6 participants)
- Flexibility (3/6).

**Voting**

The focus group were asked to vote on 26 previously identified "decent work factors". The Caernarfon group did not identify any new factors significant enough to be added to this list. All 7 participants were involved in the voting stage, culminating in a total of 35 votes available. The most popular of results for this session were as follows:

- Work that I believe is socially worthwhile – 5 votes

- A safe working environment free from physical and mental risk or harm – 4 votes

- A job that is easy to get to from where I live – 4 votes.