



## **WELL-BEING, INSECURITY AND ATTITUDES TO WORK IN WALES:**

### **Results from the Skills and Employment Survey 2012**

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#### **Headlines**

Attitudinal data on the experience of work and the intrinsic quality of work in Wales are relatively rare. This Report offers unique insights into the stresses and strains of work, the attitudes of workers towards employment and who they work for, and the fear of job loss.

- Working hours are shorter, and job-related stress and work strain are lower in Wales than in the Rest of Britain or London and the South East.
- Workers in Wales attach greater importance to employment and exhibit higher levels of organisational commitment compared to other parts of Britain.
- Perceived levels of job security are higher in Wales than elsewhere in Britain. However, the costs associated with job loss are greater in Wales reflecting the relative lack of comparable employment alternatives.

#### **Penawdau**

Cymharol brin yw'r data am agweddau tuag at y profiad o waith a rhinwedd cynhenid gwaith yng Nghymru. Mae'r adroddiad hwn yn cynnig cipolwg unigryw ar anawsterau a straen byd gwaith, agweddau gweithwyr tuag at weithio a'u cyflogwyr, a'r pryder o golli swyddi.

- Mae oriau gwaith yn fyrrach ac mae straen sy'n ymwneud â swyddi a gwaith yn is yng Nghymru nag ydyw yng ngweddill Prydain neu Lundain a de-ddwyrain Lloegr.
- Mae gweithwyr yng Nghymru'n rhoi mwy o bwyslais ar gyflogaeth ac yn dangos lefelau uwch o ymrwymiad sefydliadol o gymharu â rhannau eraill o Brydain.
- Mae lefelau'r canfyddiadau ynghylch diogelwch swyddi'n uwch yng Nghymru nac ydynt mewn rhannau eraill o Brydain. Fodd bynnag, mae'r costau sy'n gysylltiedig â cholli swyddi yng Nghymru'n uwch gan adlewyrchu'r prinder cymharol o swyddi eraill sydd ar gael.

## **1. Importance of Well-being, Insecurity and Attitudes to Work**

The UK is struggling to recover from the worst recession since the 1930s. However, the challenges faced by the economy in Wales are not simply related to the ebb and flow of the business cycle. Wales produces the lowest revenue per head of any area of the UK – about three-quarters of the UK average, and less than half the value produced in London. Furthermore, over the last four decades, the situation has been getting worse. Even for those who remain in work, this matters since depressed economic conditions can affect them too. It can dampen their feelings of well-being and heighten their fears that they may be next, while also increasing their gratitude and commitment to the organisation they work for.

## **2. Previous Evidence**

Happiness at work has become a popular topic with government now keen to measure well-being not just in terms of economic outcomes. Most notably the Office for National Statistics launched its well-being programme in 2010. Since then, it has introduced new questions into its surveys in order to measure the phenomenon and has begun to publish the results. The new questions focus on well-being in general and on specific domains of life such as health, family relationships, income and work. In terms of the context-free measures of well-being, the evidence suggests that variations across the UK are modest and that the results for Wales are on a par with other parts of the UK.

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that, despite the relative economic gloom, workers in Wales are more satisfied with work than their colleagues elsewhere. However, job satisfaction ratings require a cognitive process of judgement and comparison with what might be expected and what alternatives are realistically available. In contrast, our measures consider what jobs require of workers and/or what feelings and attitudes the job elicits. In particular, our focus is on what impact the economic recession has had on those feelings and attitudes in Wales and compares these effects to those experienced elsewhere in Britain.

## **3. The Skills and Employment Survey 2012: A Source of New Evidence**

Every five or six years a survey is carried out which collects data on the employment

experiences of British workers. In 2012 the sixth of these surveys was carried out. Like its predecessors, the Skills and Employment Survey (SES2012) is a nationally representative sample survey of individuals in employment aged 20-65 years old. In addition to funding for British-wide polls, funds to boost the Welsh sample were successfully sought in 2006 and 2012. In 2006, the Future Skills Wales Partnership funded the boost, while in 2012 boost funds came from the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD). This Report is based on two samples: 7,213 individuals in paid work and aged 20-65 years old living in Britain in 2006 (407 of whom were in Wales); and 3,200 similarly aged workers in 2012 (587 of whom were in Wales). For each survey, weights were computed to take into account the differential probabilities of sample selection, and response rate variations between groups and regions.

## **4. Concepts and Variables**

Our measures of well-being, insecurity and attitudes to work focus on objective indicators reported by respondents. They are not focused on personal circumstances and instead focus, in the main, on the job. Information, for example, was collected on the usual number of hours worked per week in the job, including both paid and unpaid overtime. An individual is defined as working long hours if they work longer than 48 hours per week. Similarly, respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement: 'I can decide the time I start and finish work'.

Work intensity is considered in the context of the level of autonomy exercised since in combination these circumstances can lead to job strain. 'High strain' jobs are defined as those in which respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement that 'my job requires that I work very hard' and they have little say over at least one of the following: work intensity; task selection; task execution; and quality standards.

As well as job strain, the surveys also provide several measures of job stress. An index of job stress is obtained by averaging responses to three questions about the frequency of 'worrying about job problems', finding it 'difficult to unwind at the end of a workday', or 'feeling used up at the end of a workday'. The responses to these questions ranged from '1' ('never') to '6' ('all of the time'). We define job stress as low where the index is '2' or less.

The 2012 survey asked respondents how important they regarded their job and their family in their lives. It also carried questions designed to tap employees' attitudes towards their organisations and the nature of the behaviours employees exercise. Respondents were asked to indicate, on a four-point scale, their level of agreement or disagreement with six statements. Such statements included 'I find that my values and the organisation's values are very similar' and 'I would turn down another job with more pay in order to stay with this organisation'. For the analysis, we first awarded values of '2' for 'strongly agree', '1' for 'agree', '-1' for 'disagree' and '-2' for 'strongly disagree'. Then, we created an index of organisational commitment by adding the scales and dividing by six. The same questions were also asked of respondents to the 2006 survey.

To shed further light on work attachment, respondents were asked 'if you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you would like for the rest of your life, would you continue to work, not necessarily in your present job, or would you stop working?' This is often referred to as the 'lottery question'. The surveys also included a suite of questions that asked respondents to rate their job security. Respondents were first asked how easy or difficult they felt it would be for them to find a job as good as their current one. We denote the cost of job loss as high if respondents thought it

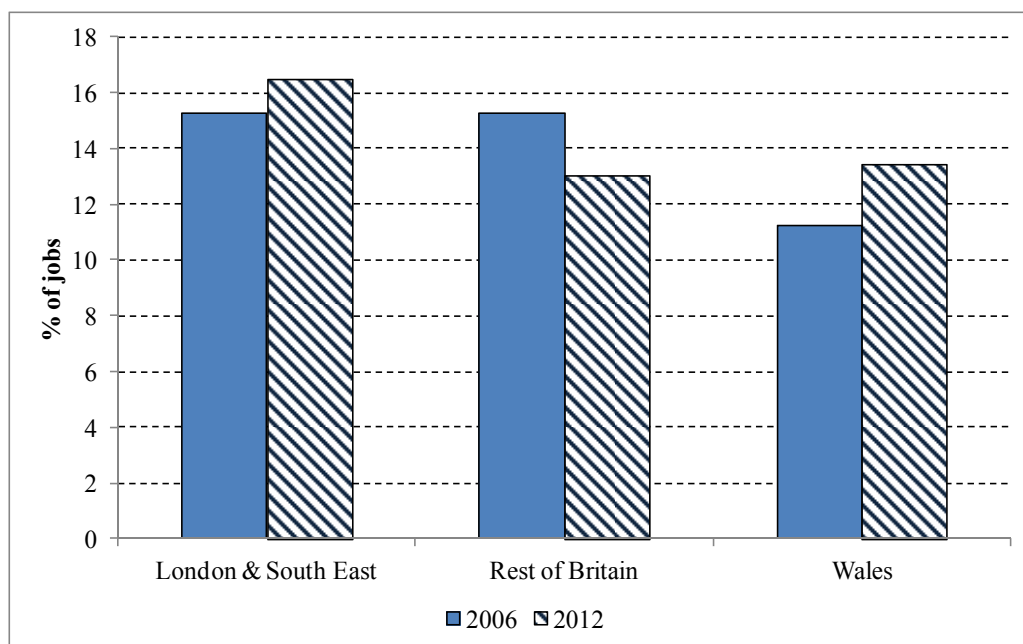
would be 'very difficult'. Respondents were then asked: 'Do you think there is any chance at all of you losing your job and becoming unemployed in the next twelve months?' If affirmative, respondents were asked to rate their chances of job loss. We report those who said evens or higher.

## 5. Findings

### *Working Hours and Job Control*

Figure 1 indicates that the incidence of long hours working is relatively low in Wales compared to London and the South East in both 2006 and 2012. However, in terms of their ability to choose when to start and finish work, both the 2006 and 2012 surveys indicate that around a third of workers in Wales (36%) agreed with the statement that they had choice over when they start and finish work. However, this was lower than elsewhere – almost half of workers in London and the South East (48%) and around four out of ten workers in the Rest of Britain (41%) were able to determine their working hours in this way. While workers in Wales do not work overly long hours, they have relatively low levels of control over start and finish times. This is consistent with other findings which suggest that workers in Wales have low levels of choice over how they do their jobs and are subject to relatively high levels of supervision.

**Figure 1: Incidence of Long Hours Working across Britain, 2006-2012**

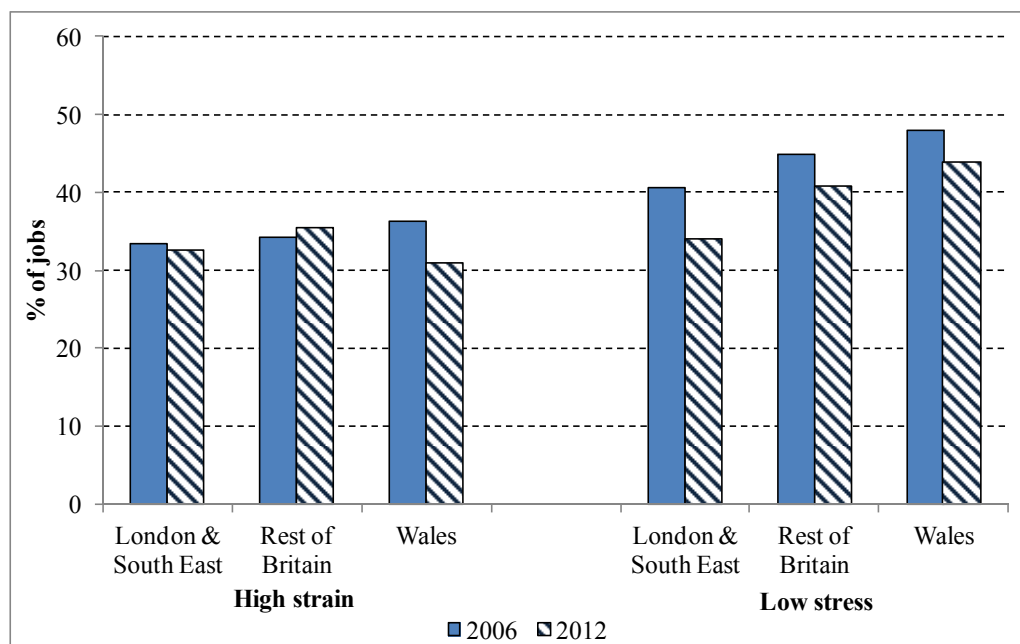


### Job Strain and Job Stress

Between 2006 and 2012, the proportion of high strain jobs in Wales fell by five percentage points, whereas elsewhere there was little change. By 2012 Wales had the lowest proportion of high strain jobs in Britain (see Figure 2). As well as job strain, the surveys also measured job stress. Across all parts of Britain job stress rose between 2006 and 2012, with the proportion of workers in low stress jobs

falling. This reduction is most apparent in London and the South East with the falls in the Rest of Britain on a par with the falls in Wales. Nevertheless, in both 2006 and 2012, Wales had the highest proportion of workers who were employed in jobs characterised by low levels of stress. In 2012, for example, the proportion of low stress jobs in Wales was ten percentage points higher (44%) than in London and the South East (34%).

**Figure 2: Job Strain and Job Stress across Britain, 2006-2012**



### Attitudes to Work

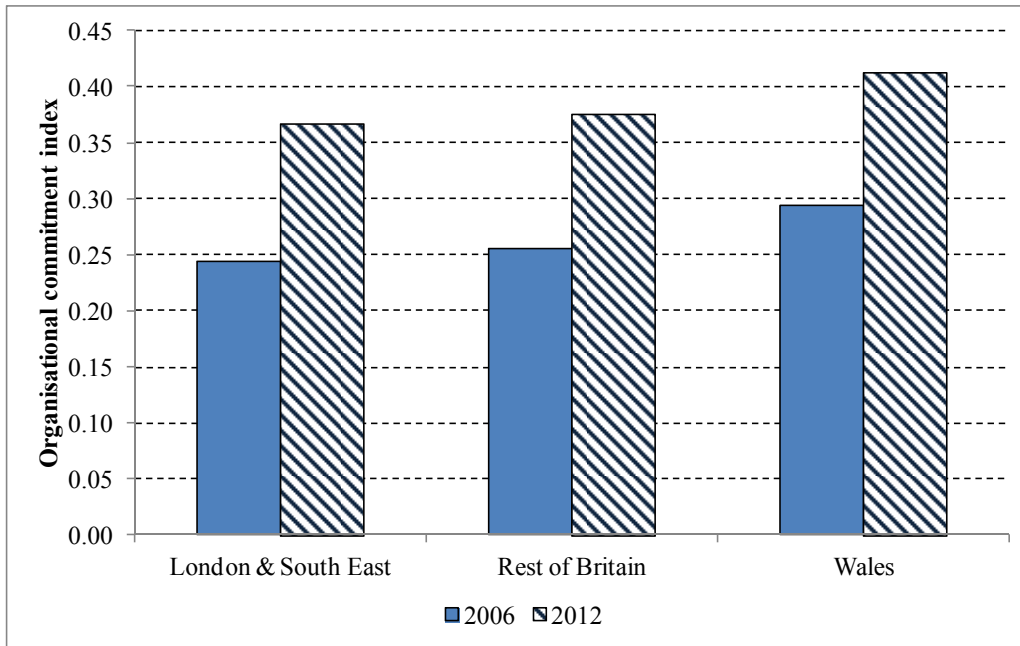
The 2012 survey asked respondents how important they regarded their job and their family in their lives. There is little difference in the importance attached to family life across different parts of Britain, with respondents rating the family higher than work. However, Table 1 reveals that almost three-quarters (72%) of workers in Wales rate work as an extremely or very important part of

their lives compared to around two-thirds of those working in the Rest of Britain (65%), and London and the South East (63%). Workers in Wales also exhibit higher levels of organisational commitment than workers in other parts of Britain. This is a pattern found in 2006 and 2012 (see Figure 3). Even so, in 2012 around three out of ten of them would be willing to stop work if they were able to do so.

**Table 1: Centrality of Work and Employment Commitment across Britain, 2012**

	London & South East	Rest of Britain	Wales
<b>Importance of work</b>			
Extremely important	21.6	22.5	23.8
Very important	41.8	42.0	48.5
<b>% who would stop work if did not need the money</b>			
All	25.2	31.5	29.2

**Figure 3: Organisational Commitment across Britain, 2012**



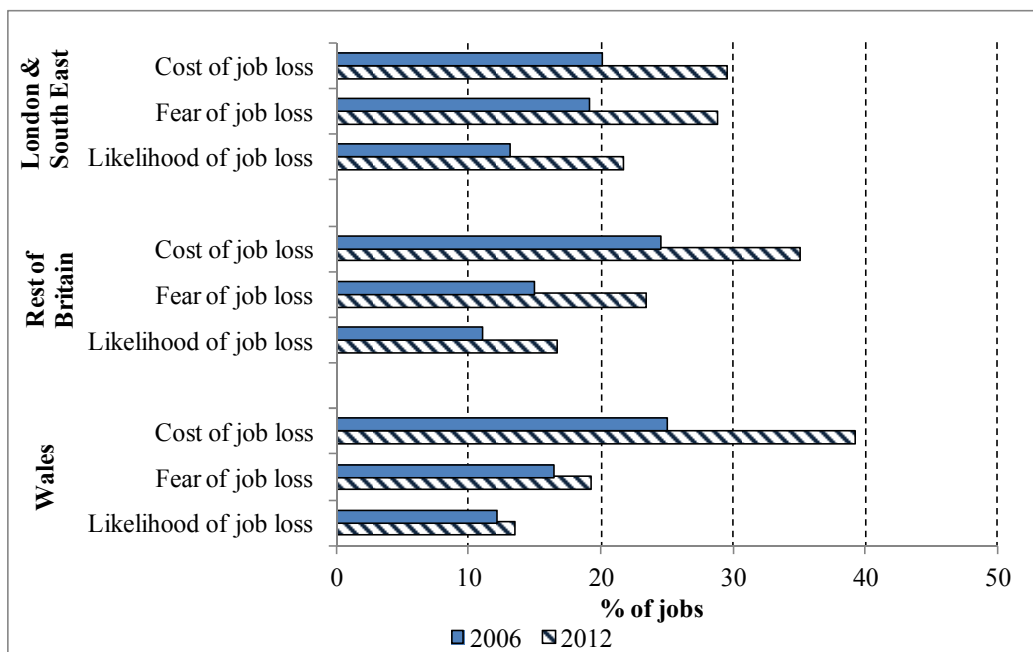
**Perceptions of Job Security**

Figure 4 shows the proportion of workers who say that it would be ‘very difficult’ to find a job as good as their current one. In 2012 the cost of job loss was perceived to be lowest in London and the South East, where less than a third of workers (30%) reported that it would be very difficult to find a comparable job. This figure increases to almost four out of ten (39%) workers in Wales, up from 25% in 2006. The rising cost of job loss was faster in Wales than elsewhere – 14 percentage points were added in Wales compared to ten points in the Rest of Britain and nine in London and the South East.

High levels of organisational commitment in Wales, particularly in relation the desire to stay with the current employer, also reflects the lack of comparable employment opportunities in Wales compared to other parts of Britain.

Figure 4 also reports the proportion of workers who indicated that there was a chance of them losing their jobs in the year ahead. Despite the economic climate, only one in five workers in Wales in 2012 thought that job loss was a possibility. This is very different to those in London and the South East, where almost one in three workers held a similar perception.

**Figure 4: Fear of Job Loss across Britain, 2006-2012**



These results may seem, at first sight, perplexing. However, the survey also revealed that fewer workers in Wales had actually experienced job losses at their place of work during the previous three to five years. This may change as the full effects of the austerity measures and associated contraction in public expenditure become apparent.

## 6. Policy Implications

The Welsh economy is characterised by a high prevalence of low paid work, a relatively low employment rate and relatively low value added production. These features are a cause for concern. However, despite this gloomy

backdrop, the survey results presented here suggest that worker well-being, feelings of job security and attitudes to employment are all higher than elsewhere. Nevertheless, workers in Wales have less discretion over when and how they do their work, and they are more closely supervised. While these results appear to provide positive news for policy makers, they may reflect that fact that good quality work is relatively scarce in Wales. As a result, once in post workers in Wales are more committed and grateful to their employers since they have little scope to move to jobs of comparable quality elsewhere in Wales.

## Reports in the Series

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