

Good work in the new economy

Employment and business structures to enhance human and non-human life

This booklet asks how we might organise work as if people and non-human life mattered.

How can we make work more meaningful, fairly paid and managed in a way that allows us to enjoy and contribute to life beyond our jobs? What kind of businesses and organisational structures would be most compatible with this vision? And what steps do we need to take to get there?

Good work in the new economy is the second booklet in QPSW's 'new

economy' series. The series builds on the ideas put forward in our *Principles for a new economy* document, and aims to help Friends and others explore alternatives to our current economic system.

This document is not for passive consumption! Full of questions to aid reflection and discussion, it asks you to imagine for yourself what a different type of economic system could look like. We hope you will contemplate these questions on your own or explore them in groups or with your meeting. We'd also like to hear what you think and invite you to share your feedback, questions and reflections with us directly or by posting them on the Quakernomics blog (www.quakerweb.org.uk/blog).



The Real Food Store co-op in Exeter; see page 9. Photo: Real Food Store.

On work

What is the point of work? The most obvious answer is that work provides a living. After all, it originated in our basic need to survive. In hunter-gatherer societies, and then in agricultural settlements, we organised ourselves to meet our needs for things like food, warmth and shelter. In today's complex economy few of us spend our days gathering, growing or hunting food to feed our families. Yet the wages earned through work are still the means to survive for a vast number of people. The first principle of *Principles for a new economy* suggests that work should be "an opportunity for service to the community" and that there should be opportunities for "the exercise of creativity and for cooperation with others towards common goals and not simply for income generation".

At its best, work is much more than a means of earning a living. It can be a cherished source of meaning, belonging and social interaction, as well as a way of helping others and exercising our skills. But too often the organisation of work is dictated

The Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) new economy project responds to minutes made by Britain Yearly Meeting between 2011 and 2015. These presented a strong critique of our current economic system and committed Friends to work towards building a different type of economic system, "an economic system in which Quaker testimony can flourish". Throughout these booklets we refer to this as the new economy.

QPSW believes that whilst Friends are, for the most part, in unity about what's wrong with the current system, we are still corporately discerning both what a better economic system might look like and how we might get there. The new economy project exists to support that discernment.

In early 2016 the project produced *Principles for a new economy*, a visionary document which sought to outline ten principles which could underpin the new economy. *What's the economy for?* and the other booklets in this series attempt to build on the principles by exploring what they might mean in practice.

The series is intended to stimulate debate and reflection. The ideas here do not necessarily reflect the policy or positions of Quaker Peace & Social Witness or Britain Yearly Meeting.

Find out more: www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/economic-justice/ new-economy.

by market forces. Increasingly, it seems as if many jobs exist simply to get the most possible work for the lowest possible wages. Sometimes it is hard to see beyond this logic and picture how things might be different. The status quo can seem inevitable. This booklet is a call for us all to be more imaginative and ambitious about what jobs could and should look like in our society. It is a reminder that things could be different, and that we all have a part to play in creating a better system.

"The ultimate criteria in the organisation of work should be human dignity and service to others instead of solely economic performance."

Quaker faith & practice 23.57, Scott Bader Corporate Constitution, 1963

Discussion points

What is your idea of a 'good' job?

How many hours would you work per week in an ideal world? What kind of activities would you do (and not do)? What kind of organisation would you like to work for? Or would you rather be self-employed?

What is good work?

Reflecting on *Principles for a new economy*, the following list provides some basic criteria for defining 'good work', or work that enhances our lives.

Safe and secure

Feeling safe in our workplaces and secure in our job has huge benefits for quality of life. When we have job security, we can plan for our future, including investing in skills, our workplaces, and our relationships with colleagues.

Properly valued

More equitable pay, providing a decent standard of living for the lowest paid workers, could raise worker morale and address economic inequality more widely. Organisations like the High Pay Centre suggest that we could place limits on the gap between the highest and lowest paid employees within organisations. In moving towards the new economy, we should also consider how we value the contributions of different types of workers. Does the CEO of a company, for example, deserve to be paid more than its cleaners?¹ And if so, by how much?

We could also encourage and celebrate socially beneficial work through better wages and working conditions, so that vital workers like carers, childcare workers, healthcare professionals and teachers are fairly rewarded and respected. As

a society, we could also choose to celebrate unpaid and voluntary work, perhaps by finding ways to measure economic success in a way that better reflects the contributions of this labour (see new economy booklet 1).

Manageable hours

Another important question for consideration is: how much work should we do? Thinkers on sustainability are increasingly questioning whether a reduced working week, paid at a living wage, would be more compatible with our modern understanding of wellbeing, and the limits to the planet's resources, than the current 40-hour norm:²

"A 'normal' working week of 21 hours could help to address a range of urgent, interlinked problems: overwork, unemployment, overconsumption, high carbon emissions, low wellbeing, entrenched inequalities, and the lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other, and simply to enjoy life."³

But wouldn't this damage our economy? Firstly, small reductions to current working hours would probably not affect productivity as much as might be imagined.⁴ Workers on shorter hours tend to be more productive hour-for-hour. They are under less stress and get sick less often. However, significant reductions in working hours may well impact on economic growth by, for example, reducing the economy's overall productive capacity or reducing demand for time-saving resourceintensive services like taxis or ready meals.

Of course, part of feeling satisfied with our wages relates to what we consider to be 'enough'. Transition to a three-day working week would almost certainly require us to address our own consumption patterns. It would therefore go hand in hand with essential thinking about the transition to an economic system no longer orientated around endless growth and consumption. This is discussed in more depth in booklet 1.

"In our constant desire to have more and more, we have sacrificed the pleasantness of labour. We want too much and so we work too much."

Tomáš Sedlácek, Economics of Good and Evil

Fairly distributed

In the new economy, we must also consider how we can share work more equally. Unemployment can hurt the spirit as well as the pocket, as can sudden retirement, especially if not desired. A change to standard working hours could also be useful here. One possibility is to use reductions in working time to create more jobs. We could also create more public sector, or state funded, work to provide Living Wage jobs for those who want them. State job creation schemes exist in many other European countries, accounting for 1.5 per cent of jobs in Holland, for example.⁵ The state could use job creation schemes to address gaps in current public services, providing important conservation or caring work. For those approaching the end of their working lives, moving to part-time work could allow people to extend their working life, to the benefit of employers, as well as public health.

Meaningful

Work that makes a difference is more rewarding. It is also more satisfying when we're good at it, when we have some variety and autonomy and get on well with colleagues.⁶ This speaks to the need for longer-term job contracts, where relationships and competency can be given time to develop. For example, a repetitive job in a large anonymous organisation might make us miserable, even if that job is ostensibly respectable and well paid. By contrast, a job in a smaller organisation to which we have a strong sense of shared values and goals might prove more rewarding, even if lower paid. This

raises a question which we will come back to later in this booklet: what organisational structures might be best equipped to provide meaningful, satisfying work?

Democratic

Most people would like to have a sense of choice over their work, rather than being victim to the dictates of the job market and pressing financial needs. Policies like a Universal Basic Income (see below) could enable us to have much more choice about whether we spend our time in paid or unpaid work.

We could also have more say in our workplaces. It is a strange contrast that in the realm of politics we see democracy and engagement in citizenship as desirable, yet in many organisations, hierarchical structures – where overall control rests in a very limited group – are accepted. One of the aspects of good work is surely the scope for participation in decisions, for a role in shaping, as well as performing, the work. Ideas about how workplaces could be made more democratic are discussed later in this booklet.

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Discussion points

What might be the positive and negative effects of a general reduction in working hours?

What do you think the maximum ratio or gap between the highest and lowest paid workers in an organisation should be?

Which jobs do you think are currently undervalued in our economy?

Which organisations do you know of that currently pay the Living Wage?

What's wrong with the current system?

UK employment has increased in recent years. However, official statistics tend to focus more on the number of people in employment than on the conditions in which they work. To get a true sense of work, it's important to look beyond the headlines. Here are some statistics about the UK economy that are worth reflecting on:

- An estimated six million people are now paid less than the Living Wage*.⁷
- Over 800,000 people (2.5% of people in employment) are on so-called 'zero hour contracts'.⁸

- Almost 3.5 million Britons work more than 48 hours a week.⁹
- Nearly 1 in 10 people in employment want to work more hours.¹⁰
- On average men earn 13.9% more than women.¹¹
- Women (especially non-white or migrant women) are still more likely to be paid poverty wages.¹²
- One recent study found that black graduates are on average paid £4.30 an hour less than white graduates.¹³

National employment statistics also fail to tell us about what some economists call the 'core economy'. This refers to work, such as caring and contributing to community institutions, which is carried out without an exchange of money. The implication is that these roles are less valued in society. Perhaps it is no coincidence that women spend considerably more time in these roles than men.¹⁴

"We must value the work done by carers in a domestic situation because it is essential to the wellbeing of individuals and the community..."

Quaker faith & practice 23.64, Jane Stokes, 1992

^{*} The Living Wage is the hourly pay that gives households a minimum acceptable standard of living. It is calculated by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) and updated annually.

Future trends: unemployment and Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Some studies suggest that within 20 years, 35% of jobs in the UK could be lost to automation.¹⁵ Although technological advancements could be harnessed to reduce working hours for all, they could alternatively exacerbate inequality and poverty if workers are made redundant without adequate support.

One solution might be the introduction of a Universal Basic Income (UBI). UBI is an unconditional. non-withdrawable income, provided by the state, for every individual as a right of citizenship. The concept of UBI has been endorsed by Nobel Prizewinning economist Joseph Stiglitz and there are now plans to trial UBI schemes in the Canadian state of Ontario, the Dutch city of Utrecht and parts of Finland.¹⁶ In theory, UBI has the potential to support every citizen to enjoy a basic standard of living, eradicating poverty and making it more difficult to exploit workers.

"Although technological advancements could be harnessed to reduce working hours for all, they could alternatively exacerbate inequality and poverty if workers are made redundant without adequate support." Discussion points How can society better

recognise the work that is done in caring, charitable and voluntary activities?

How might we protect against the unintended negative impacts of volunteering, e.g. the impact on wages and unemployment?

What can be done to address the inequalities around race and gender that play out in the job market?

How might future changes in working lives be managed?

Organisation and structure of business ownership

Most people's experience of 'work' is anchored in some kind of organisation. This raises the question of which organisational structures would best support the vision of 'good work' outlined at the beginning of this booklet?

Principles for a new economy (principle nine) suggests that in an economic system compatible with Quaker values, businesses would be structured and owned in a variety of ways and that co-operatives and community-owned enterprises would form a large part of the economy as well as private and nationally owned enterprises. A key question when considering business models is: who owns the organisation? The box below describes a number of current organisational structures, each one implying different models of ownership, accountability, incentives and constraints.

Organisational structures

Public company: people or organisations own shares in the business, which are traded publicly, e.g. on the London Stock Exchange. Company directors are legally responsible to shareholders (also known as members). Shareholders are only financially liable up to the value of their shares. These are sometimes known as Joint Stock Companies.

Private company: a company owned by members or shareholders. A private company can be "limited by shares", i.e. owned by shareholders who cannot buy or sell their shares publicly. Private companies can also be "limited by guarantee", which means that members guarantee a certain amount (usually £1) in the event of the company winding up with outstanding debts. Private companies have to disclose less information publicly than public companies.

Community Interest Company (CIC): an organisation that is set up primarily to benefit a particular community rather than shareholders, and limits the amount of money that can be paid to shareholders. CICs can be public or private companies.

Social enterprises: this is not a particular legal structure, but a general term for an organisation with a social value and mission in its governing document. Social enterprises are owned and controlled in the interests of this mission, earn income through trading and re-invest or give away 50 per cent or more of their profits towards their social purpose.

Co-operatives can be set up with a number of different legal structures, including private companies or CICs. 'Co-operative' is therefore an organisational type, not a legal term. It describes jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprises, which are responsible to their members (owners). The owner constituency can vary, e.g. worker co-ops, consumer co-ops, multi-stakeholder co-ops.

Case study 1: How a local Quaker meeting supports social enterprises

Exeter Local Meeting has supported three social enterprises. The Real Food Store is a co-op providing an outlet for many local food producers. It also has a café and bakery. Many Quakers shop there, and some supported it by buying shares, knowing that the benefits were for the local food economy and that dividends were unlikely. Exeter Community Energy is a co-op that produces renewable electricity for community benefit. The meeting obtained a QPSW Sustainability & New Economy grant to 'pump prime' the co-op in its early days. One Quaker is on the board and others have joined discussions helping to direct the project. Several have also bought shares to provide the capital for its solar installations, for which they may receive five per cent interest.

Exeter Pound CIC has launched a local currency to encourage spending in local firms. It is a community interest company, governed by directors representing businesses, faith and community groups and the city council according to the aims

specified in its constitution to support local independent businesses and create a more sustainable, resilient economy. Quakers support it by buying and using Exeter Pounds and encouraging more local traders to join the scheme.



THE REAL FOOD STORE

Above: Exeter Community Energy solar panels. Photo: Exeter Community Energy.

Below: Exeter Pound exchange point. Photo: Exeter Pound



Co-operative models of ownership

Co-operatives are increasing in number in the UK.¹⁷ Their turnover is now £35.6 billion and there are 13.5 million member owners of co-operatives.

Co-ops are often seen as good employers, tending to have higher job satisfaction among employees, lower staff turnover, better job security, higher wages,¹⁸ lower pay gaps and better benefits, such as training, skill development and (in the US) health care.¹⁹

Co-ops may also benefit surrounding communities. The area around Bologna (Emilia Romagna) in Italy has the highest density of co-operatives in Europe, generating close to 40 per cent of GDP. This has brought about high levels of entrepreneurship, with networks of businesses producing quality products. This region of Europe also has the lowest socio-economic inequality between the rich and the poor.²⁰ The Mondragon complex of co-operatives has had a similar impact in its part of the Basque country in Spain.

Of course, co-ops vary hugely in terms of their explicit espousal of social goals. But some are deliberately committed to bringing benefit to their communities, for example through deliberately including members who are more likely to be excluded from the labour market. One such organisation is residential co-op Socialist Self-Help (SSM) in Mülheim in Germany, described in case study 3 below. Co-ops and social enterprises have the potential to create monetary returns and also bring about social and environmental benefits.

Case study 2

The Labour Co-operative Bakery was set up in 1914, facilitated by local MP and Quaker Alfred Salter, to provide cheap unadulterated bread in the poor working class borough of Bermondsey, South London. It ran on democratic co-operative principles and everyone received the same wage. By 1924 there were 100 staff baking 94,000 loaves a week, paid above the union rate and with conditions among the best of any.



Statue of Alfred Salter in Bermondsey.

Sustainable businesses

In the first New economy booklet. we questioned whether perpetual economic growth is sustainable. So what sort of enterprises could thrive in a situation where conventionally defined economic growth has to be reduced, or even brought to a standstill? In a no-growth economy, organisations would be less able to attract investment based on the promise of rapid growth and returns on investment. It may be that organisations that are set up to produce social and environmental returns, rather than just financial ones, would be more able to attract investment in such a scenario.

Case study 3: Socialist Self Help (SSM) Mülheim

SSM is a co-op with 20 members, able and disabled, which runs a second-hand store, conducts removals, and rents rooms in its large converted warehouse. The group espouses radical equality. All kinds of labour are valued and are paid the same, including the work of child care. Decisions are made in a weekly forum, chaired each week by a different member.

Decisions are normally made by consensus and only exceptionally by vote. The group takes a full part in the life of its neighbourhood.

Case study 4: Mondragon co-operatives

This complex of co-operatives takes its name from the small Basque town in which most of them are situated. Most co-ops manufacture technical equipment and white goods, and together they employ some 80,000 workers. The co-op isn't perfect (it has



been criticised for its use of agency workers, for example) but pay and incomes in the region where it is headquartered are above those of surrounding areas, and were maintained during the recession. Maximum pay differentials are 9:1 but these vary between the self-governing enterprises. One of the enterprises is a self-governing bank.

Corporate power and work

It is important that, going forward, we support and promote the alternative organisational structures that best fit our vision of the new economy. However, large corporations, or 'conventionally owned' public companies, are central to the economy in its present form. On the one hand, joint stock companies can be celebrated as a structure which provides employment and enables billions of people worldwide to participate in markets. On the other, they have been described as a "remarkably efficient wealth-creating machine" that is now "pathological" and "out of control".²¹ In the light of ongoing scandals, including those around tax avoidance, government lobbying, executive pay and the mistreatment of workers, many people now feel that some big businesses have grown too large and hold too much power over our economy and governments.22

So why do some big businesses act this way?

One important factor is company management and accountability structures. The strategy of a joint stock company is primarily based around the principle of 'maximising shareholder value' or increasing the value of shares as much as possible. This has led to claims that the short-term interests of shareholders and senior managers can outweigh longer-term, social and environmental considerations.

Recent years have seen some shareholders highlight social and environmental concerns, along with some legal changes, which in the UK require large companies to 'take into account' social and environmental issues. Nonetheless, short-termism still seems to be very much built into the structure and culture of joint-stock corporations.

Discussion points

What type of production organisations would best support human and planetary flourishing and better fit Quaker values?

Do you own stocks and shares in any corporations, including through your pension? If so, how might you use your membership of these corporations to influence their decision-making?

Reimagining corporate governance

So how can joint-stock companies be reformed so that they are more able to contribute towards the common good?

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, authors of *The Spirit Level*, suggest that a move to economic democracy is a key factor in creating the more equal society which stands a chance of becoming environmentally sustainable.²³ In terms of big business, this could mean giving workers and other stakeholders more power by increasing their representation on corporate management boards. A practicable first step could be mandatory worker representation on management boards. This is already a requirement for companies above a certain size in many other European countries, including France, Germany and Holland.²⁴

Having one or two workers on a company board will not, in and of itself, ensure that workers' concerns are truly taken into account. It may also require mechanisms to ensure that worker representatives remain accountable to other workers. Worker representatives may need training and support to enable them to take on such a role and there may also be need for a cultural shift amongst other senior managers. But worker representation could begin to shift the balance of power and, in the longer term, open the door to representation from a more diverse range of stakeholder groups, including consumers, long-term shareholders and representatives from the communities where the company operates.

Of course, increased representation will not guarantee more socially and environmentally responsible behaviour, but it may make it

Case study 5: FirstGroup

Transport company FirstGroup have had an employee on their board of directors since they were set up in 1989. Each division at FirstGroup elects its own employee representative, and these representatives elect the employee director for the main board from their ranks.

Martin Gilbert, outgoing Chair of FirstGroup, says: "The presence of employee directors on the FirstGroup board is invaluable. The few drawbacks are greatly outweighed by the benefits and having this two-way channel of communication has positively impacted on the running of FirstGroup".²⁵

more likely. It may well be good for business as well; workers and committed, long-term shareholders are more likely to be risk-averse and concerned about the longer-term prospects of a company.²⁶ This multi-stakeholder representation could eventually become a prerequisite for businesses to attract state-funded contracts or be made a legal requirement.

Our power as investors

Since investment funds, like pension funds, also have power over corporate decisions, another way in which we might improve corporate behaviour is to lobby these funds to take environmental and social factors, including workers' rights, into account in investment decisions. We could also demonstrate our commitment to these factors through our own investment decisions, both individually and as institutions.

Corporate power versus worker power

It is impossible to talk about corporate power and work without recognising that, historically, the greatest advances in pay and working conditions in the UK have occurred in response to strong social movements on behalf of and by workers. However, in the last few decades, the power of trade unions has been weakened across Europe and the US. In the UK, the Trade Union Congress claims that its members now "have fewer rights to take industrial action than in 1906 when the current system of industrial action law was introduced".27 This imbalance of power between workers and employers must be addressed if we are to make employment more democratic and incentivise business behaviours which serve a common good.

Have you ever been a member of a union? What could be done to build the power of workers in the UK?

State regulation and laws

The government also has a role to play in holding corporate power in check. And as voters, we can campaign for laws and regulations which better protect workers and those adversely impacted by business operations. These could include encouraging more companies to pay a Living Wage or raising the minimum wage to Living Wage level.²⁸ Corporations could be made to provide more meaningful reports on the social and environmental impacts of their operations, as a criterion for government contracts. There is also an urgent need to reform our legal structures so that it is easier for individuals and communities to attain justice where they have been negatively affected by business activities.²⁹ Organisations which are actively campaigning on these issues are listed below.

A living wage must pay enough to live on

Poster produced by Lancaster Quaker Meeting as part of their Quaker Living Wage campaign.

Concluding thoughts

In this document we have made suggestions for the kind of employment we would like the new economy to nurture. We have highlighted different kinds of business models that we could support and discussed how big business might be reformed.

In working towards these changes - at least in the short term - we may have to be content with small gains. This has often been the pattern in past centuries, as social movements fought for conditions where human potential could be more fully realised. Unfortunately, in the UK, some of these gains are in the process of being reversed. But there are also moments when change on a large scale becomes possible, and when seemingly smallscale initiatives that have already been proven in practice form the blueprint of a new order. Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK, calls the process of imagining a better world and nurturing practical local changes "raising the sails for when the wind changes".30

Sail raising can be hard work, but no-one should find themselves doing it alone. We all have power available to us, through our roles as voters, workers, business owners, consumers, investors, members of institutions and beyond. But we are usually best able to access this power when we work together. This is why it can often be more effective to get involved with campaigns or existing groups. A good place to start could be discussing the points raised in this booklet with like-minded Friends. For groups engaged in this kind of enquiry, questions are listed throughout this document to aid further reflection, and below are listed resources for further study and inspiration, including a list of the campaigns and organisations mentioned in this booklet.

Discussion points

Which of the ideas for action above are familiar to you and which are new? Which do you think are good ideas?

Has most of your work in life been paid or unpaid?

How can Quakers support and promote good work?

What level of income would you consider sufficient for your material needs?

Campaigns and groups

Basic Income UK http://basicincome.org.uk

Co-operatives UK www.uk.coop

CORE coalition www.corporate-responsbility.org

Exeter Pound www.exeterpound.org.uk

FirstGroup www.firstgroupplc.com

The High Pay Centre www.highpaycentre.org

Lancaster Quakers' Living Wage Campaign

http://lancsquakers.org.uk/ livingwagecampaign.php

The Living Wage Campaign www.livingwage.org.uk

Mondragon

www.mondragon-corporation.com/

Mülheim SSM

www.ssm-koeln.org/start/start.htm (German site)

New Economics Foundation www.neweconomics.org

Scott Bader Commonwealth www.scottbader.com

Social Enterprise UK www.socialenterprise.org.uk

Trade Union Congress www.tuc.org.uk

Traidcraft Justice Campaign www.traidcraft.co.uk

Your Faith, Your Finance www.yourfaithyourfinance.org

Endnotes

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- 28. See the Living Wage Campaign (www.livingwage.org.uk).
- 29. See Traidcraft's Justice Campaign (www.traidcraft.co.uk/about-the-justice-campaign) and the work of the CORE coalition (www.corporate-responsibility.org).
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