

# Innovating works

...improving work & workplaces

## Networks and collaboration:

## Driving fair, innovative and transformative work in Scotland

### The FITwork Project: Research Briefing no. 2

The Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER), University of Strathclyde

P. Findlay, C. Lindsay, J. McQuarrie, R. Pascoe-Deslauriers<sup>1</sup>, J. Findlay, A. Smart<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SCER, University of Strathclyde

<sup>2</sup> University of Glasgow

*The FITwork Project: Research Briefings 1 and 2 offer evidence and learning from Year 1 of the project: Harnessing Knowledge, Research and Networks to Drive Fair, Innovative and Transformative Work (FITwork) in Scotland.*

*In Briefing 1, we outlined the evidence suggesting that fair work and workplace innovation can generate transformative outcomes for individuals, businesses and other employers and for Scotland, and presented the FITwork Tool as a means of exploring workplace practice.*

*This briefing examines how researchers, policy makers, employers, trade unions, civil society organisations and other stakeholders in Scotland have engaged with debates on fair work and workplace innovation (for brevity, FITwork) over the last decade, and considers the challenges – and opportunities – of building collaborative activity and networks that can further support and deepen FITwork. This report draws from published and unpublished material (our full report is available online at <http://www.innovatingworks.org.uk>). It is not an exhaustive review but highlights key debates, developments, and milestones as well as future challenges and opportunities.*

### An emerging consensus around FITwork

Our FITwork activities are part of a loosely coupled collective response to key challenges facing Scotland including:

- the need for action to address Scotland and the UK's low relative productivity
- the value of workplace innovation in addressing relatively low levels of innovation
- the need to promote higher value business models
- the need to improve job quality, particularly to address low pay, under-employment, skills under-utilisation and work intensification
- the value of promoting fairness at work
- the need to address income inequality and limited social mobility

These challenges are complex and interconnected – genuinely 'wicked problems' – and require smart, joined-up and holistic policy solutions.

Different stakeholders bring different insights to these

problems. Collaboration improves information sharing, supports the generation of better evidence and improves the likelihood of developing supportive policy and intervention.

The FITwork project at the Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER) at the University of Strathclyde Business School has connected researchers, policy makers and practitioners to focus attention on what happens in the workplace and to consider alternatives to 'business as usual'.

### Developing a FITwork eco-system

A FITwork eco-system is developing in Scotland comprising multiple stakeholders who have come together to define shared priorities and build support for FITwork that can transform lives, businesses and society.

There is a long history of broad-based innovation and workplace research in Scotland. SCER has played a leading role in developing an ambitious workplace research and practice agenda that aligns technical and workplace innovation with business improvement, high quality jobs and fair work.

SCER's distinctive contribution has been to emphasise the importance of shared gains in underpinning sustainable innovation and the possibilities for a 'virtuous circle' of workplace innovation that benefits employers, employees and society.

The STUC and trade unions have been prominent in debates relevant to FITwork through their core activities in collective bargaining and campaigning, improving employment rights and protections, skills and learning and workplace as well as workforce development. Unions have a clear interest in well-functioning workplaces that deliver stable, productive jobs that enhance well-being and life chances.

Employers are a heterogeneous group, but the strategic and operational choices they make are real choices with real consequences for fair, innovative and transformative work. Notwithstanding concerns over cost containment, efficiency, productivity and regulation, many employers and their representative organisations recognise the importance of accessing the right talent, delivering high quality jobs and engaging employees to deliver high performance and generate new ideas and solutions.

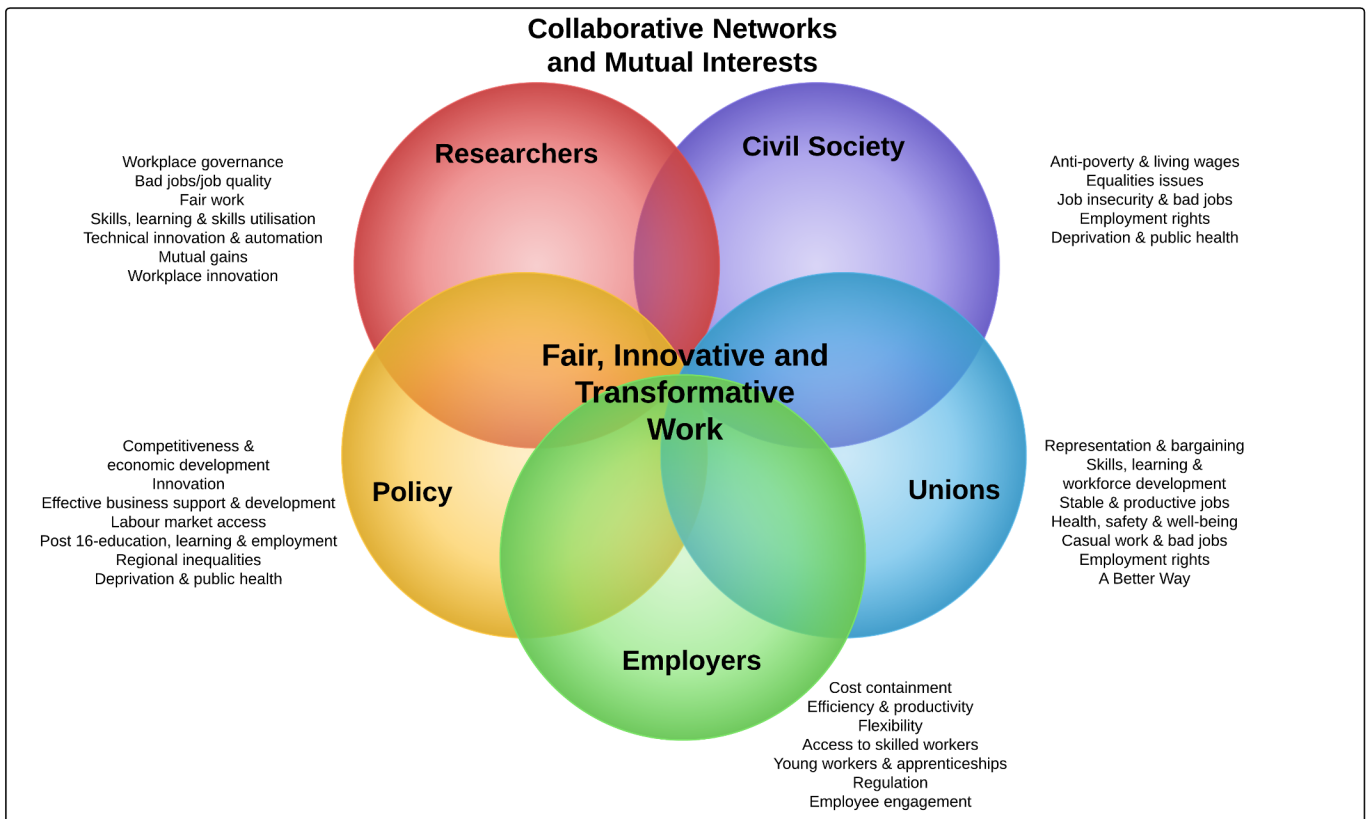
Many civil society and campaigning organisations also

promote agendas relevant to FITwork such as reducing low pay, in-work poverty, inequality and job insecurity, improving employment rights and remedies and addressing the impact of work on health and well-being. These concerns reflect the impact of what happens in the workplace on the life experience, prospects and well-being of citizens.

The wider policy community in Scotland – Scottish Government, local authorities, public agencies and public bodies – have a crucial role to play in designing policy and interventions and evaluating outcomes in the face of a myriad of complex and connected economic and social policy problems. Work and employment lie at the heart of many of the proposed solutions to intersecting and intractable policy problems that require increasingly multi-dimensional and multi-layered interventions and support.

### Common themes, shared concerns and collaborative networks

The visual below captures some of the stakeholders, debates and networks that comprise the FITwork eco-system in Scotland.



Formal and informal collaborative networks have emerged around common themes and concerns, including:

- **Skills and skills utilisation**, and the role of skills as a necessary but insufficient driver of individual, organisational and economic performance (including the Scottish Government Skills Utilisation Leadership and Action Groups);
- **The growth of bad jobs and the double-edged nature of flexibility**, providing responsiveness for employers but disadvantaging some employees (SCER/SKOPE ESRC Making Bad Jobs Better seminar series network);
- **Workplace governance and social partnership** as a vehicle for more constructive workplace relations (union learning networks; Scottish Government and STUC Memorandum of Understanding; Working Together Review Group and report; Fair Work Convention);
- **The need for more innovation in organisations**, responding to the position of the UK as an 'innovation follower' and Scotland's lag in 'innovation active' enterprises (Scotland Can Do Innovation Forum; SFC Innovation Centres; University of Strathclyde Workplace Innovation Consortium/ **Innovating Works** network);
- **The importance of fair work** in delivering inclusive growth (Fair Work Convention - FWC);
- **The importance of the Living Wage** (FWC; Scottish Living Wage Foundation)

Over the last decade we have seen the deepening of collaborative networks around the FITwork space and continuity of a core group of stakeholders and organisations across the various networks outlined above.

### **Supporting, driving and evaluating progress towards FITwork**

Despite important activity over the last decade, debates and action on fair and innovative work are still at an emergent stage. What will deliver further progress?

1. **Clear objectives** are an important starting point and

recent government policy contains a renewed focus on the workplace, the roles and responsibilities of employers and the role of workplace innovation as a far reaching solution. Workplace innovation and fair work now form part of Scotland's Economic Strategy and are seen as key and mutually supportive building blocks to reduce inequality and improve competitiveness and productivity.

2. There is a need for a robust **evidence base** on the case for FITwork. Evidence as to how fair and innovative work can benefit employees, employers and society in particular organisations, industries and sectors is crucial for engaging employers and helping policy makers to design appropriate support systems and interventions.

3. There is a role for **public investments to support FITwork** and some have indeed been made. Multi-partner investment in the FITwork project at SCER has provided underpinning evidence for fair and innovative work, supported direct engagement with employers and employees and supported greater collaboration across government and public agency partners. Public funding of exploratory activity can progress this emerging agenda until the case for employers investing in this activity becomes clearer. Public agencies lever significant influence through their business, skills and education support services. This leverage can help orient business activities towards fair and innovative work. Progress has been made in broadening innovation and economic development policy to focus on issues relating to people, work and employment, with the recent inception of a workplace innovation service at Scottish Enterprise and mainstreaming of workplace innovation within HIE's broader innovation activity.

4. **Engaging employers** is crucial. Debates on FITwork are relatively new and can be a challenging 'sell' to employers. But proof of concept and the successful engagement of the case studies during the **Innovating Works** pilot shows that, with expertise and resource to pump prime activity, employers will successfully engage with the FITwork agenda. Broadening and deepening that engagement is, however, still to be achieved.

5. **Engaging researchers** in the practice and progress of FITwork will allow the deployment of expert knowledge and support from action researchers in Scotland's universities, supported by the Scottish Funding Council and motivated by opportunities to undertake high quality, impactful research. The SCER/**Innovating Works** researchers' network, comprising researchers from different disciplines and universities linked by a broad shared interest in workplace research, is a first step.

6. **Establishing measures** that help identify the outcomes of FITwork and chart progress towards them is of key importance. Measuring complex workplace outcomes - 'soft' measures based on subjective feedback and objective measures such as adoption of practices or changes to productivity - is challenging and much work is required to define key measures and to find effective and cost efficient ways of generating data. We have designed the FITwork tool with this in mind (see Briefing 1 and [www.innovatingworks.org.uk](http://www.innovatingworks.org.uk)).

7. Addressing economic, workplace and social challenges through FITwork is a long term agenda. **Managing expectations** is important to avoid 'over-selling' what a small collection of interventions can contribute to Scottish economic performance and other outcomes. Expectations in relation to relatively limited public investments to date need to be clear and managed, focussing on their role as learning exercises and early drivers of change, rather than deliverers of large-scale change.

8. **Traction, learning and embeddedness** are also important. To be effective, the FITwork agenda has to gain traction in businesses and organisations, spread lessons and learning and become embedded into practice, policy and research. Working with interested organisations is an important first step. Supportive learning networks within and across stakeholder groups are also crucial but difficult to achieve and sustain. Broadening and deepening engagement within different organisations and industries is also important for learning lessons in context and learning from difference. Ongoing research and engagement by **Innovating Works** in the food and drink and social care sectors, alongside work with Scottish Business Pledge signatories, will deliver some of this. Insights will also be generated from Scottish Enterprise's workplace innovation service. Early lessons are important before addressing the challenges of scaling up interventions and impact.

9. A strong and supportive policy consensus can drive the development of knowledge, understanding and interventions over time. The need for **aligned policy and practice** is increasingly accepted by stakeholders who recognise the inter-connections between fair work, workplace innovation, mainstream innovation, responsible business practices and business and economic development policy. A more holistic and integrated FITwork agenda is being woven into the fabric of policy by turning policy into practice. This will remain challenging for some time.

10. **Collaboration**, built on shared priorities and efforts to align analysis, policy and policy delivery, is absolutely crucial. There is significant potential for shared learning across the research, policy and practitioner communities

and real collaboration is the route to achieve this. This will be challenging given the different experiences, contexts, incentives and constraints faced by diverse stakeholders. To date, through the **Innovating Works** and FITwork project, strong collaboration has been built through co-investment and shared investment of time by stakeholders. Recognising the distinct contribution of stakeholders and the benefits of partnership working is key to progress.

### Moving forward

Embedding the idea of workplace innovation, and stimulating enthusiasm for it, is underway in Scotland. But challenges remain. There is a need for more evidence that is sensitive to sector, industry and organisation size. While learning from 'small tests of change' can stimulate interest and engagement, scaling these approaches requires careful thought and design. Measuring progress is necessary, but creating measures that are robust, that capture outputs and outcomes as well as processes and practice, will require sensitive handling. Our FITwork tool can help employers with this, and the work of the Fair Work Convention will result in appropriate national measures.

Realistic timescales are important. Stakeholders will require patience, perseverance and a tolerance of uneven progress. Not all innovations bear fruit, but most deliver insight and learning. Across all of these activities, collaboration is crucial – challenging, but crucial. Yet, the prize of delivering fair, innovative and transformative work is worthy of our shared endeavour.

### Acknowledgements

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To get involved with the **Innovating Works...** project, email us at [sbs-workplaceinnovation@strath.ac.uk](mailto:sbs-workplaceinnovation@strath.ac.uk) or visit us online at <http://www.innovatingworks.org.uk>.