

Understanding “good jobs” employees and employers in Northern Ireland using linked administrative and survey data

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3 June 2026



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Key points:

- Increasing the number of people in 'good jobs' is a policy priority for the NI government, with the new Employment Rights Bill due to become law in 2027.
- DFE defined a good job as one that includes: (1) permanent contract, (2) non-zero hours contract, and (3) Earning of the Real Living Wage (RLW).
- Analyses of reliable data is required to provide evidence on progress towards key policy goals.
- Analyses of linked data resources within the Administrative Data Research NI (ADR NI) partnership will provide a detailed insight into the landscape of good jobs, including who provides them, and who has them.
- We present preliminary analyses of the Business Data for Research (2022) flagship dataset, a new linked survey and administrative data resource.
- Preliminary analyses indicate that the rate of good jobs was consistently lower among females, younger workers and part-time workers from 2017-2022.
- These trends are also reflected in each of the three 'good job' indicators, with particularly low rates of earning the RLW.
- Trends in good jobs for selected industries show high rates within human health activities and low rates among food and beverage service activities.
- Analyses of selected occupations show high rates among corporate managers but markedly low rates among care workers and home carers.
- A stream of further linked administrative and survey data within the ADR NI will provide a valuable source of evidence to inform job quality policy initiatives.

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Background

Job quality is gaining increasing attention from governments, policy makers and academics globally, in recognition of the wide-ranging benefits of good quality work for workers, employers and the wider economy. This growing interest is reflected in the development of international frameworks aimed at capturing the key dimensions of job quality; as well as a range of UK and NI policy initiatives. Most recently, increasing the percentage of the population in 'good jobs' is identified as a policy priority in the NI Programme for Government (PfG) 2024-27 [1], as well as one of four key objectives in the Department for the Economy's Economic Vision [2]. While NI has committed to the promotion of all seven 'Carnegie Trust-RSA Framework' dimensions of job quality [3], particular focus has been given to three aspects. In consultation with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) (December 2024), DfE has defined a good job as one including:

- A permanent contract
- A non-zero hours contract
- Earning of the Real Living Wage

The political willingness to advance the good jobs agenda is demonstrated in the development of the NI 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill, which is scheduled to become law in 2027. However, in order to measure progress towards policy goals and inform further development of policies around job quality, a reliable data infrastructure and associated evidence-base is required.

Purpose of this research

The key objective of this research is to showcase the potential of existing 'flagship' linked business data in NI via the Administrative Data Research NI (ADR NI) partnership. Analyses will build upon evidence produced by DfE (which focused on workers aged 16-64) [4] and aim to advance understanding of the profile of, and trends in 'good jobs' in NI. This policy briefing shares the preliminary findings from the first phase of analyses, providing insight into:

- The types of people in 'good jobs'
- The profile of 'good jobs' in relation to business-level characteristics
- The individual and business characteristics associated with each 'good jobs' indicator.

The briefing also outlines how ongoing research within ADR NI aims to harness additional valuable linked administrative data with the potential to inform both the development of policy and assessment of interventions around good jobs in NI.

Methods

Data

The primary dataset is NISRA's recently released Business Data Research (BDR) 2022 themed dataset, an ADR 'flagship' data resource comprising linked annual individual-level and business level survey data from 2014-2022. The key variables of interest in the current project are contained within the [Business Register and Employment Survey \(BRES\)](#), and [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings \(ASHE\)](#). ASHE forms the 'spine' of the linked dataset, with a sample size ranging from approximately 5,500-6,000 jobs each year. Our analysis focused on workers aged 16 and over. More detailed information can be obtained from: [Business Data for Research \(BDR\) | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#).

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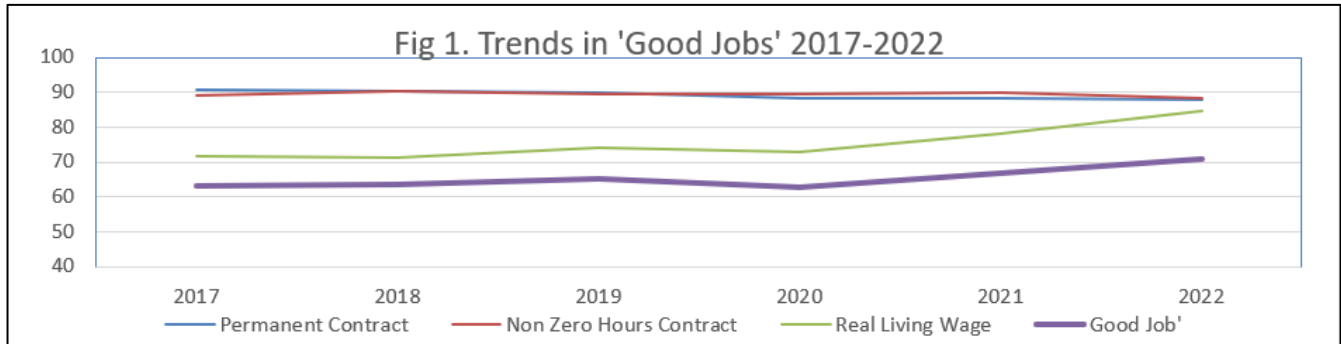
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'Good Jobs'

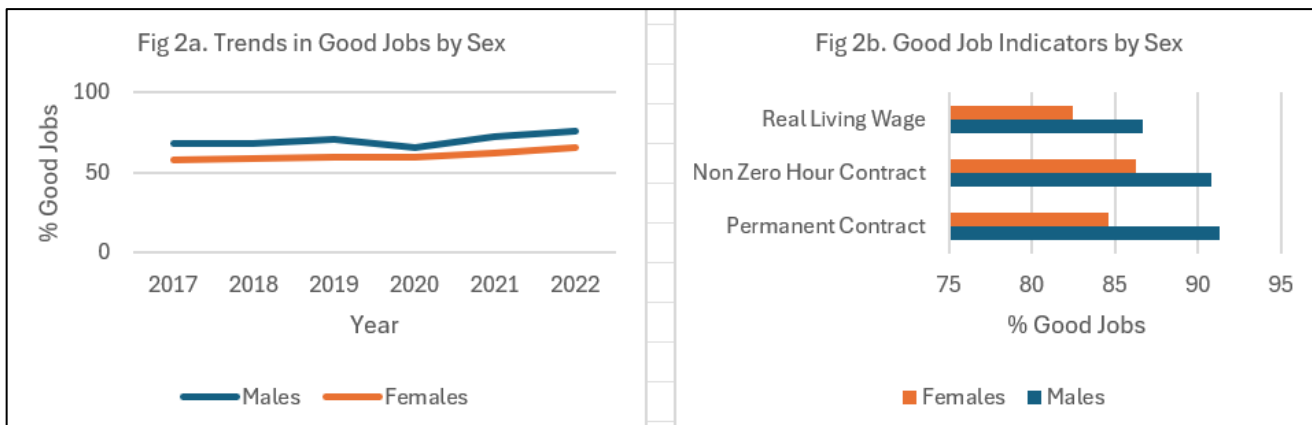
The primary outcome of interest was the presence or absence of a 'good job', defined according to the DFE criteria outlined above. For each year, a job is defined as 'good' if it meets all three criteria. The three key 'good jobs' indicators are available from 2017-2022 and therefore our analyses focused on this time-period.

Descriptive analyses were conducted within the NISRA Trusted Research Environment (TRE) by accredited administrative data researchers.

Preliminary Findings



The rate of good jobs among employees aged 16+ reached a peak of around 71% in 2022 (Fig 1), having increased from just under 64% in 2017. The rate of jobs paying the RLW generally followed the overall 'good jobs' trend line, increasing to 84.5% in 2022, while the percentage of permanent jobs and non-zero-hour contract jobs remained stably high around 90%.

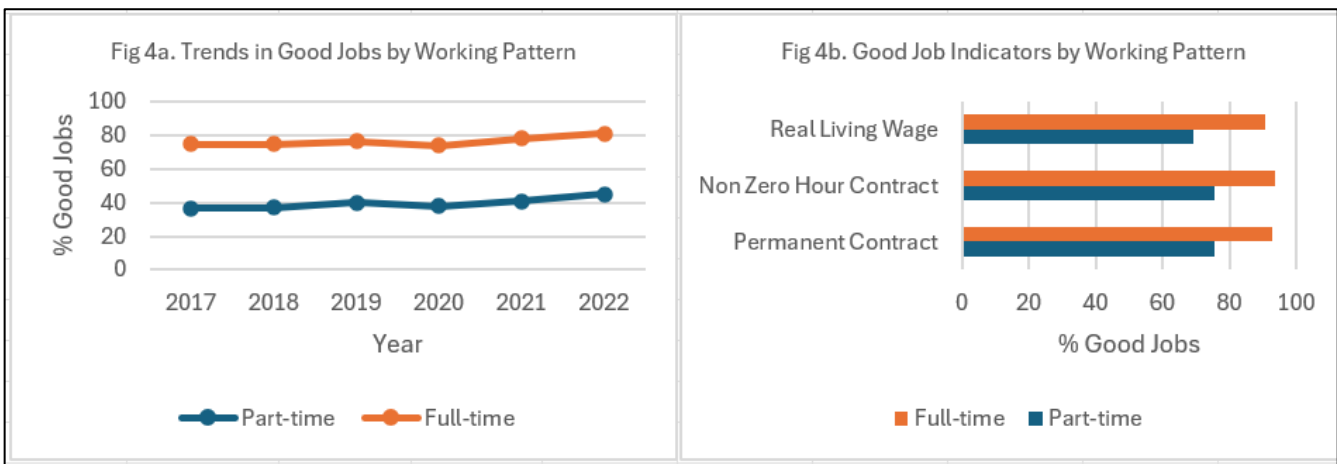
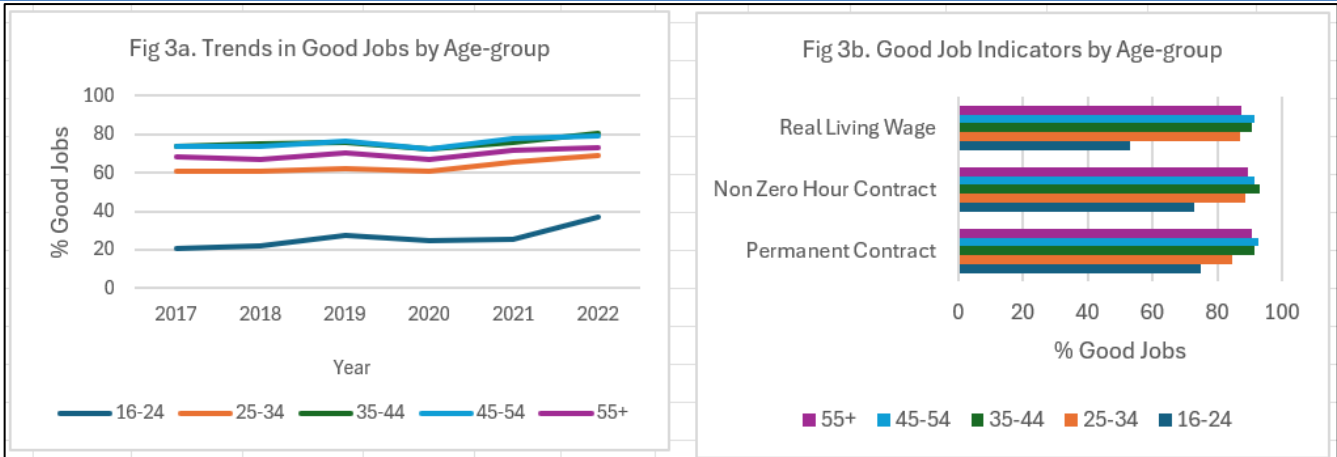


Men had consistently higher rates of 'good jobs' compared to women (Fig 2a), as well as higher rates of each of the three 'good jobs' indicators (Fig 2b). Male/female differences in the three indicators were consistent from 2017-2022. The rate of good jobs was highest among workers aged 45-54 years, while rates were substantially lower among younger workers aged 16-24 (Fig 3a). This trend is reflected in each of the indicators, with markedly low rates of jobs paying the RLW among 16-24 year-olds (Fig 3b). The rate of good jobs was consistently higher for full-time compared to part-time jobs (Fig 4a). Again, this finding was consistent across all three individual indicators (Fig 4b).

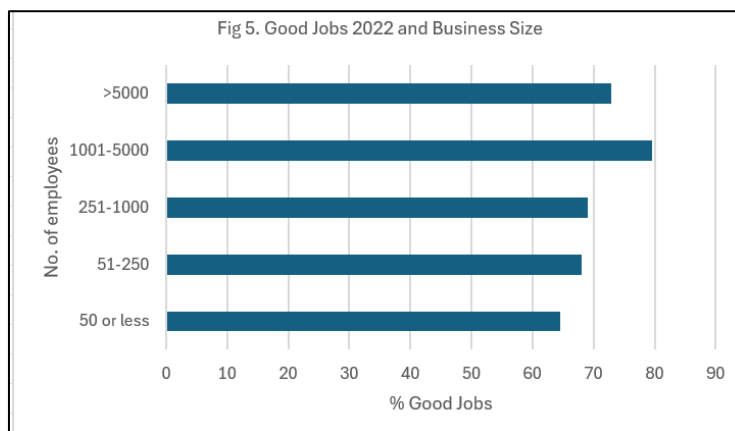
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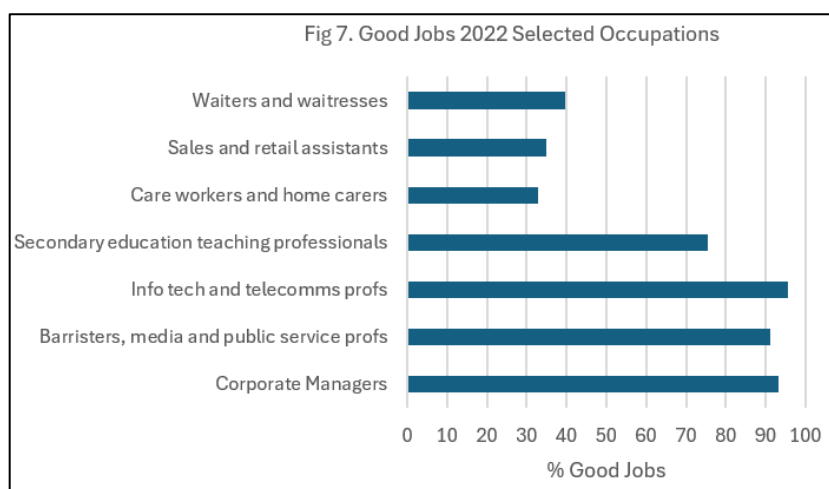
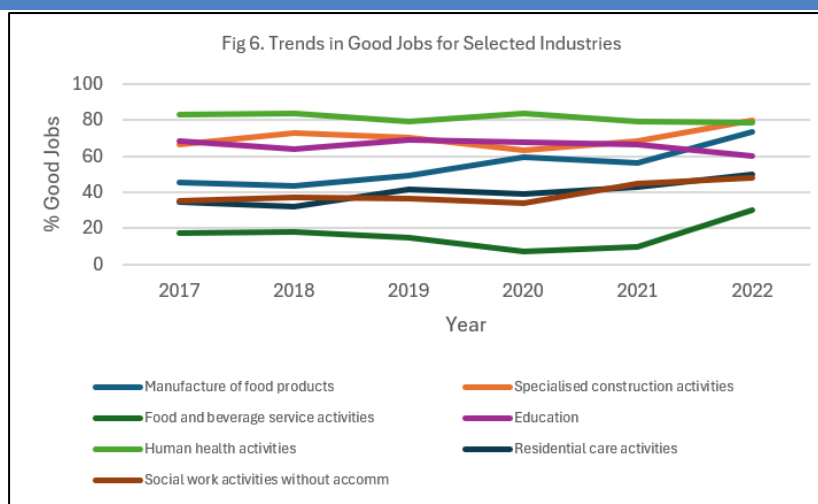


BDR linked data resources also provided an opportunity to examine trends in 'good jobs' in relation to business characteristics. For example, Fig 5 summarises good jobs in relation to business size, showing that the rate generally increased as the number of employees increased. Fig 6 illustrates trends in the rate of good jobs for selected industries (2017-22). The rate of good jobs within human health activities was high throughout the study period, while good jobs in food and beverage service activities remained low from 2017-2021, before a notable upturn in 2022. Fig 7 shows the rate of good jobs in 2022 for selected occupation types. Around 93% of corporate manager jobs were 'good', while rates of 'good jobs' for care workers and home carers was notably low at around 33%.



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Plans for Ongoing ADR NI 'Good Jobs' Research

We conducted a systematic literature review in which we identified 15 international studies looking at job quality using administrative data. We found that linked administrative data has been widely used to evaluate the impact of policies such as active labour market programmes and employment reform on job quality. The results show that administrative data can be a powerful tool for identifying the most effective levers for lasting economic impact; with the most informative studies in the review using several linked data sources. A stream of linked administrative and survey data within the ADR NI partnership, available to accredited researchers, presents an invaluable opportunity to advance the evidence base in relation to job quality, with the potential to inform and evaluate policy.

Preliminary analyses presented here represent the very early stages of a planned programme of research on 'good jobs' within ADR NI over the next five years. Analysis of BDR 2022 in Phase 1 (current phase) will provide insight into individual and business level variation in good jobs, trends over time, and transitions in and out of good jobs. In Phase 2, analysis of ASHE-Census linked data (due for release in summer 2026) will facilitate more granular analyses of the types of people in good jobs in relation to a wide range of socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics, family circumstances, and health. Future phases will focus on enhancing our understanding of educational and other pathways to 'good jobs' based on analyses of Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) NI data. Importantly, through early and continued engagement with DfE and other key stakeholders, this programme of research will form a valuable evidence base to inform initiatives aimed at improving job quality and workers' rights in NI.

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References

- [1] Northern Ireland Executive. (2025) Programme for Government 2024-27 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. Available at: [Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'- Documents | The Northern Ireland Executive](#)
- [2] Department for the Economy. (2024) Research Programme 2024-27. Available at: [DfE Research Programme 2024-27 | Department for the Economy](#)
- [3] Carnegie UK Trust and Royal Society of Arts. (2018). Measuring good work: The final report of the Measuring Job Quality Working Group. <https://carnegieuk.org/publication/measuring-good-work-the-final-report-of-the-measuring-job-quality-working-group/>
- [4] Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. (2025) Good Jobs 2025. Available at: [Good Jobs 2025](#)

Acknowledgment

Administrative Data Research - Northern Ireland (ADR-NI) takes privacy protection very seriously. All information that directly identifies individuals/organisations will be removed from the datasets by trusted third parties before researchers access them.

All researchers using ADR-NI are trained and accredited to use sensitive data safely and ethically, they will only access the data via a secure environment, and all their findings will be vetted to ensure they comply with strict confidentiality requirements.

The help provided by the staff of the Administrative Data Research Centre - Northern Ireland (ADRC-NI) and the ADR-NI support officers within NISRA Research Support Unit (RSU) is acknowledged. ADR-NI is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

The authors alone are responsible for the interpretation of the data and any views or opinions presented are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of ADR-NI. The NISRA ELMS data has been supplied for the sole purpose of this project.

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