



Local employment charters and good work agendas:

How are charters attempting to change employer practices

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Overview

- ▶ Local employment charters are voluntary initiatives that set out to **(1) describe principles and practices** associated with good employment, **(2) recognise** employers that adopt these
- ▶ Where formal powers and institutions are limited, they offer an entry point to push – softly – for social and economic change with employers. Also key means through which local good work agendas are being articulated in the UK
- ▶ So far, conceived predominantly as employer engagement tools, adopting language and approaches designed to appeal to employer interests and priorities and emphasising the value that employers can derive from being part of the initiative

Current research on local employment charters

- ▶ Limited evaluation of specific charters (for Greater Manchester: e.g. Lupton et al. 2021) and good practice guides (Crozier 2022)
- ▶ How charters can be linked to procurement (TUC 2022); and concerns re: their ability to assess and enforce compliance but also hopes for renewed tri-partism (gov-employers-unions) (McKay and Moore 2023; Johnson, Herman, Hughes 2022)

& broader critical literature on CSR and voluntary employer programmes, highlights potential for strategic engagement by employers with different forms of voluntary programmes (Fransen 2012)

Project overview

Our research asks how can local employment charters support meaningful change in employment practices?

- ▶ Based on ongoing case studies of **six city-region initiatives** across England, as well as exploratory workshops and interviews within the North West region. Co-researchers Professor Miguel Martinez Lucio, Dr Stephen Mustchin & Miriam Tenquist. Briefing paper about to be published.
- ▶ Exploring potential and limitations of charters from the perspective of policy leads involved in developing these initiatives & wider stakeholders

Questions

- ▶ What are the mechanisms through which charters attempt to change employment practices?
- ▶ What does engaging employers as 'allies' and as part of a 'movement' look like in practice?
- ▶ What types of employers can be engaged and influenced?

Local employment charters in England

Local employment charters/pledges/standards in devolved authorities in England

Scheme	Lead / area	Active since
Good Work Standard	London	2019
Good Employment Charter	Greater Manchester CA	2019/ 2020
Good Work Pledge	North of Tyne CA	2020
Fair Employment Charter	Liverpool CA	2021
Good Employment Charter	West of England CA	2022
Fair Work Charter	West Yorkshire CA	2023

Note: combined authorities with no identified public commitment to implementing a good employment charter = Tees Valley; Cambridgeshire and Peterborough; West Midlands; South Yorkshire

A safe space for employers...

- ▶ Common principles across charter initiatives
 - ▶ Implementation: emphasis on bringing employers together to work on changing employment practices; charter as a 'journey' rather than a destination; personalized action plans for employers
 - ▶ Some common dimensions of good work: pay, security, voice, opportunities...
 - ▶ Governance: decisions made by advisers, reviewers - not independent of the CA, although some 'arms-length' arrangements and use of steering groups with external members
- ▶ And some key differences
 - ▶ Different thresholds and ways for employers to comply with good work dimensions: e.g. some explicitly require union access and recognition; others asking for evidence of engagement and voice;
- ▶ And shared challenges
 - ▶ Flexibility and closed nature of assessment process = not clear what employers are committing to
 - ▶ Contrasting perspectives: safe space for employers vs. desire for noisier, more challenging initiatives

Quality over quantity? Understanding impact

- ▶ Operating in a challenging context: incl. lack of familiarity with multi-stakeholder initiatives and employer anxiety and misapprehensions re: unions;
- ▶ Potentially acting on coalition of the willing, not 'rogue' employers
- ▶ Initial focus across initiatives has been on gaining some signatories and tracking whether local leads and linked LAs can comply – building initial legitimacy
- ▶ Focus then turns to more targeted engagement. Some challenges:
 - ▶ Micro/small business variations and engagement strategies being introduced to address skew to larger employers
 - ▶ Low paid sectors, particularly hospitality, retail, care
- ▶ What would engaging more than the usual suspects look like?

Greater Manchester's charter in numbers

1,500+ 'engaged in the process of becoming supporters'

- Against ~12,000 enterprises with 10 or more people employed

600+ supporter employers

100+ members

- All 10 local authorities now members – Bolton, Rochdale & Oldham in November 2023
- Comparable to other schemes - Good Work Standard reporting ~145 members

Thank you

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References

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