COLLECTIVISING IN
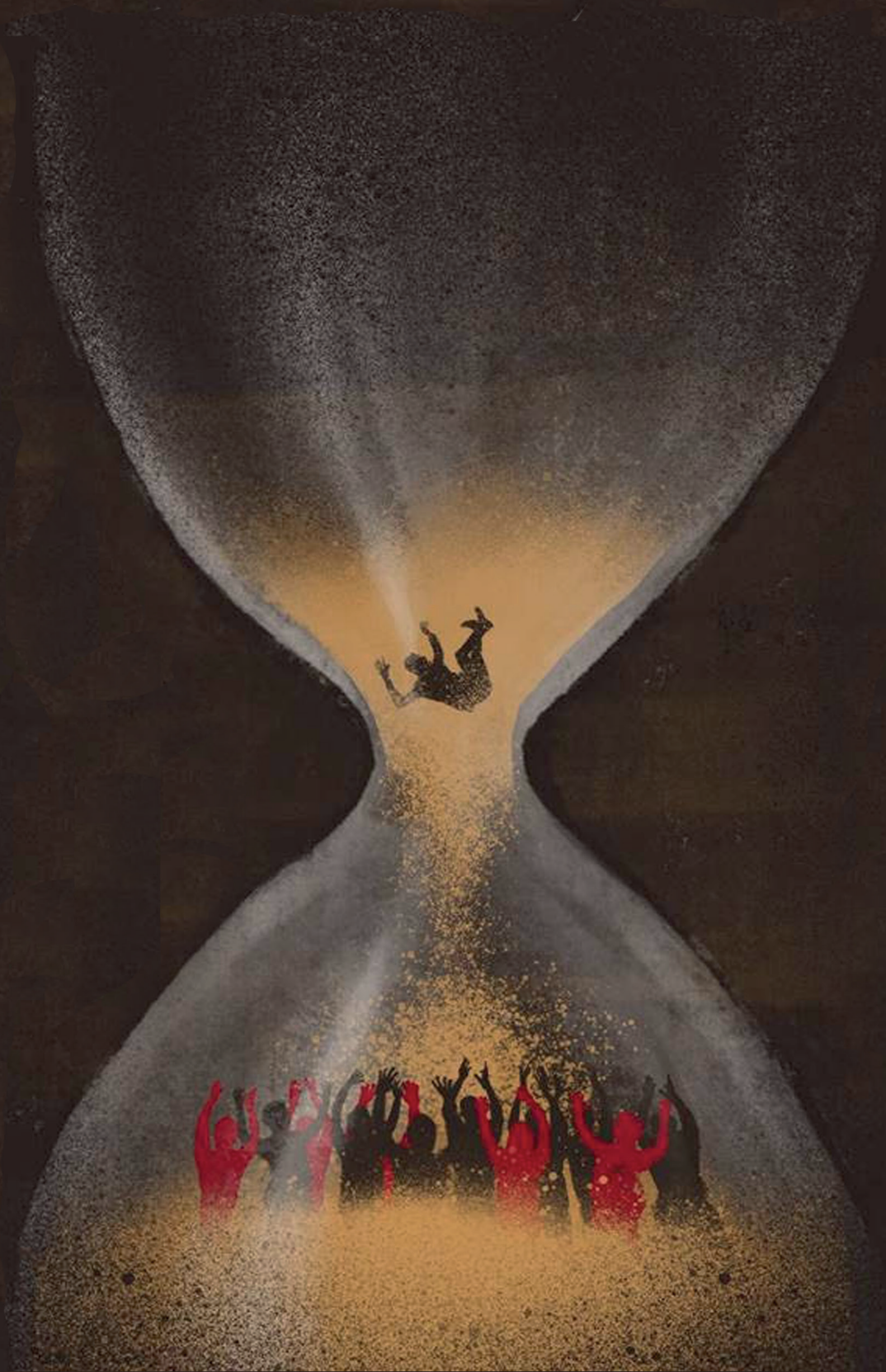# PRECARIOUS WORK

TIME | CONTROL | TRUST

stuc

"The hours of labour is a vital question at all times"

Lucy Parsons

Contents

Better than Zero was launched in 2015 in an attempt to address the decreasing youth membership across unions and increasing precarity in the workplace and lives of young workers. It was inspired by the Fight for $15 campaign, resourced by the SEIU union in the USA which employed grassroots greenfield social movement organising tactics.

With the aims of eradicating zero hours contracts (ZHCs) in workplace in order to stabilise young workers' livelihoods and lives, including by ensuring young workers know their rights in work and how to enforce them, the campaign's overall objective is to increase union membership among under-30s, create workplace leaders, and encourage union activity within precarious non-unionised workplaces. The campaign uses stunts and flash mobs to highlight the use of ZHCs and other problems at work, including deductions in wages, safety at work and other discriminatory practices.

Better than Zero is a solidarity network that builds union action in non-unionised sectors including hospitality, fast food, and customer services in Scotland. It has a solid core of activists and a fluid community of 14,000 Facebook followers, who help to compose a real-time chronicle of day-to-day working life by sending accounts of exploitation every day.

1a. Introduction
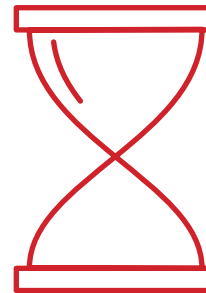
Employment rates might be at a record high in Scotland[1] but this alone is not a good indicator of the health of Scotland's labour market, and certainly not of the health of the workers within it.

With a workforce which has aged since the financial crash in 2008[2], and which is marked by precarity and insecurity across many sectors and industries, Scotland's workers do not all uniformly benefit from headlines proclaiming high employment rates. The information in the next chapter demonstrates how wages, hours, and the cost of living in Scotland all combine to create precarious lives. This precarity impacts on certain people more than others.

However, in a tight labour market where potential labour shortages exist across a range of sectors there is a clear opportunity for improving conditions. Less competition for jobs makes it more difficult for employers to cut wages, to degrade conditions, or to lay off staff who resist over-work or under-employment either individually or through collective action. Meanwhile, employers in expanding priority areas like digital and data-driven labour will have to compete with more traditional sectors to employ the labour they need.

Instead of attempting to create a Scottish version of Taylor's disappointing "Good Work" report into modern working practices[3], this research gathers and documents narrative around precarity which the Scottish trade union movement has considered through the Better than Zero campaign and other trade union campaigning activity in recent years. This report shows the multiple facets of precarity are more than simply low wages, intensified work, or insecure employment. Precarity describes a world where work is central to people's lives but where the shape, nature and value of that work can shift.

This report is also an effort to recognise where the power lies in the Scottish labour market and what workers can do to develop more collective industrial muscle. This report considers the experience that workers have of precarious work and the ways in which this precarity impacts their lives. By considering the perspective of the worker and hearing directly their experiences it provides meaning to the amorphous term 'precarious work'.

The report seeks to identity the shared experiences of precarity across sectors and to consider the ways workers can and do organise to improve their workplaces. It also aims to identify the ways in which equality issues and precarity intersect to create a double or triple burden within people's lives. Ultimately the report seeks to support the debate about precarious work and the Fair Work agenda while also supporting unions with their organising strategies within precarious settings.

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[1] Recent years have seen record-high employment rates and record-low unemployment rates. The most recent figures show an employment rate for February-April 2019 of 75.9% and an unemployment rate of 3.3%. ONS (June 2019) *Regional labour market: Headline indicators for Scotland* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/headlinelabourforcesurveyindicatorsforscotlandhi11

[2] Between 2008 and 2018, employment levels for 65+ year olds almost doubled, rising from 49,000 to 89,000. Scottish Government (May 2019) *Regional employment patterns in Scotland: statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2018* https://www.gov.scot/publications/regional-employment-patterns-scotland-statistics-annual-population-survey-2018/

[3] The UK Government commissioned a review in to 'modern working practices' in Britain which was published in July 2017. The Taylor Report sets out a number of government recommendations, particularly around employment status, in an attempt to mitigate against some of the worst excess of exploitative practices which were highlighted during the review. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627671/good-work-taylor-review-modern-working-practices-rg.pdf However, the Taylor Report is widely regarded by trade unions as a missed opportunity which does not deal with the key issues of precarity and working life in a low wage economy. Briken K & Taylor, P (2018) *Fulfilling the 'British Way' : beyond constrained choice - Amazon workers' lived experiences of workfare.* Industrial Relations Journal, 49 (5-6). pp. 438-458. https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/65538/
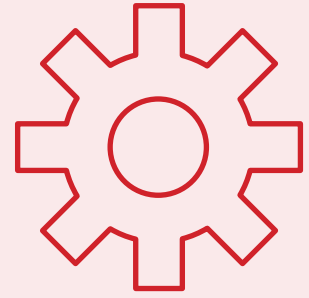
1b. Executive Summary

Precarity is not new in employment but the last decade has seen an increase in the range of sectors experiencing this form of working and of workers undertaking precarious work. This insecurity coupled with high rates of low pay creates more insecure living arrangements and increased debt. People are now living precariously as well as working precariously.

A lack of secure and stable contracts is often seen as the main identifier of precarity, both for workers and within trade unions. However, this research found, firstly, that workers in precarious work did not always identify with the term 'precarious'. For those who did, their identity and confidence levels could be so bound with the connotations of precarity that, whilst they expressed a strong desire to address the negative impacts of precarious work, they were also very keen to identify positive aspects of their job. Similarly, with respect to equality, while the research uncovered a range of clear equality impacts, the workers did not identify these situations as inequality or potential discrimination within their workplace

Whether workers identified as precarious or not, this research found three overarching themes which they all identified with: Control, Time, and Trust.

- There are different ways in which workers can be controlled, or can feel controlled in the workplace. There is a varying degree of impact this can have depending on workers' own backgrounds or protected characteristics. Feelings of lack of control are prevalent amongst precarious workers. The sense of precariousness extends beyond insecurity to concerns over the dependence on the decisions of an owner, manager, or another authority. It can describe a lack of bargaining power or ability to negotiate.

- Wages and pay are central to collective and central bargaining agreements, and this reflects a working culture which made set-hour days the standard across the economy. Now - as was the case before fixed and clear hours became customary - time itself is fluid and can be used as an incentive or punishment for worker. Particularly in a context where increasingly large parts of the economy operate based on a fixed minimum wage, the ability to negotiate and bargain about time is as vital as the ability to negotiate about pay and other benefits, as is clear from the way employers are creatively (mis)using workers' time.

- The creation of mistrust and competition between workers is a form of control which employers use either by accident or design to perpetuate forms of precarious work. However, an

atmosphere of camaraderie and friendship is also possible in precarious settings and while often more productive for the employer it is also an essential foundation that is needed to create strong trade unions. Every day in almost every workplace there are instances of practical solidarity to be celebrated and built upon.

The research suggests that the pillars of Fair Work - Security, Opportunity, Fulfilment, Respect, and Effective Voice - provide a solid framework for more dynamic, diverse, and creative workplaces. As demonstrated by this research, precarious workers are operating far from a Fair Work environment. Limited security, little to no opportunities, and a lack of respect in the workplace are, in fact, all features which underpin precarious working environments. Despite this, some workers do feel partially fulfilled at work, showing the desire that most workers have to do work that is valued and to take pride in that work.

Promoting and enhancing Fair Work within precarious workplaces would have a significant positive impact on equalities groups. Dealing effectively with the themes of control and time while promoting trust and respect would significantly improve conditions for all workers and would offer a greater degree of support to those with protected characteristics.

The following recommendations are made to trade unions, employers, the Scottish Government, and the UK Government.

Trade Unions

- *Precarious workers would receive clear benefits from a higher degree of union organisation which also promotes equality and proactive anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, and anti-disablist education; and this is particularly the case for precarious workers with protected characteristics.*

- *Union campaigns focused on the themes of 'time' and 'control' and the impact that precarious work has on the worker are likely to resonate with precarious workers in a range of precarious work settings. Organising and negotiating around these themes should be higher on trade unions' bargaining agenda.*

- *Understanding the degree of isolation faced by precarious workers is key to developing union organising strategies in different settings.*

- *Precarious workers would benefit from opportunities to develop networks and share their experiences with workers who face similar issues particularly within the same employer or sector, or because they are undertaking a variety of piecemeal or gig work. This builds a positive identity with and through the union.*

- *Unions must recognise that precarious workers often face a double burden with respect to both 'time poverty' and 'financial poverty', which might limit their ability to engage in union organisation in the traditional way. Considering new models for union engagement and organisation and the tools and support that might be required by precarious workers is therefore essential as time has been commodified.*

- *Unions should also support precarious workers to understand their rights, while recognising that many have very limited or even no engagement with an employer. Models of collective action, rather than narrow legal approaches to rights are therefore likely to be key to support improved Fair Work and equality outcomes for precarious workers.*

Scottish Government

- *Encourage employers in all sectors to end precarious work practices.*

- *Develop and effectively implement the Fair Work First agenda to as many funding streams, business support grants and public contracts as possible.*

- *Prioritise Fair Work within procurement and contract compliance systems.*

- *Support unions and employers in sectors with high levels of precarious work to agree recognition agreements and implement collective bargaining.*

UK Government

- *Implement a single employment status which places the onus on the employer rather than the worker/employee to establish the correct status. At the moment, it is up to the worker/ employee to seek a ruling on their employment status prior to their case being heard at Employment Tribunal.*

- *Make all employment rights legally enforceable from day one.*

- *Establish a statutory right to an employment contract which reflects an individual's normal hours of work.*

- *Tackle zero and short-hours contracts through introducing a statutory minimum contract of 16 hours per week, which can only be reduced by the individual worker, accompanied by their union representative, requesting to opt-out and take fewer hours.*

- *Fully eradicate youth differentials in the minimum wage and young workers to be paid the full adult rate.*

The research highlights that precarious work often limits trust and solidarity in the workplace, creating competition or suspicion between workers. Often this is not simply about wages or terms and conditions, but about the control workers have over their lives and the fact that their time is commodified. Precarity (from zero hours contracts, low pay, gig work, and casual work) as a business model is a decision made by an employer, and is often used as a tool of control by the employer.

Nonetheless, precarity can be harnessed as a shared identity and sense of community. This camraderie is, at times, identified by workers as a reason to stay in precarious sectors and is something to be valued highly in day to day lives. Precarious work is linked to other forms of precarity in life, such as housing. As such, trade union need to harness the experience of precarious workers to be a powerful force. In order to challenge precarious situations, workplaces, and lives, the experience of precarious work should be used as a unifying force, creating a situation where workers with various skills and dynamisms have higher levels of trust and solidarity in themselves and with each other.

2. Stats on Precarity
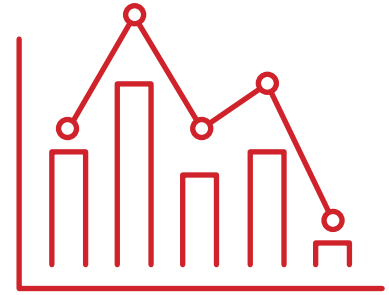
Low wages, unstable hours, and the cost of living in Scotland all combine to create precarious lives. This precarity impacts on certain demographics more than others.

The ten-year period since the financial crisis represents the UK's longest pay squeeze in 200[4] years. This stagnant wage growth impacts particularly on women, young people, disabled people and ethnic minorities. Precarious work (zero hours, short hour contracts, casual contracts, fixed term contracts, work via agencies, gig economy and bogus self-employment) has increased as the labour market has been forced to become more 'flexible'. These precarious ways of working can be inflexible for the employee and can be used as tools of exploitation and control by the employer. Figures for the past year show 118,000 temporary workers in Scotland. Over one quarter report working as a temporary worker because they cannot find a permanent job.[5] 72,000 workers were on zero-hour contracts in Scotland between October-December 2018.[6] In 2018, 321,000 workers, 12.2% of the overall workforce, were self-employed. Studies have suggested half of self-employed[7] workers are low-paid, and a number of employers use bogus self-employment contracts to reduce their tax bill and deny workers their rights.[8] A recent TUC commissioned report found that nearly one in ten workers now do platform work at least once a week, 60% of them between 16 and 34 years old, and workers are turning to this gig economy to top up incomes.[9] However, whilst self-employment has increased significantly since the financial crisis, in Scotland it has been falling since 2016. Nonetheless, these hours, modes of working, and contractual terms can further impact on certain people in different ways.

[4] New PAYE data shows employment income in Scotland averaged 2.7% in the 9 months to December 2018 - HMRC (April 2019) *Earnings and Employment Statistics from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information: Experimental Statistics April 2014 to December 2018 Quarterly estimates from HMRC PAYE RTI administrative system* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/795958/RTI_bulletin_-_April_2019.pdf

[5] ONS (June 2019) *Regional labour market: Headline indicators for Scotland* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/headlinelabourforcesurveyindicatorsforscotlandhi11

[6] ONS (February 2019) *People in employment on zero hours contracts* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/emp17peopleinemploymentonzerohourscontracts

[7] ONS (June 2019) *Regional labour market: Headline indicators for Scotland* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/headlinelabourforcesurveyindicatorsforscotlandhi11

[8] TUC (2018) *Two million self-employed adults earn less than the minimum wage* https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/two-million-self-employed-adults-earn-less-minimum-wage

[9] Report by the University of Hertfordshire and Ipsos MORI (July 2019) https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/boom-gig-economy-workers-shows-struggle-make-ends-meet

Women are heavily over-represented in occupations which tend to be lower paid and undervalued compared to those which are male dominated. For example, 38.5% of women in employment work in low pay occupations, including caring, leisure and other service occupations, sales and customer service occupations or elementary occupations such as cleaners, or kitchen and catering assistants. This compares 20.6% of males in low-paid occupations.[11] Women face a gender pay gap of 15%.[12] 22.4% of women in Scotland earn less than the Living Wage. This figure is 6.4% higher than the percentage of men earning less than the Living Wage.[13] Women also face a disproportionate double burden in undertaking unpaid caring roles within the family.[14] These are just some of the factors which can combine to make women's lives erratic.

Young people face lower employment rates than other age groups and are prevalent in workplaces characterised by insecure contract terms, such as hospitality. Across the UK, 36% of people on zero-hours contracts are aged 16 to 24 years, which is 16% higher than the second highest age range of 50-64.[15] →

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[10] Photo credit: Craig Maclean

[11] Statistics from Scottish Government's forthcoming Gender Pay Gap Action Plan. See, also: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/press-releases/men-and-women-sharing-low-paid-work-equally-would-close-the-gender-pay-gap-by-a-fifth/

[12] SPICe (February 2019) *The Gender Pay Gap: Facts and Figures* https://digitalpublica-tions.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2019/2/4/The-gender-pay-gap--facts-and-figures---2018

[13] Scottish Government's Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2018 https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0054/00543278.pdf

[14] Secretary of State for Scotland's Review (March 2015) *The Role and Contribution of Women in the Scottish Economy* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417361/The_role_and_contribution_of_women_in_the_Scottish_economy.pdf

[15] ONS Contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours: April 2018 https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/contractsthatdonotguaranteeaminimumnumberofhours/april2018#what-are-the-characteristics-of-people-employed-on-zero-hours-contracts

53.8% of 18-24 year olds in Scotland are paid less than the living wage, which is almost three times more than the Scottish average.[16] Young people are also structurally disadvantaged by the UK's minimum wage laws which allow workers to be paid less based on their age, even if their job, skills, and experience match those of colleagues. A recent survey conducted by the STUC youth committee reported that 58% of respondents found it difficult to afford the basics in life, such as food, transport and bills.[17]

There has been a big increase at the lower end of the occupational earnings distribution, particularly in the hospitality sector, which accounts for almost one-fifth of the net increase in employment since 2008. In 2018, 7.4% of the overall workforce in Scotland were underemployed - meaning they are in work but would like more hours.[18] This is despite almost half of all workers aged 16-64 years having further or higher education qualifications (SVQ level 4+ or equivalent).[19]

The employment rate of disabled people in Scotland currently stands at 45.4%, compared to 81.2% for non-disabled people, representing a gap of 35.8 percentage points.[20] When disabled people are employed it is more likely to be in sectors which are characterised by low pay and precarious ways of working. However, disabled people are not disproportionately more likely to work in low paid sectors than non-disabled workers, other than in the care sector where it is slightly higher.[21] Nonetheless, there is a widening disability pay gap, with disabled people facing a clear wage penalty. In 2016/17, median hourly earnings for disabled people were £9.89 compared with £11.63 for non-disabled people, a difference of £1.74 an hour. This represented a disability pay gap of 15.0%. The disability pay gap increased between 2013/14 and 2016/17 due to a small increase in median hourly earnings for non-disabled people.[22]

[16] Scottish Government's Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2018 https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0054/00543278.pdf

[17] STUC (April 2019) *W/age Rage: The Minimum Wage & Young Workers* http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/W_Age%20Rage%20Report.pdf

[18] Scottish Government (May 2019) Regional Employment Patterns in Scotland: Statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2018 https://www.gov.scot/publications/regional-employment-patterns-scotland-statistics-annual-population-survey-2018/pages/4/

[19] Annual Population Survey results, 2017 https://www.gov.scot/publications/regional-employment-patterns-scotland-statistics-annual-population-survey-2017/

[20] https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-disabled-people-employment-action-plan/

[21] OCEA Employment and Disability in Scotland Data from the ONS Annual Population Survey, 2017 (Jan-Dec)

[22] https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/is-britain-fairer-2018-is-scotland-fairer.pdf

Black and ethnic minority people are less likely to be employed than white people and more likely to work in low-paid occupations and sectors such as hotels and restaurants.[23] Despite high levels of educational attainment, people from the BME population are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to those from the white population. The Scottish employment rate for the minority ethnic population is 14.4 percentage points lower than the white population[24] whilst the pay gap is 10.2%.[25] The minority ethnic employment gap is higher for women than men; for women it is 22.8% whilst for men it is 5.7%.[26] Here we see a 'triple burden' for BME women working in Scotland.

Official statistics for LGBT+ people are more limited than those available for other groups: for example, employment rates and low-pay data is not available for LGBT+ workers. However, survey evidence suggests LGBT+ people are far more likely to face abuse and harassment.[27]

Across the board, 43,000 people in Scotland reported stress, anxiety or depression caused or made worse by work in a twelve months period between 2016 and 2018, with the data suggesting this is a growing problem.[28] While mental health issues are being given increasing levels of welcome attention, there is a lack of focus on the workplace as a driver of mental health.[29]

These statistics set the context for further discussion on precarious work, precarious lives in Scotland.

[23] Table taken from Kelly, M, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) 'Poverty and ethnicity: key messages for Scotland' https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-and-ethnicity-key-messages-scotland

[24] Scottish Government (2018) 'Regional employment patterns in Scotland: statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2017' https://www.gov.scot/publications/regional-employment-patterns-scotland-statistics-annual-population-survey-2017/

[25] ONS Ethnicity Pay Gaps in Great Britain, 2018 https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentand-labourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/ethnicitypaygapsin-greatbritain/2018

[26] Scottish Government (2018) 'Regional employment patterns in Scotland: statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2017' https://www.gov.scot/publications/regional-employment-patterns-scotland-statistics-annual-population-survey-2017/

[27] You Gov for Stonewall (2018) *LGBT in Scotland, Work Report* https://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_scotland_work_report.pdf

[28] HSE (2018) *Work-related illness – Country and region of residence* http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/regions/tables.html

[29] *See link to STUC report on mental health on STUC website*

3. Research Design
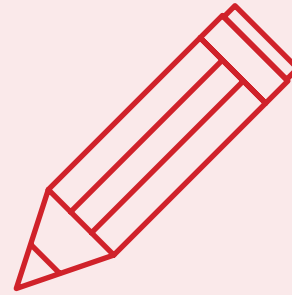
The research was developed in 2018 with support from the STUC Equality Committees[30] in order to explore the equality outcomes in terms of the structural landscape of precarity relative to the demographics of Scotland's precarious workers, the extent of direct and indirect discriminatory practices in precarious workplaces, and whether under-represented workers in insecure work are disproportionately likely to be bullied or harassed.

The report attempts to explore equality dynamics within the framework of precarity as an identity as it was important to establish at the outset how workers relate to this word and how they conceive themselves. Out of this understanding of precarity emerged three dimensions: Control, Time, and Trust. The report also looks at what individual and collective action is being taken in order to ensure that precarious workers understand their power and can demonstrate this power collectively, even when legal rights are limited or difficult to access. The themes explored offer key policy and organising lessons for the trade union movement and for wider policy makers.

The research was conducted by Sarah Collins, STUC Policy Officer, with support from Kendra Briken from the University of Strathclyde and Eleanor Kirk from the University of Glasgow. Seven focus groups were held: two with GMB members at a well-known distribution company in a rural setting.

10 couriers were interviewed across the two focus groups. One was a white female and all others were white males. The age range was 30-60+ with most couriers tending towards the higher end of the age range.

one with Unite members from across the hospitality industry in Scotland;

10 participants ranging between 19 and 31. Two were male and the rest were female. The two males were the eldest and had been in the industry for longest. All were white. The participants ranged from students who have been working in hospitality for a couple of years, to graduates who cannot get employment relevant to their qualification and therefore are in hospitality to make ends meet, to those in their thirties who began working in hospitality in their teens and ended up staying in the industry.

one with lay reps and officials from creative industry unions Equity, Musicians' Union, the NUJ, and the Scottish Artists' Union;

Two males were paid officials of their unions. One was non-white. Two were lay reps of their unions. One was female. Age range was between 30-70.

one with activists from the Better than Zero campaign;

Of the six participants, one was black and one was mixed race. Age range between 19 and 36. All apart from one were female. Most had done a variety of jobs in hospitality and retail. One was currently unemployed. Two were now in more secure employment.

one with members of the STUC's black workers, youth, and women's committees;

There were three females and one male participants. One participant identified as black. Youngest was 21.

and one with reps from USDAW across Scotland.

Of 16 participants, all worked in retail or distribution. There was a relatively even split in gender with ages ranging from early 20s to 60. Most tended to be around 35-45. The participants ranged from students on short hour contracts, to those who had worked in retail for 15 years+, to delivery drivers who were in their late fifties and had worked in distribution all of their lives.

These focus groups were arranged via affiliate unions. Further discussions were also held with NUS officers and CAB advisors in order to gather more third-party evidence.

It is important to note that, although many focus groups were initiated by and filled with union members, the majority did not come from high density unionised sectors or workplaces. Many were new members in new sectors, for example hospitality, others were new reps in unionised sectors but not necessarily unionised workplaces, for example some in retail, whilst others were in growing sectors with new collective agreements such as distribution.

[30] Black Workers, Disabled Workers, LGBT+, Women, and Youth Committees

The focus groups were relatively intersectional in terms of gender and age, and covered a range of trade union members from different industries. Access was facilitated through STUC and affiliate unions and therefore did not reach non-union workers. This may explain, in part, why issues of discrimination or bullying were not prominent in the research. The focus groups involved pre-existing groups of workers who either knew each other through work or through trade union activism, allowing the groups to become spaces of 'micro-mobilisation' in which workers discuss their shared experiences.

The method of using a focus group and group discussion was helpful as it allowed workers to tell their story and to realise that their situation is not a result of their individual choice but instead is systemic. It also allowed those workers who felt particularly vulnerable to be supported and inspired by other participants who were focussed on changing their workplace collectively.

The focus groups were shown a visual representation of 'precarity' as an ice-breaker →


The groups were asked what they immediately thought of when looking at this photo, and whether it resonated with them. Answers ranged from "not a lot" (distribution courier company) to "I think of our circus workers" (Equity) to "look at the boss just standing watching him, that's so dangerous" (Unite Hospitality). The answers in this first discussion give an indication to the diverse and unexpectedly divergent paths which each focus group took. However, it was clear from all focus groups that underlying precarity was a sense of lack of personal control, in terms of both time and money.

A female participant in her early 20s from Unite Hospitality focus group said:

"I was in a position where I was actually paying rent two months at a time because it was easier because those months you would be earning like £500 in a month kinda thing but then the next month there's no way you would so you kinda, you are constantly playing catch up to your own finances, your own mental health, to your own life, you're constantly playing catch up."

4. Identity
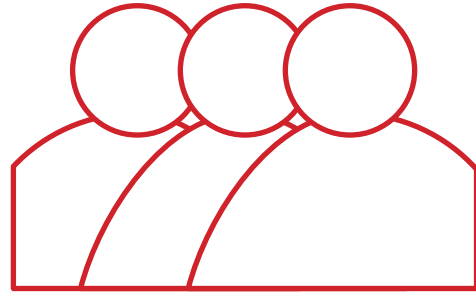
The focus group participants were asked how they felt about the word 'precarious' and what it meant to them. Synonyms used by participants included: 'unstable', 'uncertain', 'unreliable', 'inconsistent', 'unsafe', 'can't manage life, social life, family life', and 'no control'.

Am I precarious?

Some participants did not see themselves as 'precarious' workers, at least at first. Of the first focus group at a rural depot for a global delivery company, one participant was the leaseholder of the depot which the company was operating from and had been working self-employed in courier delivery for 14 years. Another had previously been a dairy farmer but had broken his back and had gone in to seasonal landscape gardening prior to working at the courier company. A third had worked in security for 15 years. None of these participants immediately identified themselves as 'precarious workers'. The fourth, however, had worked in the care sector for a number of years. He had worked in a local authority setting and was more immediately aware of how his life now was precarious in comparison to his previous job, particularly when it came to getting time off. This view accorded with views from the second focus group which was undertaken with participants from a courier company.[31] Their discussion centred much more around the fact that they felt controlled, partly by the courier company itself, and partly by the depot manager. Despite being classed as self-employed, and despite the depot manager not being their line manager, forms of hierarchical control had developed which made the participants feel more precarious. On balance, the couriers felt that they had sufficient hours and that their earnings were adequate, but that they lacked control over their time as they often had to work long hours to complete their deliveries and being self-employed they had no right to time off, which impacts their work-life balance and limits the time they can spend away from work.

It became clear through the focus groups that precarity is defined differently across all forms of non-standard work. While precarity implies insecurity, some sectors have a long tradition of what today is framed as precarity. For example, in the creative industries, precarity has been normalised to the extent that workers in these sectors do not class themselves as precarious despite their terms and conditions, and lives, being the archetype of precarity. A lay rep from the Scottish Artists'

Union explained the normalisation of precarity and gig work which, for her, has become synonymous with 'busyness'. *The word precarious in language, it has a sort of meaning, I use it in a particular way, but when I talk about precarious work [it is] one of these phrases that has become a bit meaningless... I don't think the precarious in it really has the same resonance that it maybe does in other contexts because I wouldn't say that my life is particularly precarious but I have built a structure within a precarious landscape in that I do freelance jobs and I do teaching and I make art and I do exhibitions on a freelance basis where a lot of the time I don't have contracts but I also work for the union and [for] that I have a regular salary so that's my safety net. I do both of those things and a lot of people are doing that, where you do a whole myriad of jobs. You either have one constant thing to buoy you up when other things slide, but I wouldn't say it's precarious, I would just say it's busy!*

Through the focus group discussion, a participant from Equity, the union for performers and creative practitioners, recognised that within their industry they see precarious workers as the ones on low or no pay, but that actually, all actors are precarious in some way due to their contracts of employment:

"(we) internalise(d) precarious work...and look at it through the low pay-no pay...([model]...(although) most of our members don't have 365 days a year employment, they operate on what are effectively short-term contracts so there's a precarity in that ... 'cause we see that as the norm, we then look at the low pay-no pay as the precarity but actually the whole membership is in a situation where they're not on full-time long-term tenure and with that comes employment status and so forth."

Furthermore, a full-time officer from the NUJ noted during the focus group that he thought the sweeping term 'precarious' was difficult for people to conceptualise and therefore to challenge:

I think of it as a trendy sociological term that has been introduced to our language and is unhelpful because it's too vague and doesn't actually help us deal with the issues because there's so many different ways of precarious working that we need to address because each of those ways has a different solution and to pretend it's all under one rubric of precariousness and is capable of one solution, it isn't helping,

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[31] The first focus group was with couriers who worked inside the depot, sorting parcels, prior to their delivery run. The second focus group was conducted with couriers who waited outside the depot until the parcels were sorted before going on their run. Chapter six on Trust discusses the 'insiders' versus 'outsiders' dynamic in more depth.

it's working against what we need to achieve.

Although the participants from the creative industries agreed that precarity was and always has been normal and prevalent in their industries ("You can't make a movie forever") they did recognise through the discussion, that an almost blasé attitude was formed by concentrating on those workers and skilled performers who have more individual bargaining power. In contrast they viewed those starting out in their careers as the workers in their industry who were genuinely precarious as they had less bargaining power, worked longer hours, and often had low or no pay.

In this respect precarity is not linked to skill leve, rather the precarity lies in the lack of time and control a worker has over their jobs and lives.

An identity as a precarious worker resonated more strongly with the majority of those working in hospitality or retail. One reason for this may be because these focus groups were with workers who were not also union reps or officers. In the Better than Zero focus group, the participants all agreed that being a precarious worker meant a constant feeling of anxiety. One of the participants in their early twenties described it as *"that way when you're sitting with your pals and you come down for a wee chat and everybody's got the same stuff, doesn't matter where the workplace is, or the issues, there's always an underlying feeling of anxiety, whether that's saying to your boss I can't make it in today, but just being really anxious about making that call 6 hours before your shift, and the repercussions that might have for you. And that might be for totally different reasons why I'd be feeling anxious about going to a shift, because I know I'm in for a 20 hour cash in hand thing that I might not get at the end. There's always that underlying feeling of anxiety."*

Two of the focus group participants who identified as migrant workers[32] were less keen to be identified as precarious because they were of the view that their jobs were good, stable, had progression opportunities, and paid relatively well. Both worked in distribution centres for £10 per hour basic rate. One participant was quite sharp with the other participants, asking why they do not leave their jobs if they do not like them – *"I came here with nothing and I had to work hard to achieve something".*

This shows the importance of considering different perspectives, and also the limitations of the current research as the aspects of how precarity impacts on different equality groups were not able to be explored fully due to small numbers of participants from particular equality groups, for example disabled workers. However, it is clear that experiences of precarity and job satisfaction are relative and workers' expectations of work and their previous experience in the labour market will shape their perception of their current terms and conditions. There was also a recognition within the focus groups that there is a difference between someone working a precarious job but not relying on this job for survival as opposed to someone whose whole situation is made precarious, in terms of their housing or their financial situation, due to the precarious nature of their job. The latter are more likely to suffer from other systemic factors of oppression. This relativity in turn can facilitate the employer to continue to offer precarious work as it reduces the workers' shared experiences and impacts on the trust and relationship building which is necessary to build a strong workplace union.

Our jobs aren't all bad

Nonetheless, all participants were still hesitant about criticising their jobs, seeing them as part of their identities, having an element of pride in their work, and often referring to aspects which they find enjoyable.

The GMB members in the courier company talked about the positives of their work following a discussion on the negatives:

R2 [Woman courier]: *It sounds not bad the money, it is not bad for part-time, for me, I'm not talking about them, me, part-time work it is really, it's ok, but the same scenario is everything's going up and you get your wages in and aye it looks ok for that and then you take off your fuel, your insurance, your dah, dah, dah, it's rubbish.*
R1 [eldest male courier]: *I took the job for flexibility, to work round my band and my little girl.*
R2: *I took it because the flexibility, I like going out and about, I like to talk, as you know, I like to talk.*
R1: *We can't get a word in.*
R2: *That's why I took it cause it's the customers, I like the one to one [with] customers, I like you get to know people, they're alright…"*

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[32] From three who identified as migrant workers in total, both were in the USDAW focus group

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Participants were keen to stress that low status was something they struggled to change but that their work was not low-skilled. It was clear that participants had pride in their work because they saw the skills involved, which became bound up with self-identity and esteem. Therefore, criticising the work can be seen as criticising them or their self-worth.

R8 [24 year old hospitality worker]: *I prefer it [being classed as a 'precarious worker'] to the one that we get classed as on the census which is unskilled or low paid, I prefer it to that because I don't think there's anything unskilled about our jobs. … And anybody that wrote that definition should work a Friday night, pay day Friday night in fact and bank holiday Monday on a bar and then they can come back to me about unskilled. They can get on that bar and figure out their unskilled level, so I prefer it to that, cause it definitely sums up how you feel.*

…but our health suffers

Nonetheless, despite recognising their own skills, the toll which living precariously takes on some workers is telling. For example, the focus group of USDAW representatives were mostly on permanent contracts, but identified with precarity through the lens of short hour contracts, long shifts, and low pay. Many of the workers were embarrassed about their low pay, which effectively made their lives precarious. However, instead of being angry at the employer, they were simply shamed into silence by low wages. The double burden of care, particularly for some women participants, was illustrated.

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[33] Photo courtesy of the Daily Record, April 2019 https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/couriers-fury-hermes-shuts-down-14248159

R10 [participant in her forties, working as a sales assistant]: *I mean what I feel I earn is embarrassing, I'm embarrassed to, oh my god, imagine letting anybody know that's what you [earn], when I see my wage packet I'm mortified that at my age I'm sitting with, I mean it's pennies, the wages, it doesn't really reflect the time or what you do when you're there, or maybe, because there's always something extra added, but see when I see that wage? I mean I got that when I was 21 and I'm double that age and I'm, like - it just embarrasses me. It's not something I would discuss maybe outside here or anybody who was the same money, I wouldn't openly...*

No, I shouldn't be in this situation but I mean that's just the way things have happened. No never in a million years. I mean you're lucky if you're getting 14 a year, I'm 46 and my pension will be me working, I'll be working till I'm 90, till I make something. But it is just embarrassing, you open up that, you're so excited when the wages...

I mean I would not live with anybody or anything and I mean it, actually the thought of discussing what I earn is a major factor in the fact that I would never, until I got something else or I was earning extra money, cause I would never disclose that, that's how embarrassed I am, but because I have my son myself, you've not always got the time to go and look, it's no ideal and it's maybe using it as an excuse but I need the money every week because he needs to obviously eat so, or you need to keep the house or whatever, do you know what I mean?...."

While a participant from the STUC women's committee who has worked in and been a trade union rep in the whisky industry all of her life compares her own situation to that of her daughter's, marking clear the impact that precarious work has on women and those with caring responsibilities and highlighting how low pay creates an ongoing struggle for the household. *"Myself, I would go and work in the factory, where I've ended up forever and like that, so that was the sort of life then but you still had factory work, you still had good work and then it became that it had to be 2 people that worked in a family, to keep a family going and now it's like even 2 people can't keep a family going cause I watch my daughter, she works for the NHS, she helps support nurses in the schools, she works part-time and she gets, what do you call that? Term time, she works term time and I watch her now struggling 3 days to try and put money into the house. Now she's went for a second job, she's went back to the NHS 24 that she worked for years ago, she's just starting back there so she can make ends meet because her and her husband working can't get a mortgage now and they can't do things, like that they can't plan their lives."*

A participant from the Scottish Artists Union went on to explain how precarity, coupled with the constant need to be visible and in the public eye, impacts on her mental health. *"Mental health is something that we do really need to talk about and I think is probably one of the most important things when it comes to precarity because we've all talked about people doing a particular job for an employer or doing lots of different jobs or working for no pay which is a really big issue within our members too and within the sector cause then you have a scenario where you have to constantly work to be visible, you know, and to just be constantly making work, being in public, seen to be doing things and that's really really exhausting and also if you're getting no pay or really low pay for it then the artists, the people who can't*

afford to maintain that sort of lifestyle, so then we have to talk about intersectionality there's a big issue for women and maternity and childcare where we're going towards a scenario where the whole art world is occupied with people making work who can afford to and that's really damaging for lots of different reasons."

This was similar to a discussion had in the hospitality focus group between two young women participants. *"R5: People don't understand, this comes into the culture stuff, they don't understand the social exhaustion that you feel after shifts. R3: Keeping up a personality for that long, even if it's just an extension of your own personality, you're not realistically going to smile or be that excited to see strangers that walk into a building, you know? I wish I was that enthusiastic. You're putting that on and then when you leave you can't socialise with your friends because the thought of going out and having to keep up a smile, it's just like I'd rather sit in looking miserable."*

What about our rights?

As part of a discussion on identity, participants across the focus groups also identified the impact which working precariously has on their legal rights. *"If everyone has rights, what's so wrong with me?"* One of the case studies highlighted by an advisor with CAB demonstrates the level of importance a worker gives the legal rights (or lack thereof) which they are assigned, often falsely, by the employer in relation to their employment status. In this case, a teenage woman was employed in a local bakery. She had to take some sick leave and when she enquired regarding Statutory Sick Pay, she was advised she was self-employed and therefore had no entitlement. She automatically believed that she was unable to raise a formal grievance because she was told that she was self-employed. Because of this assumed status, she felt too intimidated by the employer to challenge the lack of sick pay.

A hospitality worker who had been in the industry for a few years recognised that just because someone has a 'right' to something, for example a disciplinary process, does not mean that right will be respected or that it is easy to enforce, because of the power that their employer holds over them: *"There's no formality to the proceedings. So zero hour contracts then are the source of that … I don't think that protecting us by rights would then change anything if we didn't change the culture as well. Its 2 pronged for me."*

As such, the hospitality focus group were very clear that any change to their workplace would come from them acting collectively, not from changes in law which might have little tangible impact on the reality of the workplace. These workers identified with the term precarious and recognised how their status was used against them, and how it impacted negatively on their experience of work.

A participant from the Scottish Artists Union also pointed to the fact that precarity of employment is linked to precarity of life, including external factors, which, bound with a person's identity, requires a particular response in itself. *"When I talk about spectacle as well I really see in recent years a shift, I don't know what it's like in your industries, but of art forms trying to become more risky, more political, more entertaining, there just seems to be this situation where people these days really want to feel something, really powerful and instant…"*

Summary

The lack of a secure and stable contract is often seen as the main identifier of precarity, both for workers and within trade unions. However, for many workers, non-standard contracts and erratic schedules do not automatically result in a precarious identity. The research found that identifying workers through their contracts, or using the term 'precarious' as a catch-all term for non-stable work, can be disempowering, especially if the workers' identity and self-fulfilment are intertwined with their professions which are non-traditional by their structural make-up.

By probing into attitudes about precarity of both workers and trade union officers, another dimension of precarity emerged from the focus groups, which described a worker's sense of dependency upon an employer giving or allowing them something, for example higher pay or more hours (or less hours). Whilst every worker experiences a degree of being at the mercy of their employer in terms of control and expending their time, the key thing about precarity is the conscious and active decision which the employer takes in making the workplace or workplace terms and conditions precarious. The discussion about precarity also found that the sense of precariousness extends beyond simple concepts of insecurity and was more readily described as a lack of bargaining power, ability to negotiate, or likelihood of concession to demands. A precarious relationship therefore has certain implications.

1. Where the workers' whole livelihood depends on insecure work the situation is worse than for those who complement secure employment with a diet of freelance or short-term contractual work.

2. Where a worker feels unable to enforce their legal rights, or attempts to enforce them and are rebuffed, or believes that they have no legal rights, this can heighten their sense of precarity.

3. Where a worker feels replaceable because of their perceived skill level, or because of the potential introduction of new technologies, they have less reason to expect to be valued on the basis of their skill alone, placing them in a more precarious situation.

4. One of the symptoms of this situation is anxiety, and the ill health caused by stress is increasingly part of people's understanding of bad work.

In recent years trade unions, labour researchers and campaigns like Better than Zero have succeeded in injecting the concept of precarity into discourse about work. But trade unions now need to be conscious of how the term 'precarious' is used. As a standalone term it might not resonate with, or appeal to, the intended audience as the focus of campaigns or as an identity for workers. However, the word has the ability to effectively describe the power dynamics of certain work, and to highlight to workers that the identity is not a criticism of them, but a way of describing their situation and that their precarity is an intended consequence of a decision made by employers. Union campaigns focused on the themes of 'time' and 'control' and the impact that precarious work has on the worker are likely to resonate with precarious workers in a range of precarious work settings.

5. Control
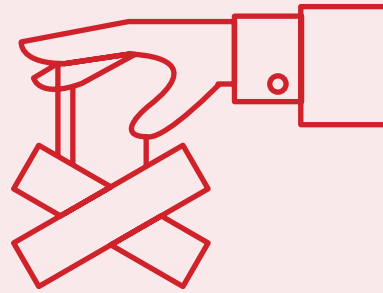
Employers' control over the worker, and the worker's lack of control over their work and lives, are key features of precarious work.

In the first case of obvious management control, the distribution couriers were conscious of how their employment status of self-employed is used against them.

R1: *…it's made known to you that they don't need to give you parcels. The contract states they can stop giving us parcels at any time so that's how it's put to us, if you don't turn up we might need to get somebody to replace you. That's the way it's put.*
R4: *Aye they're very quick, when it actually suits them they're very quick to remind you that you're self-employed. But they want you to be and do things at certain times, they tell you what to do but 'you're self-employed'.*

One of the participants in the hospitality focus group highlighted how employers can exert control over even basic legal entitlements simply by using their power and authority to misrepresent basic entitlements to workers. *"So I always use the example of I worked with a girl, she was 16 and in school and this was a part-time job and she said to me…'I don't get holiday pay because I'm only 16' and I was like 'no, no that's not how it works.'"*

The Better than Zero campaign has had numerous reports since its inception in 2015 of precarious workers being threatened with dismissal over minor incidents simply as a way for the employer to demonstrate their power. As a Better than Zero organiser notes *"employers understand where their power lies when it comes to precarious workers. They know that it's easier for them to simply stop giving someone shifts, or to cut their parcel runs, or hire more staff to side line others, than it is to follow substantive disciplinary procedures. Often, workers don't even deserve to be disciplined – it's just that their face no longer fits, or the employer is cutting corners to make more money. Precarious workers are often bullied, intimidated, sexually harassed and victimised because employers know that, individually, workers are frightened to stand up for themselves. This is doubly true of precarious workers who can very much be 'here one day, gone the next'."*

An USDAW rep who works short hour contracts and is a student said *"I had to do a job over the Christmas period, I ended up working in a [shop] or something up in the [local shopping centre] and at that time I was 16/17 and at 17 years old it was £3.73 an hour I was getting… and I actually got*

sacked from there because there was one point I had to stay and do, there was obviously no union representative but I had to childcare, so I had to do caring for my wee sister and I told them I couldn't make it in, 'what do you want me to do about it? I've got to look after [her], they put a shift up basically about 5 days in advance, and I told them and then they sacked me, they told me not to come, then I went in and they said 'what are you doing here?', so there was no kinda notice, no formal written notice, so this just shows you the kinda, the freedom that managers think they've got in shops in which there's no representation and official representation."

The second Control scenario is multi-layered and concerned with the quality of management action. Some workers saw lack of management or poor management as incompetency which mutated into control or a way of generating competition between workers; whilst others understood the perception of chaos to be a deliberate attempt by management to control workers via confusion. A CIPD report further evidenced this by indicating that poor management is more likely to be the cause of poor productivity as opposed to workers' skills, abilities or motivation.[34]

Some of the distribution couriers discussed the fact that they are self-employed but are supposed to have a field manager who can tell them 'the rules' about the company they serve. However, no field manager has been to their depot in almost two years. They are not sure of the name of their current field manager or how to contact them, but they know that they will be penalised for taking time off e.g. their runs will be cut and others reported that they were asked to pay a financial penalty. This 'incompetence' in not assigning a field manager to visit has created competition and a system of control between workers. *"**R2:** It's just not black and white, there's just no, I don't mean rules but there's just no…[the] field manager say we don't know what's what with who, gossip isn't it really?...**R1:** Yeh so there's no sort of consistency."*

Staff may be treated 'equally' in the sense that they are treated 'the same' but this can have a disproportionate impact on certain characteristics which means the outcome is inequitable. For example, precarious ways of working can impact more heavily on people who have underlying health conditions, who are disabled, or who have extra caring responsibilities. Migrant workers have a myriad of other pressures on them including worry about their immigration status or their families

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34 CIPD, Evidence to the Select Committee's Small Business and Productivity Inquiry, March 2018 https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/cipd-submission-to-hoc-business-select-committee-on-productivity-in-smes_tcm18-39292.pdf

in their native country, for example. Therefore, employers can create competition between workers over 'who is getting away early', 'who is getting a day off', 'who has been given the best shift pattern' or 'the best area to work in'. This manufactured competition is a form of control which is particularly oppressive for people with certain protected characteristics.

One distribution courier said they had no pay transparency therefore had to negotiate their pay individually whilst not knowing what other workers were paid. *"It's so secret, it's a formula that they've got and they tell you that you meet the criteria, that formula. That's it. There is nothing more than that."* This worker understood that this secrecy was used as a tool of control. Despite this secrecy, the same worker went on to say what he did to secure better pay. *"When I got my right rise I was on the phone arguing, I'd locked my van with the parcels in it and told them if I didn't get what I was promised when I started I was going home for a coffee and they could pick up the parcels when they brought me the money they owed me. And I did it on loud speaker so everyone could hear and when they finally agreed to give me the amount I was offered originally, he tried telling me that I wasn't to tell anyone and I told him 'well everyone's been sitting listening to the whole conversation, so that doesn't work. I've not signed any non-disclosure clause or anything so'."* In this instance, the worker mitigated the employer's control by acting collectively, by breaking down any secrecy and being up front with the employer about this.

The implementation of new technologies at work is also a concern for workers as they perceive it as enhancing and extending managerial control. One of the distribution couriers said *"see these machines? They're an invasion of privacy because they've got GSP [sic] on them and the field manager right? I had finished and was in the pub…They can track you, he came into the pub and he said 'what are you doing in here?' and I said 'it's got nothing to do with you' and he says 'you're still working', 'I'm not working.'"*

The third scenario of Control, i.e. workers feeling out of control of their lives due to insecurity or poor terms and conditions, was described by a young male participant from the Better than Zero focus group. *"Aye, it's looking quite bleak like, this idea of a debt occurring to sort of get through despite working fulltime hours. Like I do a 72 hour week, I'm thinking that should cover at least two weeks out of this next month coming and it's like nah, overdraft it is. And that isn't even with nights out or anything, that's just basic getting by. My mum works as a part-time carer so we're putting both of our wages together*

so we can pay our monthly rent and the way we, we have no control, we can't say no I'm going to do this, or I'm going to go out and do this or let's go for dinner or let's get something nice in the night, it's just always, always thinking about money."

In the last Control scenario, the STUC Youth Committee's delegate summarised a more systemic element of control which comes with the increase in precarious work in the labour market and is closely linked with the theme of Time. *"It's looking back especially at summers when I was working 7 days a week, it's draining, and it's as if you're too drained to even fight it…it's draining to the point where there's no energy mentally, physically you're exhausted."*

This reluctance to challenge poor employment practices did not derive entirely from the controlling nature of, or intimidation by, a particular employer, but the exhausting and draining nature of having to work more than one job and fit the rotas round each other, thereby having little time to socialise. Often precarious workers will also spend their 'down time' applying for other jobs in the hope that they will find something more secure.

This participant went on to talk about how precarious employment is different from simply being busy by highlighting that it was about the lack of control she has over her life and time that makes precarity so all consuming. *"My mum is very busy, she's a NHS worker and a councillor but at least she gets her weekends off, and at least she can book a holiday…like she'll be off the Saturday, Sunday and then she'll go 'what you tired for?' and I'm like 'because I've literally not had a day off for', like people get like a week's, a few weeks holiday a year, you don't get your holidays a year [when working two jobs] so*

you don't have any time to recuperate and that's the difference I think with being busy."

Systemic issues of immigration status, caring responsibilities and fear of harassment were all mentioned to varying degrees throughout the focus groups as barriers, obstacles, or threats of control for precarious workers. A member of Unite and the STUC Black Workers' Committee summed up how migrant workers can often be automatically put in precarious work, because of the precarity of their immigration status. *"...it's like a default position – people find themselves in this sort of work not because that's what they were looking for but because of their category they automatically fall into the bracket of people who get that sort of work whether they like it or not and some people they remain trapped in that sort of work because obviously it's very difficult to come out of that sort of work because of their situation, I mean there's another number of factors."* This 'default' or 'to be expected' attitude is prevalent throughout precarious work situations.

A Better than Zero organiser highlighted that *"it is only when workers come together that they consciously realise how the system is rigged against them and what they need to do, together, to take back some control in the workplace and for their lives."*

Summary

There are different ways in which workers can be controlled, or can feel controlled in the workplace. There is a varying

degree of impact this can have depending on workers' own backgrounds or protected characteristics.

This theme is illustrated by different variables, including the following:

i. clear styles of management control, such as shifts being cut or cancelled, or being denied basic legal entitlements;

ii. false systems of control developing amongst and between workers due to a significant lack of management or poor management or a perceived absence of management, caused or exacerbated by use of technology, secrecy, lack of transparency and poor communication;

iii. workers feeling out of control of their lives due to poor terms and conditions and/or insecurity; and

iv. workers feeling that they have no control over their lives due to time management issues which underpin precarity.

6. Time

The third identified theme of precarity is the lack of time which workers have to themselves, to socialise, rest, or do anything other than think about working. This is particularly acute when coupled with low paid work. Workers are forced into a constant battle between time and money. On the one hand, they can have more time but not enough wages to enjoy that time; on the other hand, they can work more hours or more jobs in order to ensure an income they can live on, but have no time to enjoy the wages. The battle for time is a strong image which, coupled with the themes of control, identity and trust, paint a stark picture of precarious lives.

The distribution company looked at in this research has a particular business model where it does not pay for the time it takes to sort the parcels into runs, rather it only pays couriers per parcel drop. The quicker the parcels get sorted, the quicker a courier can get onto his or her run, and the quicker they can complete the delivery. At this particular depot, there is not enough space outside for all the couriers to park and sort their parcels. Instead, they need to line up outside while only three couriers do the sorting. The last person in line to park outside is the last onto their run and therefore likely to finish later than all the others, with no additional pay. This dynamic means that those chosen by the depot leaseholder to sort the parcels, who are consistently the same couriers, are considered the 'insiders'. The 'insiders' arrive at work up to two hours early simply to get their parcels sorted and get away quicker. The other couriers, 'the outsiders', are those who wait in line outside the depot until the parcel runs are sorted. When one of the 'insiders' was asked if they are paid for sorting the parcels, he said *"no, no we don't get paid anything at all. We just get a wee bit extra time."*[35]

The example highlights the inter-relationship between time and control as the workers in question are prepared to work additional hours to gain time later in the day and to have greater control over when their shift begins and ends. However, the other workers feel disadvantaged as they lose both time and control over their working hours by being forced to wait in line for their shift to start. The fact that the 'privilege' of sorting the parcels was entirely controlled by the leaseholder and impacted so directly on the workers' time was also an issue and created a degree of resentment within the 'outsider' group.

In this workplace the leaseholder's control over the workers' time was a major feature of the couriers' experience of precarity although the leaseholder was also a courier himself. The couriers also reported that any time they want off needs to be covered by a substitute driver and therefore they do not have access to annual leave, a common issue when workers are deemed to be self-employed.

One of the drivers who previously worked in social care makes the comparison. *"I could do with a few days this April coming but I don't know whether to book something because I don't know if I'm going to get the time off, ken I don't know what to do?...Whereas when I, say when I was in social care I was guaranteed four/ five weeks a year annual leave. You just went to your supervisor 'can I get a week in*

[35] A similar dynamic was noted in Moore and Newsome's study of supply chain distribution workplaces Paying for Free Delivery: Dependent Self-Employment as a Measure of Precarity in Parcel Delivery *Work, Employment and Society* 2018, Vol. 32(3) 475 –492

April?' signed it off and that was it. You knew you would get that week, or two weeks, but with this you can't do that. So it's as if you've to work 6 days a week 52 weeks of the year, you can't get a day off. You can't get a holiday. That's the difficult thing I find with it." This is replicated across other sectors, and is particularly acute when employers simply deny those with employment status their legal minimum, as discussed in the previous chapter.

This control over time also has equalities impacts. One courier who had a new baby had to secure cover for himself before he could get time-off as he was not entitled to paternity leave.
R2: *[Name] covered my run for five days cause my wife was in labour but that's it, in over a year.*
I1: *So five days for having a baby?*
R4: *If [Name] hadn't done it you'd have had to come in.*
R2: *If [Name] hadn't agreed to do it I'd have had to come in.*
This way of working also has clear negative impacts on women drivers, those with disabilities, and those with caring responsibilities.

A major issue that came up within the creative industries was the management of time and how that was like a job in itself. Again, there is an added equality impact with this pressure on time. A participant in his seventies who had been in the industry all his life explained *"the gig economy is nothing new to us…that handling various activities and various sources of income, and, you know, there are very few people who can make money in music from that one place apart from the 20% or so of our members who are workplace musicians, you know in orchestras with salaries and so on. A large percentage of the membership is operating doing a bit of teaching, doing a bit of recording sessions, doing a wee bit of arranging, doing a wee bit of broadcasting etc."*

Although shift work is not automatically classed as precarious, the precarity dynamic comes to the fore when the employer holds the power to unilaterally make decisions, for example, about the scheduling of work. Participants from the USDAW and hospitality focus groups also spoke about how insecure conditions, low pay, lack of holidays, and shift patterns mean their personal lives are impacted with a clear lack of quality rest time. One USDAW rep who has been working as a driver for a bakers in Fife for the past three years said *"you've no life on the shift pattern we work …you come off on the Friday morning, you go home on the Friday, you're off on the Saturday morning, you're so tired on the Friday night you've got to sleep, you can't do nothing and on the Saturday you've got to fit in what you can because you're not working…you can't do nothing*

at all on the Sunday because you've got to go to your bed early and these people are just paying these sort of wages to you which I think is shocking like."

One of the participants from the Better than Zero focus group who had worked in a number of precarious jobs said *"We can't just go home, it's 4 in the morning, taxis are extortionate, we'd go to the casino, buy a bottle of wine, not to gamble just there to sit…then get a bus back home at 7 in the morning but we'd then have to wash our stuff, then shower and be back in for 1 o'clock and my manager's like 'had a good night then?' We're sitting like no, but this is how we're getting through."*

A young woman participant from Unite the Union's Youth Committee who took part in the STUC equality committees' focus group said *"because I wasn't guaranteed the hours I would have to do 2 jobs, so the first job I worked in a bar, so I was maybe finishing at like 4 in the morning, we weren't allowed to keep our tips and then I was getting up for my other shift at maybe 9 sometimes, and that was always a struggle, and a bar's hard work…"*

There are many negative health impacts associated with little sleep, having poor quality eating patterns, and missing out on quality rest time. One participant from the hospitality group said *"I don't know many chefs that eat at all…even if you do get a day off it's, like, a Wednesday night or something, how in the world are you going to find anyone else who's free on like a Wednesday afternoon because they've all got work. So it puts you in a very anti-social mood, so the only people you can socialise with are other people in hospitality and I end up drinking."*

A participant who has worked in the hospitality industry for 12 years talked about how little time he can spend with his wife. *"One of the other things about shift work that I don't know what other industries depend on shift work and zero hour contracts, so precarious amounts of hours, other than the hospitality industry really, I'm sure there are some, but the combination of shift work and not knowing how many hours you have when you're working, work is the most important thing in most people's lives right? Because it's what pays your bills, what gives you money to spend in your spare time, so it comes first but if you never know when you're working, or how much you're going to be working, you cannot organise any of the rest of your life, so your diet, your social life, I mean you can go years without seeing your friends if they don't work in bars or whatever. My wife is 9-5 Monday to Friday in a bank and it's really difficult for me to get Friday/Saturday off or Sundays sometimes, so I kinda feel like a day off with her is limited to usually a Sunday where I'm absolutely exhausted because I've been working all Saturday from, like, lunchtime to 2 in the morning, or 3 or 4, and I just don't want to socialise at all that day. So, it's very difficult to have any kind of work-life balance at all."*

Summary

Work-life balance can be a struggle for a range of workers. But, for precarious workers, particularly those with multiple jobs, anti-social shift patterns, and the added pressure of using rest time to look for a way out of precarious work, finding a 'work-life' balance can be impossible. It is also clear that many workers in these focus groups were suffering a double burden being both 'time poor' and 'financially poor'. As the TUC report pointed out, the increase in 'platform work' is used to supplement other forms of income, reflecting that UK workers are increasingly likely to patch together a living from multiple different sources rather than being permanent and full time gig workers.[36] In this sense, it is clear that time itself is being commodified. The impact that this has on the workers' well-being and their family relationships is severe. With issues of mental ill-health and stress rising across the labour market the particular issues faced by precarious workers should be recognised. In many cases, the research showed the time-consuming battle to get the best shifts and rotas saps unpaid time from workers, contributes to stress, and leads to exhaustion. Dealing with the issue of time was a first order issue for workers. It also connects to the final theme that emerged from the research: workers' competition and the lack of mutual trust.

[36] https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/uk's-gig-economy-workforce-has-doubled-2016-tuc-and-feps-backed-research-shows

7. Trust — from competition

"The untapped resources of the North Sea are as nothing compared to the untapped resources of our people. I am convinced that the great mass of our people go through life without even a glimmer of what they could have contributed to their fellow human beings. This is a personal tragedy. It's a social crime."

Jimmy Reid, University of Glasgow rector address, 1972

The idea of trust, teamwork, and sticking up for colleagues featured in every focus group. It became apparent that this can have positive and negative connotations, for example where workers themselves are in competition or are replicating a hierarchy in the company; compared to where workers are socialising together and relying on each other, for example to swap shifts.

For the distribution couriers the 'insider' versus 'outsider' dynamic centres on the fact that three workers have been chosen by the depot leaseholder, (who is playing the role of manager despite there being no official line management in the warehouse), to help sort and scan the parcels when they come in. They do not get extra pay but they do get to pick up their parcels and therefore get away earlier than the 'outsiders' who are lined up in their cars, single file, outside the depot, waiting for their turn. The 'insiders' and 'outsiders' see themselves in different groups:

R2: *This is, this is our team.*
R1: *Probably the four here.*
R2: *It sounds bad but it's like two different, it's like that's a team out there and then we're in here but that's the way it's always kinda been. Don't know why but...*

As explained in chapter five on Control, no field manager has been in contact for over a year. New couriers started in this time and have had no contact with any direct manager employed by the distribution firm, yet they never questioned this 'insider' v 'outsider' division. This impersonal management style is exacerbated by the role of automation as the couriers receive all instructions from the company via a tracking device. This working culture of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', was created by the leaseholder as a way to manage space and time rather than any formal company policy. However, the company are not paying for this time and it is having a clear impact on the workforce which led to a lack of trust between the workers and resentment, particularly in the 'outsider' group.

For the USDAW group, trust and relationships in work, in order to build a union were quite dependant on shift patterns, socialising, and pay, but this operates in two distinct ways.

R12: *because we're working most weekends, our time off, it's easier to spend time with your mate in work than it is, because they're doing things the weekend, you're working the weekend. So it works out like that, so ends up work days out and things like that, organising things with guys in the work, just because of the shift pattern.*
R3: *And we're exactly the opposite, because of the shift pattern, its constant nightshift, we can't go out, we can't meet up and go for a drink and socialise because we've no time, absolutely no time.*
R10: *I've no money, I get a bottle of wine and just sit in myself with the music turned up, always sad. I don't really, the ones in our work are quite young so you don't really socialise, well if they're at a night or something maybe...*

A lot of participants believed that, without knowing each other outside of work, it can be hard to build up a genuine rapport or trust. One USDAW rep noted *"you do know them but not to an extent, I mean especially if, like quite a lot of us say, you don't even go out and socialise with them, you know you can see a different side to someone at work and a different side to someone out of work, so I mean I trust my colleagues to an extent but there is certain things that I wouldn't tell them because I know that one or two would go straight back to management behind my back and so there is a degree of trust but you're never ever going to 100% trust your work staff."*

Many participants in this focus group had a sense that colleagues were competing with each other. Participants in the creative industries also noted that there is an added element of competition between precarious workers relating to funding of projects for them. *"I think what people do is just take themselves out of the competition...that's when people become quite isolated, existing a little bit pariah-like just because there's so much ill feeling for their peers who're seen to be getting funding or opportunities that they maybe feel that they should be getting."*

However, through the Scottish Artists Union they are breaking down some of these barriers and attempting to create more solidarity. *"We run events and workshops and things and actually it's so, what happens in those gatherings, the workshop content becomes a bit secondary to the coming together, it's just the fact that everybody's in the room together and we're usually talking about a workplace issue or learning something about how to conduct your business or whatever*

and there is an informal sharing of resources and information that happens there…It kinda buoys you up to do something about it or talk to your union or just get together." The NUJ reported a similar experience and found that new freelancers were likely to share information and to want build rapport between each other.

Similarly, there is a tight community in hospitality, partly due to the shift pattern and the way of working, and also in part due to a young workforce. One young female participant (**R8**) explained that, although competing for jobs, other hospitality staff could be a real support to each other. When she was made redundant overnight from a bar in Stirling and found herself having to get in to debt to support her and her partner, her friends – a lot from the hospitality community – turned up at her house to offer support.

R8: *Yeh, of course, cause we're all bounded together by our…*
R3: *Ironically, that is, we all find comfort in each other's miseries.*
R8: *Ironically it was the other people who'd been made redundant who kinda looked at [name] and I's situation and were like 'you guys have got it pretty gnarly right now', so they kinda clubbed together, like we had a lot of people showing up with alcohol which was very kind of them but it weirdly doesn't pay the bills, yeh, it does pacify for a while though. So yeh, and there was definitely a very traumatic impact on our whole friend group basically.*

She went on to say *"I don't know about the rest of you but I've stayed in hospitality for this long because of the community around it, like, all my friends work in hospitality. If I had a Saturday night off I'd have nobody to hang out with, so there's no point in leaving hospitality because that's where all my friends are, that's all the experiences that we have in common. So obviously our friendship goes beyond that but that's the bedrock of it so for me it's the community that keeps me in hospitality, not the employment side of it."* It is clearly important for employers to recognise that this camaraderie can be a positive reason for workers to stay in the industry.

Participants did recognise that being in the union also contributed, positively, to their identity.

A participant from Equity talked about how being a member of their union provided an identity for performers in itself. *"The Equity piece is a lot around identity as well…people are saying 'I'm more than all these little jobs that I do, my identity is a performer.' The only way they can anchor that is to join Equity*

and they can say I am part of this performer's union."

It is therefore also important for trade unions to be a place to build camaraderie in order to build stronger trade unions. Participant R8 went on *"that's also why there's so, on a more positive note, why there's so much potential to build a union, because there is this camaraderie, we've all just stepped in in 2 weeks, like that on each other's team, there's not any question about it and people do have your back."*

Summary

The creation of mistrust and competition between workers is a form of control which employers use either by accident or design to perpetuate forms of precarious work. However, an atmosphere of camaraderie and friendship is also possible in precarious settings and is often more productive for both workers and employers. It is also an essential foundation that is needed to create strong trade unions. Precarious workers would benefit from opportunities to develop networks and share their experiences with workers who face similar issues particularly within the same employer or sector in order to build trust and a sense of collectivity.

8. Where next in the challenge of precarity?

R2: *But if you do anything wrong they're [the field manager] straight on the phone and they get you, but if you try and get them for anything? No chance.*
I1: *So I'm assuming that's why unionisation might be quite important to you?*
R4: *Of course, of course it is.*

– distribution couriers.

Precarity is not new in employment but the last decade has seen an increase in the range of sectors experiencing this form of working and of workers undertaking precarious work. This insecurity coupled with high rates of low pay creates more insecure living arrangements and increased debt. People are now living precariously as well as working precariously.

The Better than Zero brand has become recognisable in Scotland as marking a workplace where precarious workers have experienced employer exploitation and have courageously exposed it. This has given the issue of precarious work more prominence in Scottish politics and media. However, precarity is not limited to hospitality. Exploitation is unexceptional, atypical work practices are increasingly typical, and precarious contracts and low pay are increasingly the expectation for many working class people across Scotland.

The research found, firstly, that workers in precarious work did not always identify with the term 'precarious' but rather expressed a strong desire to address the negative impacts of precarious work while also identifying positive aspects of their job. Similarly with respect to equality, while the research uncovered a range of clear equality impacts, the workers did not identify these as inequality or potential discrimination within their workplace and while often angry about situations that they felt were unjust, they showed no clear understanding of how equality law might offer a protection to themselves or their colleagues.

This research found that workers in precarious employment experience a range of impacts which coalesce around the concepts of 'control', 'time' and 'trust'. The research shows that these themes are interrelated and have a severe impact on the workers interviewed who often talked of being exhausted, having little time with family or of struggling with multiple jobs to make ends meet.

The research also identified a range of rights issues for precarious workers within these themes, including access to paid holiday (with some workers unable to take holiday at all), access to sick pay, access to maternity or paternity leave, difficulty meeting caring responsibilities and a lack of control over working time. It was also clear that pressure on mental health and high levels of stress and anxiety either due to issues of time and control or low pay (or a mixture of all three) were common experiences among those interviewed. The impacts of these issues were common amongst all workers interviewed but those with protected characteristics often faced greater challenges and detriments as a result of how precarious work was organised. It was also notable that workers who identified as disabled were absent for all seven of the focus groups, suggesting that precarious work may represent a further barrier to employment for this group.

The research suggests that the pillars of Fair Work - Security, Opportunity, Fulfilment, Respect, and Effective Voice - provide a solid framework to understand how workplaces can be healthier, safer, more diverse and able to meet Scotland's future industrial needs. As demonstrated by this research, precarious workers are operating far from a Fair Work environment. Limited security, little to no opportunities, and a lack of respect in the workplace are, in fact, all features which underpin precarious working environments. Despite this, some workers do feel partially fulfilled at work, showing the desire that most workers have to do work that is valued and to take pride in that work. The workers in this study were all union members and many worked in unionised settings so there was a high degree of recognition that effective voice, through their trade union, was a positive element of their workplace and a route to improve working conditions and to gain access to the other pillars of Fair Work.

Promoting and enhancing Fair Work within precarious workplaces would have a significant positive impact on equalities groups. Dealing effectively with the themes of control and time while promoting trust and respect would significantly improve conditions for all workers and would offer a greater degree of support to those with protected characteristics. Low pay and insecure employment, coupled with a lack of access to basic rights and enforcement thereof, are the underlying features of the precarious employment landscape which also must be addressed and doing so is likely to have a positive impact on the gender pay gap, the ethnicity pay gap and disability employment gap and disability pay gap.

Reflecting on these elements, it is possible to make the following recommendations for, Trade Unions, Employers, the Scottish Government, and the UK Government. →
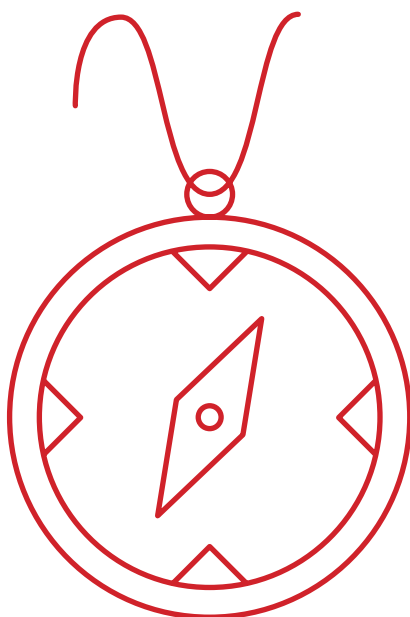
Trade Unions

There are many lessons for trade unions in terms of strategy and messaging which flow from this research. For example, it was clear from the focus group participants that, whilst they did want to talk about low pay and insecure employment contracts or employment status problems, and there was mention of the equality impacts of precarious work, the themes of time and control resonated more deeply and were consistent concerns shared by all workers in each of the precarious settings. As such, trade union campaigns that use both 'time' and 'control' as a starting point are likely to gain a high degree of resonance and traction with precarious workers and may support organising within precarious workplaces. In this way, campaigns focused on the impacts of precarious work, rather than simply its existence, and which build on the workers shared experience are likely to have a high degree of success.

In particular, with regard to the theme of 'control', breaking down secrecy, information gathering, and forging collectivism are all forms of challenging control. Precarity is a business model which is chosen by the employer. There are seldom cases where an individual has challenged the outcomes of precarity successfully. Instead, because the employer has actively and consciously chosen precarious models, often through a false sense of productivity and to maximise revenue, challenging precarity requires collective action. The research shows that there are seldom cases where workers can build up control as an individual, which is why any campaign against precarity should involve a campaign for collective control.

A central method of control is the theme of 'time'. The demand for time, particularly for eight hours a day 'free time', was once a central element of the labour movement's demands. It is clear from this research that it is still a main concern of workers. A union campaign which focusses on the value of time as well as money, which explores ways that unions could develop effective tools to monitor time-allocation, and provides a strategy for giving control of time back to workers, is likely to provoke a positive reaction from members and potential members. Responses to the platform economy often focus on observing patterns of time allocation and distribution. Negotiating around these, across other sectors, should rise on the trade unions' bargaining agenda. Collective negotiation around time, which has increasingly become individualised, would also ensure further levels of mutual trust and support within the workplace, which this research has found is important but often missing for precarious workers.

While some precarious workers reported good levels of trust and mutual support within the workplace, the research also exposed that the nature of precarious work could either drive the breakdown of trust and solidarity or act as a systematic barrier to it being created in the first place. It was also clear that many precarious workers felt isolated both at work and in their wider lives and could therefore benefit from support and networking opportunities with other workers. It is notable that unions who have organised precarious workers for a long period of time often have a clear focus on networking, resilience and mutual support within their organising strategies. The creative unions indicated a positive response from members when they organise information sharing events or upskilling events. Workers' learning, collectively, is a strong way to build a union which includes precarious workers. Participants recognised that being in the union also contributed, positively, to their identity. Instead of being a 'low paid' or 'zero hours' worker, all with negative connotations, some precarious workers take strength from being part of their union. As mentioned previously, one participant from Equity said *"people are saying 'I'm more than all these little jobs that I do, my identity is a performer.' The only way they can anchor that is to join Equity and they can say I am part of this performer's union."*

Unions should therefore consider the following key points:

- *Precarious workers would receive clear benefits from a higher degree of union organisation which also promotes equality and proactive anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, and anti-disablist education; and this is particularly the case for precarious workers with protected characteristics.*

- *Union campaigns focused on the themes of 'time' and 'control' and the impact that precarious work has on the worker are likely to resonate with precarious workers in a range of precarious work settings. Organising and negotiating around these themes should rise on trade unions' bargaining agenda.*

- *Understanding the degree of isolation faced by precarious workers is key to developing union organising strategies in different settings.*

- *Precarious workers would benefit from opportunities to develop networks and share their experiences with workers who face similar issues particularly within the same employer or sector, or because they are undertaking a variety of*

piecemeal or gig work. This builds a positive identity with and through the union.

- *Unions must recognise that precarious workers often face a double burden with respect to both 'time poverty' and 'financial poverty', which might limit their ability to engage in union organisation in the traditional way. Considering new models for union engagement and organisation and the tools and support that might be required by precarious workers is therefore essential as time has been commodified.*

- *Unions should also support precarious workers to understand their rights, while recognising that many have very limited or even no engagement with an employer. Models of collective action, rather than narrow legal approaches to rights are therefore likely to be key to support improved Fair Work and equality outcomes for precarious workers.*

Employers

It is important for employers to understand the impact precarious work has on workers – from low pay to zero hours contracts to bogus self-employment. This research exposes the degree of detriment that these working practices create. It is clear that workers require and deserve more security, respect, opportunity and fulfilment in their working lives. Ensuring this is the case can provide employers with a more dynamic, diverse, and creative workforce.

The research also highlights that precarious workers face a range of inappropriate management styles including

i. undue management control, such as shifts being cut or cancelled or being denied basic legal entitlements.

ii. false systems of control developing amongst and between workers due to a significant lack of management, poor management or a perceived absence of management, caused or exacerbated by use of technology, secrecy, lack of transparency and poor communication.

iii. workers feeling out of control of their lives due to poor terms and conditions and/or insecurity.

iv. workers feeling that they have no control over their lives due to time management issues which underpin precarity.

Fundamentally this approach to work is unsustainable and employers must consider how they can deliver Fair Work

in every role or setting within their operation including areas which are currently outsourced. As the labour market tightens, employers which offer better, fairer and more equal workplaces will be more likely to retain staff.

Employers should:

- *Review their use of precarious contracts, including outsourced agreements, with a view to ending precarious work.*

- *Offer routes to Effective Voice for workers particularly through union recognition and collective bargaining.*

- *Ensure that managers are better resourced to understand their job, and the consequences of their actions on workers.*

- *Seek to reduce isolation within their workplace, recognising that new technologies and new ways of working often limit the opportunities workers have to build positive relationships that support mental wellbeing.*

- *Meet their requirements under the Equality Act and ensure workers have access to their rights at work.*

Scottish Government

The Fair Work Framework offers a useful approach to supporting precarious workers. However, it must be recognised that precarious workers in a range of industries across the Scottish labour market are currently facing high levels of unfair work practices and potential rights violations. The research highlights the degree of commonality between precarious workers in different settings which suggests that changing how these workplaces function and tackling the negative impacts of precarious work will need to be a focus if the Scottish Government is going to meet its vision for Scotland to be a Fair Work leading nation by 2025.

Ensuring Fair Work in precarious workplaces would have a significant equality impact. Allowing workers more time and control over their work and lives, and to build up relationships of trust and respect, will mean less pressure and burden on workers with protected characteristics and is likely to address the gender pay gap, the ethnicity pay gap, disability employment gap and disability pay gap.

The work that the Scottish Government has begun to put in

place Fair Work First and to effectively build Fair Work requirements in procurement systems is a positive beginning. However, greater focus needs to be placed on ensuring that employers meet their responsibilities and that workers are genuinely empowered to shape the nature and quality of work and to understand and have, the Scottish Government should:

• *Encourage employers in all sectors to end precarious work practices*

• *Develop and effectively implement the Fair Work First agenda in as many funding streams, business support grants and public contracts as possible.*

• *Prioritise Fair Work within procurement and contract compliance systems.*

• *Support unions and employers in sectors with high levels of precarious work to agree recognition agreements and implement collective bargaining.*

UK Government

The research raised some clear issues around access to and enforcement of employment rights. The Taylor Review recognised that employers are increasingly using 'loop-holes' in the rules around 'employment status' (e.g. self-employed rather than employed) as a tool for reducing both their tax liabilities and their obligations as an employer. However, the recommendations of the Taylor Review did not go far enough to truly protect precarious workers from the range of impacts illustrated in this research.

The UK Government should:

• *Implement a single employment status which places the onus on the employer rather than the worker/employee to establish the correct status. At the moment, it is up to the worker/employee to seek a ruling on their employment status prior to their case being heard at an Employment Tribunal.*

• *Make all employment rights legally enforceable from day one.*

• *Establish a statutory right to an employment contract which reflects an individual's normal hours of work.*

• *Tackle zero and short-hours contracts through introducing a statutory minimum contract of 16 hours per week, which can only be reduced by the individual worker, accompanied by their union representative, requesting to opt-out and take fewer hours.*

• *Eradicate youth differentials in the minimum wage so that young workers are paid the full adult rate.*

• *Introduce a £10 per hour minimum wage rate.*

The research highlights that precarious work often limits trust and solidarity in the workplace, creating competition or suspicion between workers. Often this is not simply about wages or terms and conditions, but about the control workers have on their lives and the fact that their time is commodified. Precarity (from zero hours contracts, low pay, gig work, and casual work) as a business model is a decision made by an employer, and is often used as a tool of control by the employer.
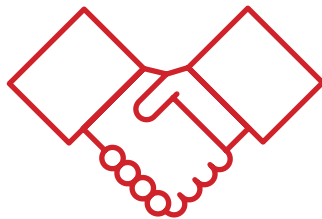
Nonetheless, precarity can be harnessed as a shared identity and sense of community. This camraderie is, at times, identified by workers as a reason to stay in precarious sectors and is something to be valued highly in day to day lives. Precarious work is linked to other forms of precarity in life, such as housing. As such, trade unions need to harness the experience of precarious workers to be a powerful force. In order to challenge precarious situations, workplaces, and lives, the experience of precarious work should be used as a unifying force, creating a situation where workers with various skills and dynamisms have higher levels of trust and solidarity in themselves and with each other.

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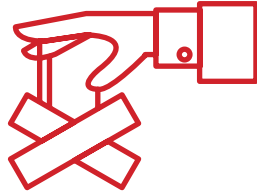
Control

Time

Trust

STUC

October 2019