

Dignity at Work

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Policy Brief: Voluntary Dignity at Work Programme Restoring Respect and Value in the Gig Economy

Summary

Work provides not only economic benefit but a sense of personal value and purpose. However, in sectors where workers are seen as easily replaceable—such as the gig economy—dignity is often eroded by poor treatment, harsh conditions, and lack of basic respect.

This policy proposes a **voluntary, incentivised “Dignity at Work” certification programme**, targeting gig economy employers. Companies that foster high-dignity working environments will be publicly recognised and rewarded. Mystery shopper inspections and a transparent scoring system will ensure credibility, while participation remains voluntary—making the programme non-punitive but reputationally powerful.

Context & Problem

- **Dignity gaps** in work are most acute where jobs are low-paid, high-turnover, and algorithmically managed.
- **Gig economy workers** (e.g., drivers, couriers, warehouse pickers) often report:
 - Inadequate breaks or access to restrooms
 - Excessive monitoring
 - Lack of respect, support, or feedback mechanisms
- These practices are **morally concerning, economically short-sighted, and socially corrosive**.

Despite public pressure, platform companies resist regulation by claiming non-employer status. This programme **avoids that legal trap** by using **voluntary participation** and **soft-power incentives**.

Policy Proposal: Voluntary Dignity Certification Programme

Key Components

- **Voluntary participation:** Companies opt-in; non-participants face no legal penalty.
- **Mystery shopper inspections:** Trained inspectors assess dignity practices using a structured grid over a 3-day period.
- **Scoring system:**
 - +1 for dignity-enhancing events
 - -1 for dignity-reducing events

- Fines of £250 per highlighted dignity violation (only for participating companies)
- **Incentives for participation:**
 - **National Insurance reduction:** 0.1% employer contribution discount for qualifying firms
 - **Public recognition:** “Dignity Stars” and optional “**Royal Supplier of Dignity**” crest
 - **Prize draw** funded by fines, with proportional ticketing by dignity score

Scoring Thresholds

Business Size	Points Required	Competitive Requirement
Small (<10 staff)	30+	None
Medium (11–100)	40+	Top 50% in size group
Large (>100)	60+	Top 25% in size group

Benefits

For Workers

- Increased respect, safety, and wellbeing
- Incentivises fair treatment without fear of retaliation

For Employers

- Access to tax breaks and public goodwill
- Stronger recruitment and retention
- Opportunity to lead on ethical innovation in gig work

For Government & Society

- Improves public perception of labour standards
- Encourages dignity-driven practices without legal overreach
- Helps shift gig economy toward long-term sustainability and fairness

Implementation Steps

1. **Legislative support** to establish the Dignity Programme framework
 2. **Creation of an independent inspection body** with trained evaluators
 3. **Pilot programme** in select urban areas or sectors (e.g., food delivery, warehousing)
 4. **Public awareness campaign** to promote dignity-certified employers
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Conclusion

Dignity should not be a luxury in the workplace—it should be a baseline. This voluntary, incentive-based programme provides a pragmatic way to promote human dignity in gig and low-wage work without burdensome regulation. By rewarding positive practices rather than punishing failures, it creates a race to the top.

Policy Brief: Enhancing Workplace Inspections with a Dignity Module

Date: May 2025

Executive Summary

Workplace dignity—respectful treatment, fair conditions, and recognition of workers’ value—is essential for employee wellbeing and productivity. However, existing regulatory inspections often focus narrowly on safety, compliance, and consumer protection, leaving dignity largely unassessed.

This brief proposes integrating a **Dignity Module** into existing UK workplace inspections for all businesses, with additional requirements for large employers (>500 employees) to designate a **Dignity Champion**. This role will be dedicated to promoting dignity initiatives, supported by allocated time equivalent to 15 minutes per employee annually.

Rationale

Why Focus on Dignity?

- **Dignity at work improves employee wellbeing and productivity.** Research shows that when workers are treated with respect, autonomy, and fairness, they experience higher job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment. This translates into reduced absenteeism, lower turnover, and improved performance.
 - *“Workplace dignity is a key psychological resource that supports motivation and resilience”* (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012).
 - Studies in organizational psychology link dignity to improved cognitive function and innovation (van den Broek et al., 2021).
- **Servant leadership promotes dignity and enhances organizational outcomes.** Leadership styles that emphasize serving and empowering employees — rather than controlling or micromanaging — foster dignity and trust, which drives team cohesion and effectiveness.
 - *“Servant leadership positively influences employees’ perception of dignity, which mediates the relationship between leadership and job performance”* (Eva et al., 2019).
- **Embedding dignity assessments in inspections institutionalizes these benefits, providing objective measurement and accountability.** This approach complements existing health and safety focus with a psychosocial dimension crucial for modern workplaces.

Separate Proposal for the Gig Economy

- Given the unique challenges of the gig economy—such as worker precarity, platform control, and lack of traditional employment protections—we propose a **dedicated dignity inspection program** using mystery shoppers and scoring grids tailored to this sector.
- This policy brief focuses on **mainstream businesses** with established inspection regimes, ensuring dignity standards are raised where traditional oversight exists.

Policy Proposal

1. Dignity Module Integration

- **Scope:** Add a dignity assessment checklist as an add-on module to existing regulatory inspections across sectors.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - Fair and respectful treatment
 - Access to breaks and basic facilities (e.g., restrooms)
 - Protection from harassment and bullying
 - Reasonable workloads and autonomy
 - Recognition and employee feedback mechanisms
- **Implementation:** Regulatory bodies adapt inspection frameworks and train inspectors to assess dignity-related factors.

2. Dignity Champion for Large Employers

- **Requirement:** All companies with **more than 500 employees** must appoint a **Dignity Champion**.
- **Role:** The Champion will lead dignity initiatives, monitor workplace culture, and act as a liaison between staff and management.
- **Time Allocation:** Companies must allocate **15 minutes per employee per year** of paid working time for the Champion to conduct dignity-related activities (e.g., surveys, meetings, training).
- **Reporting:** Annual dignity reports submitted to regulators and made available to employees.

Benefits

- **Improved Employee Wellbeing:** Regular dignity checks foster respectful and supportive workplaces.
- **Enhanced Productivity & Retention:** Dignified workplaces reduce absenteeism and turnover.
- **Reputational Gains:** Public recognition of dignity compliance enhances brand value.
- **Data-Driven Improvements:** Inspections provide actionable insights for continuous enhancement.

Funding & Support

- Costs are expected to be marginal, absorbed within existing inspection budgets.
- Large employers benefit from increased retention and productivity, offsetting the modest time investment.
- Government to provide guidance materials and training support for dignity assessments.

Conclusion

Incorporating a dignity module into workplace inspections and mandating dignity champions at large companies represent pragmatic, low-cost steps toward fostering dignity at work across the UK. This policy will support healthier, more equitable workplaces, aligned with modern employment values.

List of current inspections

Health & Social Care

- **Care Quality Commission (CQC)** inspections of hospitals, care homes, GP practices, dentists
- Focus: Quality of care, safety, dignity, safeguarding

Education

- **Ofsted** inspections of schools, colleges, early years providers
- Focus: Teaching quality, safeguarding, pupil welfare

Food Safety & Hygiene

- **Local Authority Environmental Health inspections** of restaurants, food manufacturers, retailers
- Focus: Food hygiene, safety, pest control

Health & Safety

- **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** inspections of workplaces including factories, construction sites, warehouses
- Focus: Worker safety, machinery, chemical handling, fire safety

Transport

- **Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA)** inspections of commercial vehicles and drivers
- Focus: Vehicle safety, driver hours compliance

Trading Standards

- Inspections of retail and consumer goods for product safety, fair trading practices

Fire Safety

- Fire authority inspections of buildings (public, commercial)
- Focus: Fire risk assessments, emergency planning

Financial Services

- **Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)** and **Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA)** inspections of banks, insurers, investment firms
- Focus: Regulatory compliance, financial stability

Environment

- Environment Agency inspections related to pollution control, waste management, and environmental permits

Construction & Building Regulations

- Building control inspections by local authorities or approved inspectors
- Focus: Structural safety, compliance with building codes

Public Health

- Inspections related to sanitation, pest control, water safety in public spaces

References

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