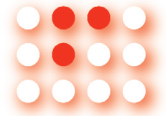
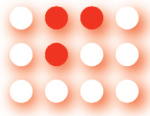


FACT

S E R V I C E



101 Gig is up
Little or no progress on social mobility

102 Retirement income gender gap widens

103 New guidelines for apprenticeships
Voluntary sector takes up real Living Wage

104 Concerns over Brexit minister and asbestos

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Gig is up

Over three million people – one in 10 of the UK workforce – now face insecurity at work, according to a TUC report on the gig economy.

The gig is up says that not only do these workers often face uncertainty about their working hours, they also miss out on rights and protections that many take for granted, including being able to return to the same job after having a baby, or the right to sick pay when they cannot work.

The study shows the impact of insecurity at work on workers themselves, and on the UK's economy and public finances. It also reports back from a TUC survey of people in insecure jobs, enabling them to tell us about their experience of work in their own words.

Importantly, the report sets out what policy-makers could do to ensure that the modern world of work is one in which everyone can have a decent job – not one of ever-increasing insecurity.

The TUC wants policy-makers to:

- help more workers to have a voice at work;
 - upgrade our framework of employment rights to make it fit for the 21st century;
 - make sure those rights are properly enforced;
- and

- ensure that the tax, social security and pensions systems all encourage employers to offer decent jobs, and guarantee that everyone has a decent standard of living when they're not at work.

Matthew Taylor, who is heading an independent review into modern-day employment practices and how they need to change in order to keep pace with the latest business models, is due publish his report very soon.

www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-gig-is-up.pdf

Little or no progress on social mobility

Two decades of government efforts to improve social mobility have failed to deliver enough progress in reducing the gap between Britain's "haves and have nots", the Social Mobility Commission says in its latest report.

The commission, an independent body that monitors progress on social mobility, calls on current and future governments to learn five key lessons from the mistakes and successes of the past 20 years.

It warns that without deep-seated reform, social and economic divisions in British society are set to widen with consequences for community cohesion and economic prosperity.

LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

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The *Time for change* report examines various public policies pursued over the last 20 years and assesses the impact they have had – for good or ill – on social mobility in Britain.

The in-depth analysis, carried out for the first time, covers four life stages from the early years and school through to training and further or higher education and then into the world of work. It gives “red”, “amber” and “green” ratings depending on how successful governments have been in translating policy into positive social outcomes.

Disappointingly, the report is not able to give a single “green” rating to any of the life stages. Both early years and schools are given an “amber” rating, while young people and working lives receives a “red” rating. Overall, only seven policies score a “green”, while 14 score “amber” and 16 “red”.

Main findings from the report include:

- child poverty has risen in the aftermath of the recession and there is currently no prospect of it ending;
- at current rates of progress, it will take 15 years before all children are school ready and 40 years before the attainment gap between poor five-year-olds and their better-off counterparts is closed
- there is currently no prospect of the gap between poorer and wealthier children being eliminated at either GCSE- or A-level;
- labour market outcomes for young people are poor: while youth unemployment has fallen, the number of young people who are NEET – not in education, employment or training – has barely changed;
- young people’s wages have fallen 16% – taking pay to below 1997 levels;
- despite university access widening, retention and graduate outcomes for disadvantaged students have barely improved;
- employment rates are the highest on record and extreme low pay has been eliminated, but one in five people in the UK are stuck on low pay – a higher proportion than other comparable nations; and
- the highest-paid and best-paid jobs remain deeply elitist, while some progress is being made – it is painfully slow.

The report has a raft of recommendations for government action covering the early years, schools, young people and working lives.

In the early years these include that the government should focus childcare policy on improving teaching for the poorest children by doubling the early years pupil premium to enable childcare providers to offer extra support for disadvantaged children.

On schools, the government should, for example, introduce a new ambition that, within a decade, the attainment gap between poorer children and their better off classmates should be closed at GCSE level. And it should abandon prime minister Theresa May’s plans to extend grammar schools – which seems to have happened already – and instead focus on developing new collaborative approaches to turning around failing schools.

For young people, government actions should include a refocusing of apprenticeships policy on young people and on higher quality apprenticeships, and making sure that higher education is available via further education colleges in social mobility cold spots.

In working lives, the commission’s recommendations include an increase the number of high-skilled jobs in the regions and particularly in social mobility cold spots, by encouraging and incentivising public sector bodies and private companies to base themselves in those areas.

Alan Milburn, chair of the Social Mobility Commission, said: “What is so striking about this new analysis is how divided we have become as a nation. A new geographical divide has opened up, a new income divide has opened up and a new generational divide has opened up.

“If we go on like this, these divisions are set to widen, not narrow. There is a growing sense in the nation that these divisions are not sustainable, socially, economically or politically. There is hunger for change. New approaches are needed if Britain is to become a fairer and more equal country.”

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/622214/Time_for_Change_report_-_An_assessment_of_government_policies_on_social_mobility_1997-2017.pdf

Retirement income gender gap widens

The gap between women’s and men’s annual average expected retirement incomes in 2017 is at its highest level for three years, according to new research from financial services group Prudential.

The study shows that women expecting to retire this year will be £6,400 a year worse off, on average, than their male counterparts. Last year the gap was £5,300, while in 2015 it was £4,800.

Women retiring this year will be nearly £200 a year worse off than women who retired in 2016.

Women this year can expect an average annual retirement income of £14,300, which is the second highest on record although slightly down on the £14,500 for those retiring in 2016.

This year's female retirees are feeling slightly more confident about their finances, however, with half (50%) saying they are financially well-prepared for retirement, compared with 48% in 2016.

Meanwhile, as women's incomes stagnate, men's expected retirement incomes have shown a fifth consecutive year of growth. Men retiring this year expect an annual retirement income of £20,700 – £900 a year more than last year. That growth has helped drive the gender gap to its highest level for three years.

www.pru.co.uk/pdf/press-centre/20170628-co2017-gender-gap.pdf

New guidelines for apprenticeships

Employers must take responsibility for apprentices' off-the-job training, according to new government guidelines.

The guidelines lay out further details of the apprenticeship levy's training requirements, which employers and providers will be expected to comply with to deliver high-quality apprenticeship programmes.

As part of the requirements of the new apprenticeship levy, which was introduced this April, 20% training must be off-the-job – described in the guidelines as learning that takes place outside the core working environment and which focuses on the personal development of the apprentice.

Keith Smith, director of funding and programmes at the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), which is working alongside the government to oversee the apprenticeship levy, said employers and providers that were confused by the off-the-job training threshold must approach ESFA with any queries, warning that a hard line would be taken with any employer that did not comply with the guidelines.

"A huge amount of work has gone into the guidelines – please do read it, as this will be an area of zero-tolerance around non-compliance," he said.

Actual delivery of the training can be handled by a provider or the employer themselves. Regardless

of how the training is delivered, employers will be responsible for making sure apprenticeships are receiving off-the-job training for a minimum of a fifth of the time they are paid to work.

<http://www2.cipd.co.uk/pm/peoplemanagement/b/weblog/archive/2017/06/27/employers-face-zero-tolerance-approach-to-training-apprentices.aspx>

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/621565/OTJ_training_guidance.pdf

Voluntary sector takes up real Living Wage

There has been a groundswell in support for responsible pay in the charity sector, with more charities signing up to the real Living Wage than ever before, the Living Wage Foundation reported in Small Charities week which ran from 19-23 June.

So far, 1,041 third sector organisations have chosen to take up Living Wage accreditation – ranging from major household names including Oxfam, Save the Children and Macmillan Cancer Support, to small local projects serving communities right across the UK.

Three hundred and sixty-four (or 35%) of these organisations employ fewer than 10 people, and 794 (76%) of them employ fewer than 50, showing that the Living Wage commitment is possible for small charitable organisations.

By becoming Living Wage accredited, charities ensure that everyone working for them – regardless of whether they are direct employees or third-party contracted staff – receive a minimum hourly wage of £9.75 in London or £8.45 in the rest of the UK. Both these rates are significantly higher than the statutory minimum wage for over 25s which was updated to £7.50 an hour in April 2017.

Grant-makers to charities have also joined the fray with 27 Friendly Funders enabling fair pay by funding posts at the Living Wage rate. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the People's Health Trust, the Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief, City Bridge Trust and Lloyds Bank Foundation are just some of the organisations that have signed up as Living Wage Friendly Funders, with more joining every day.

John Hume, chief executive of the People's Health Trust and chair of the Living Wage Friendly Funders Committee, said: "Living Wage Friendly Funders support charities to pay the real Living Wage that meets the cost of living, through their grant-making.

"We want to see the Living Wage become the norm, and believe that funding organisations can lead the way in making this happen within the Voluntary Sector."

www.livingwage.org.uk/news/small-charities-embrace-real-living-wage
www.livingwage.org.uk/news/four-new-living-wage-friendly-funders-announced

Concerns over Brexit minister and asbestos

Brexit minister Steve Baker MP has lobbied the government to weaken asbestos laws, leading the Unite general union to demand that Theresa May's government now provides "cast-iron guarantees" that asbestos regulations won't be watered down.

Much of the existing legislation, which bans the use of asbestos and controls how the substance is removed, is governed by European Union legislation. Baker's appointment raises concerns that when the so-called *Great Reform Bill* becomes law, he will be able to use his position to weaken asbestos laws, bypassing effective parliamentary scrutiny.

The latest figures from the Health and Safety Executive for 2014 reveal that, 2,515 people died as a result of developing mesothelioma, the incurable and fatal cancer of the lining of the lungs, caused by inhaling asbestos. In 2013 and 2012, there were 2,556 deaths and 2,549 deaths respectively.

In October 2010, Baker asked a series of parliamentary questions regarding asbestos. He asked the secretary of state for work and pensions: "If he will bring forward proposals to amend the provisions of the *Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002* to distinguish the white form of asbestos and the blue and brown forms of that substance."

Baker also asked: "If he will commission an inquiry into the appropriateness of the health and safety

precautions in force in respect of asbestos cement." And "If he will bring forward proposals to amend existing regulations governing the safe use of asbestos cement in line with the evidence cited in the Health and Safety Commission Paper HSC/06/055."

Unite assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail, said: "It is alarming that an MP who holds such extreme views on asbestos has been given such a sensitive position."

Baker is also mentioned in a 2015 report by the Conservative Rural Affairs Group (CRAG) as having contacted Lord de Mauley, then a parliamentary under-secretary of state at the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, "about asbestos issues on farms".

CRAG has long campaigned for a derogation "to allow the re-use of end-of-life asbestos cement sheets on farms" rather than the professional removal of the substance, which is currently the case.

Baker's questions and the policies of CRAG are in line with a well-funded pro-asbestos group which argues contrary to scientific evidence that white asbestos is safe. This group has the support of several right-wing politicians and commentators within both the Conservative Party and UKIP.

Cartmail said: "Following these revelations it is essential that senior government ministers give a cast-iron guarantee that the existing asbestos regulations will not be weakened or modified and the safety of workers will remain the priority."

"With thousands of people dying every year, directly as a result of being exposed to asbestos, the priority must be to ensure that the existing safety laws are adhered to and employers who ignore this life saving legislation are prosecuted and convicted."

www.unitetheunion.org/news/concern-that-new-brexit-minister-supports-removing-asbestos-laws/

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