

An ESRC Future of Work Programme Seminar Series



Diversity in Britain's Labour Market

by Robert Taylor



Future of Work

Contents

The diversity of work and employment in Britain's labour markets is one of the key policy issues for the new millennium. This Report assesses the implications for policy of the most up-to-date findings from a nationally representative survey of changes in employees working lives, and illuminates in particular the contrasting experiences of men and women, older and younger workers and those employed in smaller rather than large organisations.

Page No.	2	Foreword by Professor Peter Nolan - Programme Director
	4	Commentary by Rita Donaghy - Chairman of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)
	6	Diversity in Britain's Labour Market by Robert Taylor - Media Fellow on the ESRC Future of Work Programme

Future of Work Commentary Series:

Publication One - The Future of Employment Relations

Publication Two - The Future of Work-Life Balance

Publication Three - Britain's World of Work - Myths and Realities



Foreword



THE PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS OF DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OF LABOUR MARKET regulation have been widely debated in the UK and overseas. Since 1980, the dominant domestic policy stance had been to proclaim the performance benefits of deregulation and the removal of obstacles to management prerogative, but that perspective may now be waning as policy makers review the performance of the past two decades and note the continuing evidence of significant productivity gaps between the UK and other leading economies. Whether there will be a pronounced change in the character of public policy remains to be seen, but for the moment we must assess the consequences of the developments in labour market policies that have been pursued in the past two decades.

Some commentators assert that the forces of globalisation, new technologies and the policy shifts aimed at promoting more flexible labour markets in Western economies will generalise the insecure lifestyles and poor working conditions more commonly associated with the newly industrialising economies. More optimistic scenarios point to the benefits that the new work and employment systems will bring to individuals, families and economic prosperity. The blurring boundaries between paid work and home life that the new technologies will facilitate, they say, will enable individuals to exercise more scope and discretion over how, when and where paid work is performed.

Fuelled in the past by the dearth of systematic theory and evidence, such disagreements remain a central feature of current policy analysis and debate. The ESRC launched the Future of Work Programme in 1998 to help close the gaps in our understanding of the changing world of work. The Programme has supported twenty-seven projects and the research activities of more than one hundred researchers at twenty-two UK universities.

Topics under investigation include the nature, significance and economic implications of flexible labour markets, the representation by trade unions of female ethnic minority workers, the changing employment prospects of young Asian women, and the employment choices of mothers of pre-school children. Other projects are examining the changing nature of employment relations in the workplace, the performance consequences of high commitment management practices, and the significance for employment of new models of business organisation.

Key findings from the Programme are brought to the attention of policy

makers and practitioners through an extensive series of publications, seminars, workshops and conferences. The aim is to help improve the quality of information available to all parties with a direct interest in shaping the future of paid work and its implications for other aspects of social life.

To assist in the dissemination of the findings from the research projects, the ESRC commissioned a series of Reports by Robert Taylor, the internationally renowned expert on work and employment. The fourth Report in the series examines the character and significance of the growing diversity in Britain's labour markets with reference to the important new findings from the Working in Britain 2000 Survey. The latter was conducted by a team of researchers based at the London School of Economics and the Policy Studies Institute at the University of Westminster.

Focusing on the contrasting work experiences of men and women, older and younger employees, and those engaged by small rather than large organisations, the survey findings shed fresh light on, among other things, the sources and variance of levels of dissatisfaction at work, the extent to which women and men differ in their attitudes to new work systems and employment practices, and the position of older employees relative to their younger peers. The significance of organisational size has long been an issue in policy analysis, with some commentators proclaiming that small is beautiful. Hard evidence, illuminating the distinct role of size in determining employees' experiences at work, has been scarce, but the gaps in our knowledge are bridged by the new findings presented in this report.

Mobilising the new evidence, Robert Taylor points to worsening trends in Britain in the relative position of employees that are forecast to grow as a proportion of the workforce in the next decade. The findings highlight the plight of the over-50s, the stubborn obstacles to improvements in the relative position of most women employees, and the deteriorating status of employees in many small firms. With careful glances to the changing labour market regulations of other European economies, Robert Taylor sets out a stimulating policy agenda to advance the quality of employment in Britain in the future.

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Professor Peter Nolan Montague Burton Professor of Industrial Relations
Director, ESRC Future of Work Programme

Commentary

by **Rita Donaghy** Chairman of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)



OPTIMISING THE CONTRIBUTION OF AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE WORKFORCE is one of the biggest challenges facing Government, employers, employees and their representatives.

We have witnessed a significant change in the gender mix of the labour force with women now making up nearly half. The growth in female participation has been accompanied by an increase in part-time working and a general ageing of the working population. Britain is also more than ever a multi-racial and multi cultural society.

While the changes in the labour market have been taking place competition has been increasing year on year in an increasingly global market place. The result has been pressure to produce more and to produce it faster, cheaper and better. Responses to this increased demand for productivity have been various including investment in new technology, performance related pay, staff reductions to cut costs and longer working hours from those that remain.

Despite their efforts not all organisations have achieved sufficiently high levels of performance and as a whole UK productivity compares unfavourably with many other western nations. There is no simple answer to improving competitiveness but at ACAS our experience with thousands of organisations convinces us that the major contribution comes from employees. For this reason it is worrying to see the results of surveys - for example those commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council's Future of Work Programme - which show sections of the labour market such as women and older workers growing less satisfied about their work

In his Report, Robert Taylor questions the validity of the crude contrasts between a deregulated USA and a highly regulated Europe. He points up the UK dilemma of being slow to encourage immigration to refresh the labour market as happened in the USA, and the growing dissatisfaction of the female labour force, and the over 50's, with their lot at work.

The prospect of women being in the majority in the workforce in the not

too distant future and of starting to recognise the more positive aspects of an aging workforce have profound implications for broader public policy in both child support and pensions.

If organisations are to be successful they need committed, motivated workers and if employees are becoming disillusioned this is bad news for everyone in the workplace and the economy as a whole. At ACAS we see the key to organisational effectiveness in good employment relations practices. With more complex workplaces and a more diverse workforce there is a greater need for employers, employees and their representatives to discuss and agree work practices together. Effective communications and consultation, openness and trust can be the basis for shared goals and a shared commitment to achieving them.

Many of the organisations with the highest performance are those with the best employee involvement. If all employees are informed and consulted and have the opportunity to affect decisions their needs and ideas can be taken into account. In this way a diverse workforce can be committed to a common goal.

“ If organisations are to be successful they need committed, motivated workers. ”

Diversity in Britain's Labour Market

by Robert Taylor



Britain's Labour Market in Perspective

THE MODERNISATION OF BRITAIN'S LABOUR MARKET LIES AT the core of the government's programme for the creation of 'employment opportunities for all'. Developing more flexible and dynamic workplaces is seen not only as a necessary means both to improve the country's comparatively poor productivity performance and increase business competitiveness but also make Britain a much fairer and more inclusive society. In the words of the Treasury's submission to the European Commission in July 2002: "Effective labour market reforms, set against a background of macroeconomic stability, help to make economies more flexible, competitive, productive and responsive. The benefits, however, go beyond the purely economic. Employment is not only most people's prime source of income but also an important part of their identity." (*Towards Full Employment in The European Union*).

The need to encourage the paid work ethic is what motivates much of current public policy. It can be seen in the development of the government's welfare to work New Deal programme, designed to encourage the long-term jobless back into paid employment, as well as the introduction of the statutory national minimum wage to tackle poverty pay. But it is also apparent in official efforts to improve the basic skills and overall educational standards of employees and in particular the most socially disadvantaged. Perhaps even more significantly the strong commitment to the paid work ethic can be found in the importance that the government attaches to employment creation through the application of a minimum framework of regulations and encouragement of business enterprise and risk-taking.

It is only within this broader public policy framework that we can really assess the importance of the current evidence-based research being carried out into the future of work in Britain. The findings that are now emerging from the various projects commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council's Future of Work Programme are helping to provide policy makers with a plentiful and invaluable source of information on the characteristics of our contemporary labour market. Indeed, the evidence so far available ought to go some way in enabling both the government and the corporate community to gain a much clearer picture of what is actually going on in the world of paid work and what this portends for the future direction of public policy. This commentary - the latest in an ongoing series designed to publicise many of the key findings from the programme - concentrates on an analysis of some of the vital features of Britain's labour force that are not yet receiving the close public attention that they deserve. Its primary purpose is to provide both policy makers and the wider interested public with some much needed substance on a subject that tends unfortunately to be so often overwhelmed with rhetoric, hyperbole and prescriptive exhortation and often written in an impenetrable management jargon that is of little practical use to practitioners.

But we need to place our examination of diversity in the labour market within a broader dimension. Much of our current debate on the future of Britain's labour market remains far too simplistic and parochial. It is still based - to a considerable extent - on a number of

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basic assumptions that simply fail to reflect what are often highly complex realities. One of the commonest assertions is that our labour market is more flexible and therefore as a result by implication much more successful than those in most of the countries of continental Western Europe because it enables companies and recruitment agencies to enjoy the freedom to hire and fire workers, thereby encouraging innovation and risk taking. The Prime Minister Tony Blair and many of his cabinet colleagues draw understandable inspiration from what they regard rightly as the impressive record of net job creation achieved by the US economy during the 1990s. They argue that the American experience underlines the crucial importance of making sure that labour markets are lightly regulated and much more sensitive to market forces of supply and demand than those of our European Union neighbours who are allegedly more concerned with the need for employment protection, the encouragement of more social cohesion and the extension of worker and trade union rights. A recent government commissioned report on Germany's labour market drew some positive inspiration from the UK experience, especially in our more rigorous effort to use the benefit and training systems to encourage those without work back into paid employment. However, the supposed contrast between a free-wheeling, can-do US labour market model and a sclerotic European social system weighed down by bureaucratic red-tape and a tendency to concentrate on the needs of those already in paid work than the millions of unemployed among the socially excluded has become something of a cliché of contemporary discussion.

In fact, this misleading comparison is no longer accepted by the British government. We can detect growing signs of a belated but welcome shift in the direction of official analysis of labour markets. In a clutch of important but virtually unreported publications released by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury in July 2002, policy makers acknowledged for the first time that the US/European contrast in labour markets is an over-simplification. In fact, they now recognise that there is much more substantial legally enforceable regulation covering the governance of US workplaces than is often appreciated. It is estimated that more than 200 separate pieces of legislation now condition workplace behaviour in that country. The plethora of laws - from a national minimum wage to controls on the amount of overtime being worked by certain groups of employees, to detailed occupational health and safety regulations and individual employee rights covering race, gender and sexual discrimination, from family leave entitlement to a ban on company-led information and consultation committees for employees - suggests the US statute book is full of legislation which is designed to influence the behaviour of employers and their workers. It may be true that much of this regulation is often poorly enforced and open to damaging legal challenge. The current Bush administration has made no attempt to disguise its determination to weaken many existing legal entitlements for employees. Moreover, an enormous difference can be found in the range and effectiveness of workplace regulation between the individual states. An employee in New York state or California, for example, is likely to enjoy access to more rights at work and an employer more restrictions on his or her workplace right to manage than somebody working in Alabama or Texas. It is highly questionable whether the undoubted success of net employment creation in US labour markets during the past decade really owed much at all to the alleged flexibilities they are believed to have enjoyed for generations through

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an absence of regulation. In the first three decades after the end of the Second World War the American jobs experience was actually inferior to that of the countries of Western Europe. It was only after the crisis of the 1970s that the record of job creation went into reverse and the US became the stronger engine of net employment growth.

So what changes can explain this? Most of the social regulation governing labour markets and workplaces in Western Europe was a product of the so-called golden age between 1950 and 1974 but this did not seem to have made any genuinely harmful impact on net employment growth. Equally it is by no means clear that the Western European labour market experience even over recent years is directly related in any decisive way to the existence of social regulation that impedes job creation and discourages entrepreneurship. Indeed, it has become positively unhelpful to talk glibly about a single, all-embracing and coherent European social market model. As many differences exist between the continent's labour markets as there are countries in the European Union. A contrast between Sweden and Spain, Greece and the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, reveals few common conditions. History, tradition and practice underline the diversities of modern nation state capitalism. Moreover, the actual employment experience does not indicate Western European countries with more flexible labour markets have enjoyed better records in job creation, recruitment and retention than those that are more highly regulated. The most successful labour markets during the 1990s turned out to be Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Denmark and Britain. It is true that this country lacks any social consensus over workplace change. But ever since the British government signed the social chapter of the 1991 Maastricht treaty, we have witnessed a substantial range of labour market regulation. This has included among other rights - the introduction of a legal entitlement to four weeks paid annual leave, a voluntary limit to a 48 hour working week, the introduction of minimum rest breaks, unpaid 13 weeks parental leave, the right to time off to deal with family emergencies, equal rights for part-time workers and the provision of European works councils. The Department of Trade and Industry acknowledged in July 2002 that all of those innovations so far appear to be making 'little if any impact on employment levels'.

The main focus of this commentary is concerned primarily with Britain's labour market and not those of other advanced market economies. But we need always to place the findings of the Future of Work Programme within an increasingly international context. To understand the distinctive characteristics of our own labour market we must draw on comparable research findings from elsewhere, if only in order to understand and appreciate what is so distinctive about this country's approach to workplace change. A later commentary will seek to place our own experiences within that wider international dimension.

The immediate need, however, is to draw public attention to what can only be described as the troubled conditions of our labour market with the uneven impact it is making on specific and important sections of the workforce who are set to grow more important for the future of paid work in the coming years. We appear to be witnessing the emergence of a much more diverse workforce than in the recent past, though some might argue it represents a return to the multifaceted world of work of over a century ago. Britain

needs more diverse labour markets in the future if it is to acquire an adequate supply of workers to sustain future economic growth.

Older workers aged 50 and over, women workers and those who are employed in small firms and establishments will increasingly determine the future development of the British labour market. But the evidence emerging from the Working in Britain survey, a key part of the ESRC's Future of Work Programme, suggests that the discontents and frustrations discovered in the workforce as a whole are particularly marked among those key groups who are forecast to enjoy significant net employment growth in the coming years. The last commentary - published in May 2002 - concentrated on other findings from that important survey, especially on the tenacious and continuing relevance of social class and occupational difference among workers as well as the growing information technology divide that is occurring between them. In doing so it sought to question some of the myths that have grown up around Britain's workplaces in the past few years. The new findings described and discussed in this new commentary are also derived from the survey but they focus specifically on the position of older workers and women in the labour market as well as those employed in small firms and establishments. They provide us with yet further evidence which highlights the stark contrast between the many myths and realities that continue to distort so much of our analysis and debate about the future of paid work.

The study includes people from every part of the workforce from executives, senior managers and professionals, white-collar technicians and supervisors, clerical staff and manual employees. The data derive from lengthy, in depth interviews with 2,466 employees (including the self employed but not those out of work) from across all occupational groups. They were visited in their homes during the second half of the year 2000.

Falling Satisfaction Among the Over-Fifties - The Real Meldrews

PEOPLE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 50 AND 60 who are no longer in paid work or are still active in the labour market have become the subject of intense public debate. This is hardly surprising. Falling birth rates and increasing life expectancy are already focusing our attention on the role that older people will have to play in the advanced market economies of the future. It is an interest that is bound to intensify in the years ahead. The primary problem is that it is by no means clear whether Britain - like other European countries - will nurture enough healthy and trained people capable of meeting the diverse needs of our labour market. One possible and obvious remedy to this common problem looks today as though it remains politically and socially impossible to pursue. The US labour market's achievement of the 1990s in substantial net job creation was due in large part to America's generous and open attitude to the inward migration of workers of whatever colour, ethnicity or creed into its already diverse labour market. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics has estimated that nearly half the net increase in the country's workforce between 1996 and 2000 came from the arrival into the country of foreign-born workers. But racial prejudice and popular fears of cultural difference as well as official worries about the dangers of social disorder in Britain seem likely to inhibit or slow down

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any steps to adopt any similar generous attitude towards labour migration on the kind of scale required to stimulate sustained growth and prosperity. This means - unless we experience an unlikely conversion to a much more enlightened attitude to strangers than seems probable at the moment - many of the demands of our future labour market will have to be met through a much more effective utilisation in paid work of people already living in this country.

The probable shortage of key workers suggests in particular that we will need to encourage increasing numbers of people who are still in the labour market not to retire before they reach their current statutory pension age but instead to encourage them to extend the length of their paid working lives beyond current practice. The July 2002 Treasury report to the European Commission on the UK labour market argued: "As the retired proportion of the population rises, boosting activity rates among those of working age becomes increasingly important. With the share of younger workers set simultaneously to decline, low participation rates at the older end of the age range - which in the context of longer active lives, is no longer as old as it once was - are a luxury the economy cannot afford." It is true that by continental European standards Britain can claim to have a more substantial work participation rate for its over-50s. At present just over half of all adults aged 55 to 64 in this country are still working in some form of paid employment. In fact, this country has already achieved the European Commission employment participation rate target of 50 per cent for those aged 55 and over to state retirement age by the year 2010. Only Sweden and Denmark - among western European countries - can boast higher overall employment rates for the over-50s than Britain, with about two thirds of that age group in those countries in paid work. In fact, in recent years the male employment rate for the over-50s actually increased - by five per cent between the spring of 1995 and spring of 2001 after nearly two decades of decline.

We will need to encourage increasing numbers of people who are still in the labour market not to retire before they reach their current statutory pension age.

A recent study by the Office for National Statistics has examined those men who are economically inactive over the age of 50 but younger than the state pension entitlement age of 65. It has highlighted two specific groups who are in that position. First of all, we have the professionals who left paid work voluntarily to live out their lives on occupational pension and severance packages. But much larger in number is the second group made up of older men who have found themselves forced into economic inactivity by being made compulsorily redundant and then becoming unemployed and have become classified as long-term sick or disabled.

But what is so striking about the findings in the new Working in Britain survey is that our popular perception of older workers is quite misconceived. It has been widely assumed that most of them are more loyal and committed to their employer, and more hard working and highly motivated in their work than other age groups in the labour market. It is also believed that the occupational benefits they receive from their employer are likely to be more generous than those promised for younger workers and that as they approach their age of retirement they hold a much more positive view about their work than do other age groups. Both the government and many employer organisations like to emphasise the genuine value of older workers that companies recruit.

However, there can be little doubt that the over-50s have grown increasingly less satisfied about their work in recent years. It is no exaggeration to suggest that many of them are suffering from what amounts to a growing lack of contentment at work even if they are not in open revolt. Workers aged 50 to 60, whether men or women, are becoming more like other age groups in the labour market in their souring attitudes to work. This is apparent when the results of the new survey are compared with those of the Employment in Britain Survey in 1992.

Back in 1992 that older group felt far more contented at work than they were eight years later. As many as 61 per cent of those surveyed that year said they were either completely or fairly satisfied with their work. But by 2000 that proportion had fallen sharply to 48.6 per cent. It may be true that the proportion of the over-50s at work who are satisfied remains higher than for other age groups. Yet the relative deterioration in their outlook to their paid work has been dramatic and precipitous as the table below reveals. Of course, it also needs to be emphasised that the over-50s, like other age groups, are not necessarily completely or fairly dissatisfied with the various facets of their work. The picture that emerges is not one that points to the emergence of an angry and dissenting generation of older workers. On the other hand, the evidence is also overwhelming that there is a clear and widespread perception among the over-50s that paid work is no longer bringing them the levels of satisfaction that it was able to do as recently as the early 1990s.

The following table provides some striking evidence of the decline in satisfaction that has occurred across a wide range of workplace issues among the over-50s. The proportion completely or fairly satisfied with the length of their working time more than halved between 1992 and 2000. Comparable decline was seen in the satisfaction figures for the amount of work they have to do, the kind of work they perform and its variety. Taken together these figures reveal a substantial deterioration in the attitude of the over-50s towards their work.

Table One - The Less Satisfied Over-50s

<i>Are you completely satisfied or fairly satisfied?</i>		
<i>%</i>	2000	1992
<i>with pay</i>	12	37
<i>with supervisor/management</i>	43	59
<i>with job security</i>	39	48
<i>with use of abilities</i>	41	60
<i>with management efficiency</i>	23	41
<i>with working hours</i>	25	53
<i>with fringe benefits</i>	14	27
<i>with work itself</i>	43	64
<i>with amount of work</i>	26	51
<i>with variety of work</i>	41	60

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The over-50s still in regular paid employment are already facing the grim prospect of an impoverished old age

Nor are they all being adequately compensated for the added pressures they are having to endure in their work through the provision of more generous benefits. It may be still widely assumed that the looming crisis over the future of pensions (as employers terminate their occupational schemes unilaterally) is still some time off. But this is a serious mistake. In fact, the over-50s still in regular paid employment are already facing the grim prospect of an impoverished old age. The most alarming evidence for this can be found in the survey's revelation of the relatively small proportion of the over-50s who are still in possession of an occupational pension attached to their present job. As many as 37.7 per cent of the over-50s said they did not have such a benefit. This figure highlights a marked deterioration in their position over eight years. In 1992 only 26.9 per cent of the same age group said they did not have such a pension from their employer. In fact, today the middle-aged are much more likely to belong to a private pension employer-based scheme. In 2000 as many as 69 per cent of the 30 to 40 year olds and 67.8 for those in their 40s had such pension arrangements as well. This suggests companies are more prepared to offer such benefits as recruitment or retention inducements to workers who are in their middle years but not to the over-50s. However, age differences between workers look less significant when it comes to access to sickness benefits, the use of a company car, subsidised transport to work, subsidised meals, provision of company loans, access to private health insurance and provision of discounted goods. The common feature is the trend towards greater convergence of treatment across the age groups.

Further findings suggest that the over-50s are also facing a more rigorous approach by their employer to the way in which they earn their money. As many as 20.6 per cent of them in 2000 received a pay incentive, bonus or commission payments based on their own individual performance, compared with 13.1 per cent who did so in 1992. The proportion of the older group who received extra payments through an assessment of their performance in teams rose from 3.0 per cent to 12.7 per cent over the same period of time. The picture was broadly similar between the two dates when it came to the assessment of those whose extra remuneration derived from overall workplace performance. By contrast as many as 71 per cent of the older workers both in 1992 and 2000 had pay increases regardless of performance, a much higher percentage than any other age group. On the other hand, while the proportion who experienced annual appraisals rose from 43.4 per cent to 51.4 per cent between the two surveys, this was a much lower figure than those for the other age groups. But a quarter of the over-50s in 2000 said their appraisal did influence how hard they worked compared with only 13 per cent who believed this was the case nine years earlier.

The financial motivation to work hard was more marked among the older workers than other age groups. The over-50s were in fact marginally more likely to work harder because of the pay incentives they received. While 16 per cent said this was so in 2000, this compares with 13 per cent who did so in 1992, a lower figure than for the rest of the workforce. As many as 60 per cent of the older workers said how hard they worked was determined by themselves and nobody else. The role of the supervisor or manager in encouraging harder work being done is apparently less important for the over-50s than for any other age group.

Table Two - Sickness Absence - 1992 and 2000

<i>% Frequency of absence in the past 12 months</i>							
Age	Year	Never	Once	Twice	3-5	6-10	over 11
50-60	1992	53.1	25.9	12.6	6.9	0.5	0.8
	2000	48.1	33.4	10.8	5.4	1.2	0.9
20-29	1992	32.2	28.1	21.2	5.3	2.0	1.2
	2000	34.8	26.7	20.1	13.6	3.4	1.2
30-39	1992	42.1	29.7	16.9	9.0	1.1	1.0
	2000	39.2	28.6	21.5	9.2	0.9	0.5
40-49	1992	49.0	29.9	13.0	6.4	0.9	0.8
	2000	43.6	31.6	17.6	5.2	0.6	1.3

However, in some important respects, workers who are over 50 remain a positive and stabilising asset to organisations. They may be older but their sickness absenteeism is lower than that of other age groups. Of course, it is true the long-term sick and those burnt out from work are no longer among the economically active. But even so, the contrast is striking. As many as 48 per cent of the over-50s when asked said they were never away from work because of ill health, compared with just under 35 per cent of the 20 to 29 year olds. The older you are the less likely you are to take time off for reasons of sickness. Older workers are more likely to have their suggestions for job improvement to be taken seriously and they tend to have longer job tenure with their current employer than younger age groups.

But the overall findings point to a growing crisis among the over-50s at work. They are under pressure like everybody else but they do not feel they are either rewarded or treated fairly in return for their experience and willingness to work hard. There is not much room for sentimentality about older workers. The survey evidence is devastating in its record of the slump in feelings among the over-50s towards their work. It suggests employers will need to adopt a much more active approach to address their perceived grievances. The old can no longer be ignored or patronised. They are about to become a badly needed resource for employers facing staff shortages. This is why a new strategy for the over-50s has become an urgent priority for the policy makers. It is the crucial lesson that needs to be drawn from the new Working in Britain survey.

The older you are the less likely you are to take time off for reasons of sickness.

The Worsening in Gender Workplace Inequalities

THE NEED TO NARROW AND EVENTUALLY CLOSE THE gender gap in the treatment of men and women in the labour market has held a high priority for policy makers during much of the past 30 years. Through a judicious mixture of regulation and exhortation successive governments have sought to reduce the obstinate differentials in earnings levels that continue to exist between men and women as well as in the level and breadth of benefit entitlements and the opening up of promotion opportunities to better job

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opportunities for women. Meeting the specific needs of women in paid work is the focus for a good deal of the present government's public policy attention. This is as it should be. Women have almost reached equality of proportions in the current make-up of the British workforce. It is estimated that as many as 44 per cent of the adults of working age are now women and 72 per cent of women of working age were economically active by the spring of 2001. At the same time the employment rate for women of working age reached 69 per cent, the highest figure so far recorded in modern times. A recently published article from the Office of National Statistics argues that "over the past decade there has been continuous improvement in the position of women in the labour market, both in terms of their level of participation in paid work and in the range of occupations available to them" (*Labour Market Trends March 2002*). Women in paid work are now almost as educationally well-qualified as men, with only a five per cent superiority in the employment rates of men with a higher qualification. But it also needs to be emphasised that as many as 43 per cent of the 12.1 million working-age women in employment in spring 2001 were in part-time jobs compared with only eight per cent of men. Moreover, women in the labour market are predominantly employed in three occupational sectors - administrative and secretarial work, personal services, and sales and customer services.

What advances we have seen in recent years in the relative status and position of women in the labour market remains limited. Indeed, the overall picture is by no means a satisfactory one for many women at work, according to the new findings from the Working in Britain survey. These provide us with graphic evidence that shows us just how far we still have to go in Britain before we can claim to have achieved anything as laudable as workplace gender equality of treatment. Indeed, in some important respects the relative position among large sections of working women seems to have actually deteriorated during the 1990s. Many of the steps that have taken place towards greater workplace equality have tended to help more highly educated, professional women who are securing senior positions in industry and services. But the large numbers of women who work at more routine jobs do not seem to have experienced similar improvements in their overall position. On the contrary, as we have seen is the case with older workers, we can detect clear signs that the convergence in workplace attitudes that took place between 1992 and 2000 did not take the form of an improvement in the position of women relative to men but quite the opposite.

The clear evidence of a perceived deterioration of life at work seems to be much more marked among women who are growing less satisfied with their jobs in line with men. In 1992 54 per cent of women surveyed said they were either completely or very satisfied with their work but by 2000 that proportion had fallen to 49 per cent. This contrasts with figures for men of 48 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. The decline in work satisfaction for both genders is broadly similar. But the proportion of women who said they were very or completely dissatisfied with their work grew from 2.2 per cent in 1992 to ten per cent in 2000, a highly significant increase. The growth in work dissatisfaction for men was considerable but much less than the trend for women, climbing from 2.7 per cent to seven per cent.

The levels of job satisfaction have deteriorated for women in every aspect of their work. Their lack of satisfaction with their level of pay, their job prospects and their benefits have dropped precipitously while feelings about job security, the quality of their management, the use of their abilities at work, the kind of work they do and its variety have also declined but less significantly. However, overall the difference between men and women employee satisfactions has narrowed not widened since 1992 in an overall picture of decline for both sexes. Indeed, the gender divide does not look so pronounced between the sexes on many aspects of satisfaction. Women revealed little difference from men when asked whether they were satisfied with their chance of personal achievement in their job, their ability to develop themselves, the degree of personal responsibility they can exercise at work and the challenge of their job. But it would be quite wrong to draw the general conclusion from this evidence that the gender divide does not mean a marked difference in attitude between men and women towards their paid work. In fact, the new survey indicates that in some respects a larger decline in workplace satisfaction among women relative to men took place between 1992 and 2000.

The most startling sign of this disturbing trend is revealed by the findings on levels of satisfaction with the length of time spent in paid work. Women like men have seen the number of their working hours a week increase significantly. In 2000 men worked on average 1.6 hours a week longer than those surveyed in 1992. This represented an average increase of four per cent. The growth occurred within all male age groups except those who were aged between thirties and forties. But the work experience of hours on the job of women over that same period of time was found to be much worse. For them the average increase in working hours amounted to as many as 2.1 hours a week, a seven per cent growth over eight years. It remains true that most men still work longer hours in paid work than women. While one in ten women worked 46 hours or more a week in April 2001, more than a third of men did so. But women in their 30s and 40s have suffered the largest increases in the amount of time they spend working in their paid jobs although they are at age when their family responsibilities are at their greatest.

A more detailed breakdown reveals an even more worrying picture. There has been a dramatic deterioration in satisfaction with hours worked among women at all occupational levels except for those who are employed in professional and managerial grades. The two tables on page 16 reveal this highly significant development that suggests Britain's world of work saw a marked decline in the proportion of women at work satisfied with their position during the 1990s because of the rise of the long hours culture. The figures on women without educational qualifications are especially startling. We have seen a huge drop in the rate of work satisfaction among that particular group.

In 1992 female satisfaction with working hours was relatively high, especially among those employed in semi and unskilled manual jobs and lower administration, clerical and sales posts. Women in part-time jobs were found to be the most stressed. But satisfaction levels have fallen for all groups of women since then but the drop in 2000 was less

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pronounced among those who held the most senior positions as managers and professionals. Clearly women in less privileged and poorer paid jobs with dependent children are finding it much more difficult to balance their work and family responsibilities. Unlike female managers and professionals their earnings are much lower and as a result they find it much harder to find the financial means needed to hire nannies, child minders and cleaners both to lessen the burdens of household chores and to look after their small children or family dependants. The intensification of work and the lengthening of working time are imposing a particularly heavy burden among those women who are the least powerful and most open to discrimination and exploitation in the workplace. So much of the emphasis of the current debate about working women has tended to concentrate on the need to eradicate glass ceilings and the concerns of those women who aspire to reach senior posts. The new survey findings suggest we need to give a much higher priority than we do at the moment to the needs of the large section of working women at lower levels, who are more vulnerable, unlikely to be in a trade union and remain literally without a voice in their place of work.

Table Three - Falling Satisfaction Among Working Women

<i>% completely or very satisfied with hours worked.</i>		
	1992	2000
<i>Higher level professionals and Managers</i>	38	26
<i>Lower level professionals and Managers</i>	44	28
<i>Higher admin/clerical/sales</i>	58	35
<i>Lower admin/clerical/sales</i>	61	35
<i>Technicians and supervisors</i>	45	17
<i>Skilled manual</i>	44	17
<i>Semi and unskilled manual</i>	57	22

Table Four - Satisfaction Among Women According to Educational Qualifications

<i>% completely or very satisfied with hours worked.</i>		
	1992	2000
<i>University Degree</i>	36	23
<i>Degree equivalent</i>	44	33
<i>Advanced level at school</i>	57	27
<i>Ordinary level at school</i>	54	33
<i>CSE</i>	51	34
<i>None</i>	62	26

The public policy implications of this research for women at work must be addressed. Clearly a more generous and comprehensive strategy will be needed to assist women with dependants, especially small children, if they are going to be encouraged into paid employment. Britain is still a long way from the creation of a publicly funded national child care programme on the model of many continental European countries. But unless we can develop such an approach, it is hard to see how we can expect more women on low incomes with dependent children to be attracted into playing an active role in the labour market without having to endure an unfair burden. Moreover, the impact of the long working hours culture on women ought to be given a much high consideration by any government that wants to narrow and eradicate the country's continuing gender divide. The marked decline in the levels of work satisfaction among women is one of the most important findings in the new Working in Britain survey. The mutual reinforcement of gender and occupational discrimination that appears to have taken place during the 1990s threatens to make it much more difficult for most women to come into and remain a necessary element in the creation of the labour markets of the future.

Small is Not Always Beautiful

AN INCREASING NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN BRITAIN NOW work in small establishments or workplaces employing less than 25 workers, even if many of those workers are still employed by large companies. It is widely agreed that the future of paid work lies in the creation of increasingly more jobs in small-sized work units. But small is not always beautiful. Indeed, much of the evidence contained in the new Working in Britain survey casts considerable doubt on the popularly held view that small workplaces are usually a more conducive environment in which to work and where most employees are more satisfied than those working in larger units. Small establishments are believed to attract greater employee loyalty and commitment, are more flexible and pragmatic in their workplace relationships and provide far more job autonomy and independence. Moreover, it is asserted that while employees working in smaller units may be on average paid less well and enjoy fewer fringe benefits they are compensated for those disadvantages by a more settled and gregarious work environment where they are more trusted and prepared to work harder when required to do so.

Much of the evidence in the survey challenges the more positive among these widely held popular assumptions. Indeed, in some respects smaller establishments appear to have significantly greater handicaps than other workplaces. During the 1990s the overall relative position of employees in such units deteriorated at a more rapid rate than for workers employed in larger establishments. What is particularly striking in this respect is the downward trend we can see in the extent and quality of their benefit provisions. It might have been expected that in the 1990s an increasing number of companies with small establishments as well as small firms would seek to attract and retain their labour forces by accommodating their needs for better benefits and conditions of employment. The human resource management rhetoric and talk of psychological contracts would point to

Smaller establishments appear to have significantly greater handicaps than other workplaces.

such a benevolent development. In fact, the very opposite appears to have been happening. The relative position for workers employed in smaller units has actually worsened and not grown better. There was a particularly sharp deterioration in the level of provision of employee benefits in small establishments during the 1990s. In 1992 47.5 per cent of those working in units of less than 25 employees said they did not enjoy access to a company pension but eight years later that figure had dropped to only 36.9 per cent. The proportion receiving sick pay above the statutory minimum from their employer fell from 53 per cent to 47 per cent over the same period of time while those able to claim a company car declined from 26.8 per cent to 17.4 per cent between 1992 and 2000. Access to private health care experienced a similar decline in smaller work establishments, with nearly a halving in the number enjoying such a benefit from 16 per cent to 8.5 per cent over the same period. The drop in the proportion in small establishments with access to subsidised meals was also significantly down - from 22 per cent to 15 per cent though this was in line with a similar contraction in such a benefit for employees in workplaces of over 25.

The relative position for workers employed in smaller units has actually worsened and not grown better.

Nor were there any signs of a noticeable advance in the incidence of profit sharing or option schemes for employees in small establishments. The proportion with such a benefit actually declined from 11 per cent to seven per cent between 1992 and 2000. This falling trend in smaller workplaces contrasts with a clear expansion in profit sharing and options for those employed in establishments of over 100, with a growth from 21 per cent to 24.5 per cent over that same time period. On the other hand, workers in smaller establishments found themselves much more likely to be covered by individual pay incentives, with an increase from 14.5 per cent to 20 per cent between 1992 and 2002 although this was not so stark a trend as the growth in individual incentives for those employed in establishments of 100 or more workers, which climbed from 15 per cent to 25 per cent over the same period. The proportion employed in small establishments benefiting from group-based incentive schemes reveals a similar expansion, up from only four per cent in 1992 to 14 per cent eight years later. Again, this trend was in line with a similar expansion in such group incentives in larger establishments, up from six per cent to 21 per cent over the same time period. However, a clear difference can be found in the incidence of workplace incentives based on the performance of the whole workplace between larger and smaller establishments. There was hardly any noticeable increase in such incentives in units employing 25 or less workers (21 per cent in 1992 compared with 20 per cent in 2000). But contrast this with the 22.6 per cent of workers in establishments of over 100 who were covered by workplace incentives compared with 32.57 per cent who were eight years on. Individual merit pay dropped from covering 36 per cent in 1992 to 33 per cent in 2000 in the smaller establishments, whereas in the larger ones there was an insignificant change from 39.77 per cent to 41 per cent over the same period. Workers in the smaller establishments were less likely to receive across-the-board pay increases than those employed in workplaces of over 100.

The use of employee appraisals did not grow significantly over the period in smaller establishments, up from 38.5 per cent to only 43 per cent between 1992 and 2000. By contrast there was a five per cent growth in such appraisals in the larger establishments

over the same period - from 64 per cent to 68.5 per cent. But hardly more than ten to 11 per cent said their pay levels were affected by such appraisals in smaller establishments. The evidence that people who work in smaller establishments are motivated by far more than the desire to make more money than those in larger workplaces is by no means overwhelming. In fact, little difference in attitude can be found between employees in both kinds of establishments when they were asked whether they regarded the job they were doing was more than just a means to make a living. On the other hand, sickness absenteeism was found to be much less common in smaller workplaces, with 47 per cent saying they had not been absent for reasons of ill health in the previous 12 months compared with only 37 per cent of those employed in establishments of over 100. It seems unlikely that the difference can be explained by the fact that smaller workplaces are healthier than large ones. What it seems to suggest is that workers are much more likely to be aware of their wider obligations to their colleagues in smaller establishments and could be expected to have to shoulder heavier burdens in their absence. But it could also mean that managers in smaller workplaces are less tolerant of absenteeism. Indeed, the survey evidence reveals surprisingly few periods of sickness absenteeism, which seems to conflict with other data that might suggest much more is taking place. Only 8.6 per cent in 2000 said they were absent due to ill health on or more than three separate occasions a year. On the other hand, little difference can be found between workers in different sized establishments when asked whether or not they worked very hard. In all cases the overwhelming opinion was that they did so. Nor was there any sign of a significant difference when workers were asked whether they had enough time to finish their job.

Levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction also showed little obvious division between workers depending on the size of establishment that employed them, although the trend suggests greater convergence took place between 1992 and 2000 in overall attitudes, as the table on page 16 indicates. But the decline in relative satisfaction levels for those employed in smaller units was significant. The proportion who were completely or very satisfied with the use made of their abilities at work dropped from 59 per cent to 46 per cent over the time period. There was a similar big drop in the proportion stating that they were completely or very satisfied with the work they were doing between the two surveys. While 59 per cent said they were in 1992, only 46 per cent did so eight years later. By contrast as many as five per cent said they were very or completely dissatisfied with the work they were doing in 2000, twice the figure of 1992. There was a noticeable drop in relative satisfaction on the variety of work employees were doing and in the amount of work they were carrying-out. But not all was gloom. In both surveys the overwhelming majority of employees in small establishments - as in the larger ones - said they were very or completely satisfied with the friendliness of their work colleagues.

On the other hand, workers in smaller establishments believed they enjoyed a greater say in decisions affecting them than their colleagues in larger workplaces with a significant improvement over the eight years between the two surveys. While 40 per cent in 1992 said they had a great deal or quite a lot of say in 1992, by 2000 the proportion had climbed to 47 per cent. This contrasts with 28 per cent of those employed in

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establishments of over 100 who thought this in 1992 compared with 36 per cent eight years later. Indeed, the survey suggests that most workers are satisfied with the amount of consultation they receive from their employer before company decisions are made. Only 32 per cent of those working in smaller establishments in 2000 said they wanted more say compared with 51 per cent in the larger workplaces. These figures are significantly lower than in 1992, which reveals a decline in support among workers today for having a greater say in decision-making in their establishments. This finding suggests we can expect less employee pressure on management for the introduction of more information and consultation arrangements.

Clearly workers who are employed in small establishments are likely to be in closer personal touch with their management. It is simply easier to communicate in an individual way in workplaces where fewer than ten workers are employed. On the other hand, those employed in larger establishments were found to be much more likely to have meetings with management and be able to express their views at such get-togethers. They are also much more likely to belong to work improvement groups if they are employed in larger establishments than smaller units.

Substantial differences are apparent in the length of job tenure between workers depending on the establishment size. Those employed in larger workplaces are more likely to have been with their current employer far longer. However, there seems to be little evidence that smaller workplaces are more likely than larger ones to employ temporary rather than permanent workers. In 2000 as many as 91 per cent of employees in the small workplaces were on permanent contracts compared with 84.3 per cent eight years earlier. These figures were only marginally lower than for the larger establishments where 92.5 per cent said they were covered by permanent employment contracts in 1992 and 89 per cent eight years later. A mere six per cent of workers in smaller establishments were on temporary contracts of a year or less and a further three per cent on such contracts for up to three years in 2000. The figures were only slightly less than for larger establishments where five per cent of workers were on temporary contracts of less than a year and 2.5 per cent of up to three years. But it does appear the use of temporary contracts was more widespread among smaller establishments in 1992 when seven per cent said they had been on one for a year or less and a further nine per cent for one to three years.

Employees in smaller establishments do not appear to enjoy greater autonomy in their jobs than their colleagues in larger workplaces. In 2000 57 per cent of workers in such workplaces said their employer was solely responsible for setting their working hours, while 11 per cent said that while they were given an initial choice of the number of hours they worked, once agreed they could not be varied. Those proportions were not significantly different from the larger establishments. However, 20 per cent of those employed in workplaces of 24 or less said they took part in a flexible working hours system compared with just over a quarter of those working in larger establishments. Only 11.5 per cent of those employed in smaller workplaces said they were able to

decide when to start and finish their work. The figure was similar at 12.2 per cent for workers in establishments of over 100.

The survey evidence does not indicate workers in smaller establishments are more significantly committed or more loyal to their employer than those working in larger units. It is true the proportion of workers who said they agreed they would turn down another job with more pay to stay with their current employer fell more dramatically in establishments employing 100 or more workers - from 29 per cent in 1992 to 19.5 per cent in 2000. But the proportion also dropped in units of less than 25 workers - from 30 per cent to 26.5 per cent over the same time period.

The overall picture of employee attitudes in smaller establishments is not encouraging. The evidence does not point to the growth in a more enlightened workplace approach to employees. High quality workplaces still seem few in number among the smaller establishments. Moreover, despite a tightening labour market in 2000 the survey does not indicate that most employees in small units have strengthened their bargaining position with resulting improvements in their pay and conditions. Mobilising employment practices in the smaller establishments will not be easy. But the survey evidence does suggest that we will need to see the development of a much more coherent strategy towards those units if we want to encourage a more co-operative attitude from employees to workplace change

Implications for the Public Policy Agenda

The latest findings from the Working in Britain survey do not reveal a satisfactory picture of a world of work at ease with itself. But we would be wrong to rush to any sweeping conclusions from the existing evidence that might suggest the need for an abrupt change in the direction of public policy. We can still find much more continuity than change has occurred since 1992 in the workplace although many of the current findings indicate a relative overall deterioration in the attitude to work of the over-50s, women workers and those employed in small establishments. What is clear is that there is neither room for any complacency or optimism that Britain's labour market is becoming more effective and enlightened in addressing the country's endemic problems of comparatively low levels of productivity and lack of competitiveness. As so often, the gap between the rhetoric and reality remains enormous. No amount of gloss can hide the depressing fact that this country still has a long way to go before it experiences any widespread conversion to the creation of high performance workplaces based on the best human resource management practices.

A number of public policy initiatives may help to improve the present, rather dismal picture. For the over-50s we need to see the development of a concerted strategy that addresses the so-called third age in a practical and credible manner. This means not only tackling the worsening pensions crisis in an enlightened and comprehensive way but challenging the erroneous assumption that older workers are more of a problem rather

For the over-50s we need to see the development of a concerted strategy that addresses the so-called third age in a practical and credible manner.

than a vital asset to the success of an advanced economy. The over-50s are not a homogeneous, submissive and inert mass but as diverse as any other age group in the labour market. Policies by government and employers need to recognise this and to act accordingly. One way forward is to actively encourage more flexible and transitional arrangements for older workers so that they can go on working for money for as long as they wish through part-time and temporary forms of employment. The arbitrary and often devastating shift from full-time work one day to full-time retirement on the next can not only have a negative impact on the individual but be a misguided and ultimately wasteful strategy for many firms as they lose needlessly employees with considerable skill and experience. In other words, we must to give the over-50s a much higher priority in the making of a world of work policy.

One way forward is to actively encourage more flexible and transitional arrangements for older workers so that they can go on working for money for as long as they wish through part-time and temporary forms of employment.

It is true that much greater public policy attention is being devoted to the position of women in the labour market. But here, the Working in Britain survey evidence, reveals an alarming deterioration in the attitudes of the vast majority of women workers, who are not in professional and management jobs trying to break through a glass ceiling, but low paid, frustrated and stressed as they seek to balance work and life without adequate resources of their own and a chronic lack of community or workplace support. Many women still suffer - as they have always done - from the double inequality of gender and class. This is why we need to see the creation of a much more comprehensive and generous strategy from government and the business community to meet the particular needs of women workers. We cannot be satisfied with a future world of work that is based on levels of insecurity and inadequate benefits for women which are not experienced in most other European countries. The survey provides us with considerable empirical data that points to the urgency in particular of the long hours work culture as it affects working mothers with small children or elderly dependants.

It is also clear that while smaller establishments will grow in importance in the creation of paid jobs over the coming years, they are not inevitably going to provide the kind of civilised work that raises performance and standards without much more consistent and coherent support from government. Unfortunately the current public debate on the condition of small firms tends to concentrate on whether or not they should be required by law to meet the same European Union wide minimum labour standards as larger ones. The need to avoid or remove red tape may be understandable in companies where excessive costs can determine survival or closure. But this does not mean we should tolerate or encourage the success of small enterprises if they fail to meet commonly recognised standards in the way they treat their employees. Policy makers like to suggest that the future of work means the emergence of jobs that are challenging, highly skilled and highly valued, but these outcomes cannot be achieved by market forces alone. It will require both sensible and realistic regulation as well as the encouragement of voluntary practice. The new survey suggests we are still far from achieving such an outcome in the wider labour market.

Finally, the research findings on the over-50s, women workers and employees in the smaller establishments also point to the need for a much greater sense of urgency. There is a sad and depressing danger that most of Britain's workplaces will simply continue as they have done in the past, being more reactive and hand to mouth than innovative and strategically managed. If this happens we can be sure that the expectation levels of employees at work will remain low, as will their aspirations for a much better life. Unlike in the countries of Northern Europe, we in Britain have never given sufficient national public policy focus to the world of work. And yet it is now a widely accepted truism that people at work are a company's and a nation's best assets. If we are at all serious about closing the substantial productivity gap that continues to exist between this country and mainland Europe and the United States, we need to address the human resource problems in our workplaces and not just the low tax needs of employers, investment and research and development incentives as well as measures of deregulation. The government's 'employment opportunities for all' strategy must engage with a workplace agenda of change if it really wants business organisations to win not only the consent but the active co-operation of workers of all ages, whatever their class, gender or ethnic origin and identity. The latest Working in Britain survey provides a rich source of evidence that shows us just how far we still have to go before we can achieve a reality that justifies any optimistic rhetoric about the extent of workplace modernisation.

Robert Taylor is media fellow on the Economic and Social Research Council's Future of Work Programme. He is also a research associate on the Leverhulme funded Future of the Trade Unions Project at the London School of Economic and Political Science, ESRC Centre for Economic Performance.

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The comparator survey, Employment in Britain 1992, was co-directed by Duncan Gallie and Michael White and is reported in *Restructuring the Employment Relationship*, Oxford University Press 1998.

We need to address the human resource problems in our workplaces and not just the low tax needs of employers.

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