



## Risk Management with a Smile! Getting an early start on health and safety

Sally Wilson, IES Senior Research Fellow

### IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 Supporting students with mental health issues
- 5 Impact of market integration on employment conditions in road haulage
- 7 The difference managers can make to workplace health
- 9 IES Honorary Fellowship launch
- 10 Vocational Education Research at IES
- 11 Publications
- 12 Viewpoint

The Employment Studies newsletter reports on IES research on labour market and employment policy and practice in the UK and abroad. It is aimed at those interested in research to inform the development and implementation of public policy. Two other publications, *Research Digest* and *HR Insight*, provide briefings on IES employer-related work.



**‘You’re never too young to learn about health and safety’ according to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), which aims to make European workplaces safer, healthier and more productive. IES recently carried out an evaluation of EU-OSHA’s ongoing ‘Napo for Teachers’ initiative, developed with the aim of promoting basic health and safety knowledge to primary school children.**

‘Napo’ is a friendly, animated character who gets into all kinds of mishaps and, in doing so, shows children how to keep themselves and others safe from everyday hazards. His perilous encounters at home and at work are all shown to be avoidable through taking

care and following basic rules. The main aims of IES’s evaluation were to examine uptake of this initiative in European schools across the various EU Member States, and to survey teachers’ views on introducing health and safety in a classroom environment.

#### Focus on children and classrooms

In addressing the main evaluation questions, IES researchers were mindful that ‘Napo for Teachers’ represents a major departure from the usual activities of EU-OSHA, most notably with respect to target audience and environment: ie its focus is on children, teachers and classrooms rather than, for example, working adults in industrial settings. Therefore the Agency’s existing network of contacts and intermediaries across Europe (which include representatives of trade unions and employment ministries) are not ideally positioned to help them promote and disseminate teaching materials. A challenge from the outset therefore was going to be communications with teachers across the EU and alerting them to the existence of the initiative and its potential benefits. In recognition of this, the evaluation was set up to look at the factors that were instrumental to Napo’s ‘reach’ across Europe and to identify any national contextual factors that presented challenges.

Another important task for the evaluators was to look at the usability acceptability of the various ‘Napo for Teachers’ materials that EU-OSHA had produced, such as the free, downloadable lesson plans that have been made available on its website. These were developed in consultation with education professionals and cover

*continued on page 2*



# International Briefings

## Mainstreaming employment and social indicators into macroeconomic surveillance

IES will complete a short country profile for the UK and a very short briefing for Greece as part of a study for the European Parliament, led by the Istituto per la ricerca sociale (IRS). The study will examine the effect of employment and social indicators in the 2014 and 2015 European Semester exercise, in terms of improving social monitoring.

The study will evaluate whether:

- these indicators are suitable to adequately capture and reflect social impacts
- the introduction of these indicators has led to restoring the balance between social and economic governance
- the interplay between fiscal/structural reforms and the recommendations regarding the employment and social situation advocated in the CSRs is balanced.

*IES contact: Kari Hadjivassiliou*

## Precarious employment: patterns, trends and policy strategies in Europe

IES is working with IZA and IDEA Consult to produce a study on precarious work in the EU for the Employment Committee of the European Parliament. The study will include a literature review of the extent and trends relating to different forms of precarious work, data analysis and a more in-depth analysis of precarious work in eight EU Member States.

*IES contact: Andrea Broughton*

## Peer Review Programme in Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2015

IES is providing expert input to a European Commission programme, co-ordinated by ÖSB Consulting, identifying and disseminating good practice in the area of social protection and social inclusion, across EU member states.

*IES contact: Nigel Meager*

*continued from page 1*

topics that primary school children are likely to encounter at home and at school, including attention to safety signs, prevention of cuts and burns, lifting heavy objects safely, and the identification of risks and hazards. Various video clips and creative activities are designed to explore the topics in an engaging yet informative way. In one example, 'Napó's Hazard House', children 'hunt the hazard' in a chaotic 'DIY' environment in advance of a classroom discussion about how one might prevent these risks. Much of the content aimed at young children is language-free (Napó appears as a silent movie character); the cartoon content is supplemented by materials for teachers containing text translated into more than 20 European languages.

### Positive feedback for Napó...

Using surveys and interviews, IES researchers found that feedback from teachers across the EU who had used Napó materials in class was almost unanimously positive. Not only were the characters well-liked by children and the stories seen as appropriate for the intended age groups, but there was also widespread appreciation of the value of introducing OSH themes to primary school-aged pupils. The toolkit contents were seen as high-quality and appealing and the formats were generally considered user-friendly for classroom implementation. Furthermore the humour and charm of the cartoon character were seen as key success factors, allowing serious subjects to be tackled in a light-hearted and fun way. Added to this there were several anecdotal reports indicating that messages had hit home. For example, one teacher reported that their students now say 'don't be like Napó' to remind one another not to leave trip hazards on the floor in class. This suggests that the lessons have the potential to impact on behaviour in an immediate and practical way, possibly playing a role in accident prevention.

### ... but variation across Member States

As expected, IES found that the overall impact of the initiative varied significantly from country to country and was somewhat dependent on efforts at national level to promote and market the materials, highlighting the difficulties many EU agencies face when organising international campaigns for diverse audiences. Promotional events

that involved teachers being introduced to the resources face-to-face were very effective in encouraging uptake. Unsurprisingly, those in which Napó himself showed up (an adult dressed in a Napó bodysuit) had made the most memorable impact. Where awareness-raising efforts had been well-resourced, there appeared to have been an impressive level of local take-up, often by multiple teachers in the same school. Typically, Napó had been introduced in subject areas such as personal health and social education, science, and road safety. Some teachers had even creatively introduced Napó as an aid to learning a foreign language. However, there were also several areas of Europe (particularly in larger, founding EU Member States) where the initiative had failed to bed in. Despite widespread approval of the materials, some teachers struggled to find opportunities to use them and this was often linked to national circumstances. For example, in some countries, challenges arose in relation to 'fit' with national curricula and workload pressures on teachers.

### Crossing of national, linguistic and cultural boundaries

Despite the logistical difficulties of resourcing and implementing EU-wide promotion of the initiative, IES's findings show that the initiative has successfully crossed national, linguistic and cultural boundaries and that there appears to be potential for Napó to make a difference to young audiences he has yet to reach. The evaluation centred on teachers and EU-OSHA's network of contacts, not students, so it is only possible to speculate on the impact on children's day-to-day life. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the safe and healthy habits they learn from Napó will serve them well throughout their lives.

It remains to be seen whether a new generation of young safety-conscious workers will emerge from European schools in the next decade or possibly a cohort of budding inspectors. Whatever the outcome, EU-OSHA has succeeded in making health and safety fun, which, given its traditional 'red tape' image, can only be applauded.

---

The toolkits are now available in more than 20 languages and may be downloaded from Napó's website (<http://bit.ly/NapoLessons>).

# Supporting students with mental health issues



**Matthew Williams**, IES Research Fellow

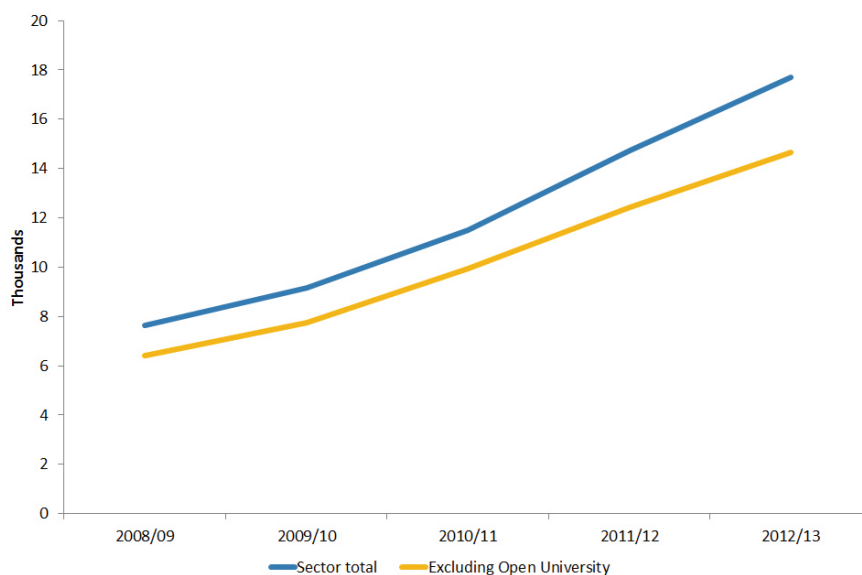
**Over recent years there has been better recognition of the economic and social costs of poor mental health among the population. Improving mental health has also become an increasing political priority, illustrated for example by the recent appointment of a Minister for Mental Health to the full Shadow Cabinet. At the same time, public attitudes have been changing for the better, leading to a more open culture in relation to mental health.**

IES has a long track record of researching mental health at work and recently undertook research for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to investigate how higher education institutions provided support for students with mental health problems and/or other impairments with intensive support need. The research, conducted with research partners at Lancaster University, involved a literature review and case study visits to 12 institutions.

The number of disabled students in higher education has been rising rapidly over the past five years, and the number declaring a mental health problem has more than doubled (see Figure 1). Across all institutions, the proportion of students who declared a mental health problem was 1.4 per cent in 2012/13, although this was felt to be only a small proportion of the number of students actually experiencing mental health problems.

A key challenge for institutions has been encouraging disclosure of problems by students, and particularly early disclosure, so that the institutions can plan support effectively; late disclosure could result in students not having support in place, which could in turn affect their academic performance and retention. Case study institutions stressed that disclosure of a disability or mental health problem was separated from the admissions process, but recognised that students may be anxious about declaring a problem for fear that it may act against them. They had generally taken various steps to encourage disclosure, including awareness-raising campaigns, involving disability and mental health advisers in open days and Freshers' Week and peer mentoring/support, and had numerous ways for students to disclose before and during their studies.

**Figure 1: Number of disabled students in higher education**



## Common features of support approaches

In supporting students who were known to have a mental health problem, there was a commonality of approaches across the institutions visited. There was generally a disability support team located within student services, with a number of disability advisers who supported students; in some institutions there were specialist mental health advisers while in others, advisers dealt with students across the range of impairments that may lead to a support need. Disability or mental health advisers would be involved in a range of support activities, including:

- Pre-admission support for applicants who had disclosed an impairment on their application, or more general outreach work.
- Induction support and awareness-raising for new students, and triaging of new students.

- Assisting with applications for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), which gives financial help to students who have extra costs while studying because of their disability.
- Developing specialist responsive support packages and ensuring that they are implemented.
- Crisis prevention and management.
- Wider wellbeing activity.

Where students were in receipt of DSA in relation to mental health problems, DSA generally paid for one-to-one specialist mentor support, provided either by in-house mentors or an external agency, and typically for one hour per week during the academic year.

In addition to specific and individual support through the disability support team, there was also wider, more general support provision. All





# UK Briefings

## **Research into tackling unemployment among disadvantaged young people**

This research for Centrepoint will seek to understand what impact the government's proposed measures to tackle youth unemployment will have on some of the most disadvantaged young people, particularly homeless young people. The research will involve interviews and focus groups with practitioners in the youth homelessness sector, homeless young people, employers and training providers. Desk-based research, including a literature review and potential analysis of national administrative datasets, will provide broader context to the study.

*IES contact: Jonathan Buzzeo*

## **Discriminatory recruitment practices in employment**

IES, along with IFF Research and COMPAS, has been commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to carry out research designed to improve understanding of employer behaviour and practices when recruiting British and migrant workers with the right to work in Great Britain. The research will take the form of a literature review, a survey of employers and recruiters, and 35 qualitative interviews with employers, migrant workers and UK workers.

*IES contact: Andrea Broughton*

## **National Careers Service – Review of the Area-based Contracts Funding Model**

IES, in partnership with the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby, has been commissioned by the Skills Funding Agency to evaluate the current outcome-based model for funding the National Careers Service. The review will assess the sustainability and impact of the funding model and examine the method for setting payment rates.

*IES contact: Emma Pollard*

*continued from page 3*

institutions visited had a counselling service available to all students, which provided time-limited counselling support with onward referral to appropriate statutory services if necessary. It was noted that counselling services were seeing more students with severe and enduring mental health problems, whereas in the past the services had been dealing more with transition, homesickness and relationship issues. Some had introduced programmes aimed at preventing issues arising in the first place, through improving general health and wellbeing among students and building resilience.

There was a recognition that some support needs could be anticipated through course design, and a number of institutions had introduced inclusive curricula methods such as placing materials into the virtual learning environment before classes and audio/video recording lectures.

Introducing, or further developing, inclusive curricula was seen as a key challenge facing institutions. In the face of future funding changes, and with increasing demands placing additional pressure on resources, developing inclusive curricula can help institutions provide more support using fewer resources. Furthermore, introducing or further developing proactive measures to reduce demand for support, such as wellbeing and resilience initiatives, can also assist in making limited resources stretch further.

## **Key role of academic staff**

Outside of the specialist provision from disability advisers and counselling services, wider university services had an important role to play. Academic staff were seen to have a key role in supporting students with mental health problems or other impairments. They could have important roles around communication, education and guidance, as well as involvement in pre-entry activities and attendance monitoring to help spot any emerging problems. Estate departments and accommodation teams had a significant role, for example placing students with mental health problems in quiet accommodation blocks and ensuring hall wardens are alert to any particular needs. Similarly, library support could include quiet work spaces or separate rooms to help reduce stress. Chaplaincy staff played a role as a first point of

contact and provider of informal support, and Students' Unions and local Student Minds also played an active role in supporting students through buddy initiatives and wellbeing campaigns, and may have involvement in the development of institutional policies and strategies.

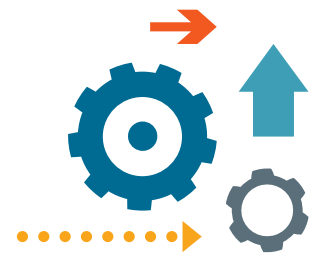
The involvement of academic staff varied both across and within institutions. In some institutions there were members of staff with a specific remit to work with disabled students, either academic staff with additional support responsibilities, or disability advisers assigned to and located in particular departments or faculties. Improving internal links between academics and support staff was seen as a key issue; there was often a disparity between the understanding and knowledge around disability issues of academics compared with staff from the disability support teams, and improving the relationship could increase the holistic nature of support for students. Disability awareness training for academic staff may also be effective.

## **Support networks**

Universities do not operate in isolation and their support activity is complemented by that from the NHS and other statutory services. All case study institutions were working with external agencies such as GP practices, NHS mental health services and voluntary organisations, and this was felt to be an important part of the support network. Some institutions were more strategic in their relationship with external agencies, for example having services present on campus or being involved in wider steering groups, while others relied on more ad hoc individual-level relationships which were at the mercy of staff changes on both sides.

Developing more systematic relationships with external agencies could bring benefits through facilitating access to more specialist and expert support for students, and allowing both parties to gain a better understanding of each other; some institutions felt that statutory services could lack awareness of student life. While developing relationships and increasing partnership working could have time and resources implications for institutions, the costs may be more than outweighed by the resulting savings in other support areas.

# Impact of market integration on employment conditions in road haulage



Andrea Broughton, IES Principal Research Fellow

**The road haulage sector is an important transnational sector in the European Union. The industry has undergone significant structural change over the past decade, due to liberalisation of the market and the increased competition that this has caused. IES recently undertook research for the European Parliament that assessed the impact of market integration on employment conditions in the sector. A complicated picture emerged of a sector characterised by long and complex subcontracting chains and instances of long driving times, inadequate rest, and some employer practices aimed at circumventing EU and national employment regulation.**

## Composition of the sector

The road haulage sector is very male dominated, with open-ended and full-time employment the most common form of contracting. However, subcontracting is becoming a prominent feature of the sector, often involving complex subcontracting chains across borders, which enable employers to benefit from hiring workers on the basis of lower wage levels. This practice of subcontracting has been linked to a proliferation of employment practices that have the capacity to undermine the working conditions of drivers. These include false or bogus self-employment and the employment of non-resident drivers via so-called letter-box companies, which are companies registered in a particular Member State, but which in actual fact have no activity in that country.

The sector has undergone significant structural change over the past 10 years, due to market integration and liberalisation, resulting in increased competition following the opening of market access for drivers from the newer EU Member States in central and eastern Europe (the so-called EU12). Operations based in these countries now have a much greater share of the market than 10 years previously, and the number of those employed in the sector overall has grown significantly in most EU-13 countries (EU-12 plus Croatia) in the past 10 years, whereas

it decreased in most of the other EU Member States.

## Understanding cabotage

The practice of cabotage, which is the national carriage of goods for hire or reward carried out by non-resident hauliers in a host Member State, has grown over the past decade. Typically, a driver might carry a load from one country to another and then while in the destination country will carry out some delivery work within that country or in neighbouring countries. The practice of cabotage grew by 50 per cent between 2004 and 2012, and by a further 20 per cent in 2013 alone. According to the European Commission, this rise is largely due to the lifting of restrictions on the market access of EU-12 drivers. Despite this growth, however, cabotage still only accounts for a mere 1 per cent of total freight activities in the EU-28. EU regulation allows hauliers to perform up to three cabotage operations within a seven-day period beginning the day after the unloading of the international transport cargo. There are concerns about the extent of cabotage as it could potentially undercut road haulage operators that are based in the destination Member State.

## Pay and employment conditions

Labour costs in the sector vary considerably between Member States and although there are indications of

labour cost convergence, considerable divergences remain. Labour costs have fallen to the greatest extent in Greece, Portugal and Cyprus since 2008, and have risen most strongly in Bulgaria and Romania (albeit from a very low base). The divergence in reported wages in part reflects different methods of remuneration: variable elements are a key component of total remuneration in particular in the case of EU-12 nationals.

Drivers in the international road haulage sector face a number of challenges in relation to working conditions and general employment conditions. These include long driving times and insufficient rest, time spent away from appropriate rest and washing facilities, and high strain coupled with low autonomy. These issues are all exacerbated by the increasing internationalisation of the sector, which results in longer missions and longer periods away from home. There is also evidence that the employment conditions of EU-12 drivers are worse than those of EU-15 (the western European Member States, prior to EU enlargement in 2004) drivers in terms of pay, social protection, working time and rest breaks.

There are also occupational hazards related to the type of material transported (which can result in exposure to specific chemical or biological hazards) as well as to prolonged exposure to diesel, which can increase the risk of respiratory diseases. There are also physical risks related to prolonged sitting in a static posture, combined with whole-body vibration, while loading and unloading activities are associated with specific ergonomic risks (such as musculo-skeletal symptoms associated with performing physically demanding loading and unloading tasks).

However, the sector, both nationally and internationally, also struggles with the popular perception that it is more dangerous than it actually is:



# UK Briefings

## Evidence on employment practice for the Teachers' Longer Working Review

The overall aim of this project is to provide information to the teachers' Working Longer Review, a tripartite review between the Department for Education, teaching unions and their employers, so that it has the necessary contextual evidence to support its decision making. A Rapid Evidence Assessment will draw together, summarise and synthesise the existing evidence base on employment practice. This will assess evidence from a wide date-span, and will explore: career pathways and exit points, good employment practice, the employment experience of older teachers, flexible working, and Teachers' Pension Scheme flexibilities.

*IES contact: Emma Pollard*

## Evaluation of the Carers' Employment Pilot: supporting carers to remain in employment

IES has been commissioned by the Social Care Institute for Excellence to evaluate a two-year pilot programme, which is focused on testing and finding out what works to support carers to remain in employment and economically active. Nine English local authorities have been selected to participate in the Carers' Employment Pilot, which involves provision of support to employers as well as carers themselves.

*IES contact: Sally Wilson*

## The impact of STEMNET's programmes on young people's employability skills

This research for STEMNET will explore whether and how the STEMNET Ambassadors and Clubs impact on young people's employability skills. The research involves interviews with national stakeholders, contract holders and case studies in schools, as well as surveys of teachers, ambassadors and pupils. A desk research phase will review key project documents to derive an employability framework to underpin the research.

*IES contact: Rosa Marvell*

*continued from page 5*

*"In terms of health and safety, the perception is that it's a dangerous profession, but the statistics don't bear this out. In terms of the number of deaths, the figures for this sector are lower than the average of other sectors."*

**Brian Bayliss**, chair of the European Commission's High-level Group on Road Haulage

## The future of the sector

There is a comprehensive body of European legislation governing the sector, which aims to balance market integration (access for operators and free movement) and protection of employees, for example, regulation of working time and rest periods. This is principally the Posting of Workers Directive; Regulations on access to the profession of road haulage operator and access to the international road haulage market; the Directive limiting working time in road transport; the Directive on social legislation relating to road transport activities; and the Regulation on harmonisation of certain social legislation relating to road transport.

However, there are doubts as to whether this legislation is adequately protecting the employment conditions of drivers who are working in an increasingly integrated, internationalised and competitive sector. Although current legislation is deemed to be adequate in general, there are issues around weak application and enforcement in Member States, which may be partly due to a lack of clarity or loopholes in existing legislation. Specifically, there are differences in interpretation of EU legislation, definitions and categorisation of infringements and the levels of fines and sanctions. There are also discrepancies in control mechanisms and enforcement practices.

We found that in order to close any loopholes and clarify issues and concepts defined in European legislation, a review of existing legislation may be of use. In addition, intensified coordination could help to improve the situation, including more guidance from the EU in the form of explanatory information, tools, financial help and exchange of good practice.

## Social partner views

There is a high degree of consensus among the social partners – employer and worker representatives – about how to improve the situation. They

agree that there should be clarification on the application of the Posting of Workers Directive to international drivers and that other loopholes should be closed, such as regulation of the use of the tachograph, in order to ensure that drivers have adequate rest. The social partners also agree on the need for legislative action to enhance enforcement of EU legislation, for better sharing of information and data, and an enhanced social dialogue. Combating social dumping (whereby foreign service providers undercut local service providers using cheaper labour, often with lower labour standards) through joint liability in sub-contracting chains and further action against letter-box companies is another key area of consensus.

The main areas of divergence between the social partners include how to sanction companies in breach of social legislation, the creation of an EU-wide corps of inspectors for roadside checks, and how to limit the length of subcontracting chains.

## Policy recommendations

Our main areas for policy revision were to develop a common classification of infringements in order to standardise practice in all Member States, and to examine whether indicative values can be assigned to sanctions in relation to minor, serious and very serious infringements in all areas of employment conditions.

We also recommended that enforcement could be strengthened by encouraging Member States to staff labour inspection bodies adequately and to fund the training of enforcement officers, and by promoting cooperation between different national authorities.

Finally, in order to limit subcontracting and the proliferation of letter-box companies, we recommended that formal, written contracts should form the core of employment relationships in the sector, thus formalising supply chains. Further, conditions for access to the road haulage market could be tightened.

---

Broughton A, Curtarelli M, Bertram C, Fohrbeck A, Hinks, R and Tassinari A: *Employment Conditions in the International Road Haulage Sector*. European Parliament 2015. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/542205/IPOL\\_STU%282015%29542205\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/542205/IPOL_STU%282015%29542205_EN.pdf)



# The difference managers can make to workplace health

**Jim Hillage**, IES Director of Research



**The importance of the role of line managers in employee wellbeing and health has been highlighted by guidelines recently published by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), which were underpinned by an evidence review from IES.**

In 2013, IES, in partnership with The Work Foundation and Lancaster University, was commissioned by NICE to undertake a series of three evidence reviews of relevant studies, and an economic analysis to support the production of the guidance. The guidance was published by NICE in June this year.

The studies were based on a systematic review of the available evidence. The first review examined the evidence on

the effectiveness of interventions taken by supervisors that could enhance the wellbeing of the people they manage. The second examined the evidence on the effectiveness of organisational interventions that aim to support line managers to enhance the wellbeing of the people they manage. The final review focused on non-intervention studies which explored the workplace factors that facilitate or constrain the ability of line managers to enhance the wellbeing of the people they manage.

The first two reviews found relatively few studies which evaluated the effect of particular workplace interventions to support line managers in managing the wellbeing of their employees. There were many more non-intervention studies and the third review included 65 separate studies plus three good practice guides and 13 literature reviews.

This article summarises the findings of the reviews and the guidance published by NICE earlier this year.

## **The guidance**

The NICE guidance, which is supported by the evidence, covers 11 points. Some of it is aimed at an organisational level, including recommending that 'employers, senior leadership and managers, human resource teams, and all those with a remit for workplace health' should make health and wellbeing a core priority throughout the organisation.

In addition, the guidance proposes that organisations should consider their employees' mental health by creating a supportive environment that enables employees to be proactive in protecting and enhancing their own health and wellbeing. Organisations

should also develop policies to support a workplace culture that respects work-life balance. For example, in relation to stress, organisations could refer to the principles of the Health and Safety Executive's management standards for work related stress. [These cover the job demand and control, workplace support and relationships, the job role and workplace change].<sup>1</sup>

The IES research highlighted the relationship between fairness and justice in the workplace and employee wellbeing. The guidance picks this up by stating that employers should ensure that any unfair treatment of employees is addressed as a matter of priority, and that line managers should know how to direct employees to support if the employee feels that they are being treated unfairly.

Furthermore they should:

- Ensure that employees feel valued and trusted by the organisation by:
  - offering support and training to help them feel competent
  - promoting team working and a sense of community.
- Encourage employees to have a voice in the organisation, and actively seek their contribution in decision-making through staff engagement forums and (for larger organisations) by anonymous staff surveys.
- Value and acknowledge employees' contributions across the organisation. If practical, act on their input and explain why an action was taken. If employees' contributions are not acted on, the decision should be explained clearly.
- Encourage employees to engage with trade unions, professional bodies and employee organisations whenever possible.

### Management and leadership

With respect to senior managers, the guidance states that those with a leadership responsibility in workplace health should provide consistent leadership from the top, ensuring that the organisation actively supports a positive approach to employee health and wellbeing and that policies and procedures are in place and implemented. This should be part of the everyday running of the organisation, as well as being integrated into management performance reviews, organisational goals and objectives.

Further, senior managers should:

- Provide support to ensure that workplace policies and interventions for health and wellbeing are implemented for line managers, so that they in turn can support the employees they manage.
- Ensure that line managers are aware that supporting employee health and wellbeing is a central part of their role, for example by including it in line managers' job descriptions and emphasising it during recruitment.
- Display the positive leadership behaviours they ask of their line managers, such as spending time with people at all levels in the organisation and talking with employees.
- Act as a role model for leadership and proactively challenge behaviour and actions that may adversely affect employee health and wellbeing.

### The role of line managers

Line managers are crucial to implementing policy in an organisation. The guidance therefore states that employers should recognise and support the key role that line managers have as the primary representative of the organisation and seek their input. This would include using line managers as a two-way communication channel between the employee and organisation, and encouraging staff to be motivated and committed to the organisation. Line managers' views should be sought on staff morale and staffing and human resource issues.

It should also be acknowledged that line managers have an important role in protecting and improving the health and wellbeing of their employees through involvement in job design, person specifications, and performance reviews. Line managers should be given adequate time, training, and resources to ensure they balance the aims of the organisation with concern for the health and wellbeing of their employees.

### Leadership style of line managers

The guidance states that line managers should adopt a positive leadership style that includes: encouraging creativity, new ideas and exploring new ways of doing things and opportunities to learn; offering help and encouragement to each employee to build a supportive relationship; acting as a mentor or

coach; being open and approachable to ensure that employees feel free to share ideas; and recognising the contribution of each employee. Line managers should also have a clear vision that they can explain and make relevant to employees at all levels, and ensure that employees share the same motivation to fulfil their goals. Overall, they should work towards becoming role models who are trusted and respected by employees, and who provide a sense of meaning and challenge and build a spirit of teamwork and commitment.

Further, line managers should try to: consult regularly on daily procedures and problems; promote employee engagement and communication; recognise and praise good performance; and work with employees to produce and agree employees' personal development plans. They should be proactive in identifying and addressing issues and concerns early, and take preventive action at the earliest opportunity, identifying sources of internal and external support.

Line managers ought to, in particular, avoid negative behaviour such as detachment from colleagues and ignoring employees' suggestions, ideas and projects, failure to monitor and manage their employees as a group, feeling threatened by competent employees, or withholding information from colleague.

### Training of line managers

As line managers play such a key role in ensuring the health and wellbeing of employees, it is crucial that they are trained adequately. The guidance states that all those with a remit for training should ensure that line managers receive training in areas such as effective leadership, the importance of maintaining health and wellbeing at work, and the effect of health and wellbeing on improved organisational performance. They should also be kept up-to-date with changes in the legal obligations and official advice to employers. Other key areas in which line managers should be trained include the implications of organisational change and how to manage it. They should also have good communication skills, including how to have difficult conversations with employees, and be able to develop people's skills and resolve disputes.

Line managers play an important support role for employees, and line manager training should teach them to agree relevant and realistic targets and



also how to recognise when someone may need support (for example, because of problems achieving a work-life balance, demands of home life or unfair treatment at work) combined with an awareness of the services they could be directed to.

In the area of stress management, line managers need to be trained in how to use stress risk assessments to identify and deal with sources of stress, as well as develop workplace solutions to reduce this risk. They should also be able to recognise the internal and external causes of stress, such as excessive workload, financial worries, work-home conflict or family issues and be able to give advice to employees about further support for stress both in and outside the workplace. Line managers should also have equality and diversity training on employee health and wellbeing and know how to manage sickness absence in line with NICE's guideline on managing long-term sickness and incapacity for work<sup>2</sup> (which were also underpinned by an IES evidence review).

All those with a remit for training should therefore ensure that the above skills and behaviours are set out in any documents outlining the skills and knowledge line managers need, and in their performance indicators. They should also ensure that line managers receive training to improve their awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues. This includes increasing their awareness of how they can affect the psychological wellbeing of employees. It also includes equipping managers to identify when someone may have a mental health problem, for example learning to identify signs and symptoms and looking for changes in behaviour and performance. Training should also ensure that line managers can give employees advice on where to get further support.

### Job design

Job design and content is an integral part of ensuring employee wellbeing. Line managers should therefore encourage employees to be involved in the design of their role in order to achieve a balance in the work demanded of them. They should also allow them to have a degree of control, appropriate to their role, over when and how work is completed. This should take into account the resources and support available.

If possible and within the needs of the organisation, line managers should be

flexible about work scheduling, giving employees control and flexibility over their own time. When implementing flexible working, line managers should be able to balance the needs of the business with the workloads and needs of other employees.

Finally, job design should take into account the effect on physical health when designing jobs. This could include, for example, ergonomic reviews, and giving advice on posture and on moving and handling physical loads. Jobs should be designed to promote and improve the physical health of employees by, for example, helping people to be physically active in their working day. See NICE's guideline on promoting physical activity in the workplace<sup>3</sup>.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Finally the guidance adds that all those with a remit for workplace health should:

- Regularly monitor and evaluate the effect of new activities, policies, organisational change or

recommendations on employee health and wellbeing and identify and address any gaps.

- Ensure managers regularly review their own progress in promoting workplace health and wellbeing and acknowledge any gaps in their competencies. Organisations should support line managers in this activity.
- Identify and use reliable and validated tools to monitor impact.
- Give line managers a role in monitoring impact.

1 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>

2 NICE (2009) *Workplace health: long-term sickness absence and incapacity to work*

3 NICE (2008) *Physical activity in the workplace*

---

This research was published by NICE in June 2015, as *Workplace policy and management practices to improve the health and wellbeing of employees*. It is available to download from: <http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng13>

## IES Honorary Fellowship launch

### This Autumn, IES will be launching our Honorary Fellows programme.

We have invited eminent individuals who share our values and support the Institute's mission to bring about sustainable improvement in human resource management and employment policy.

The official Fellowship launch event will take place following the annual IES HR Provocation in November at which we are delighted to announce that Lord Ian Blair will be the evening's keynote speaker.

IES Honorary Fellows are individuals who have worked with and supported IES in various ways, and include those at the forefront of employment issues: organisational, trade union and HR leaders, thinkers, policy-makers and commentators. They have each made a personal contribution to sustainable improvements in employment policy and HR management, some through thought leadership, others through

being leading-edge workplace practitioners or experts.

Our Fellows will form a unique body of influential peers from a range of sectors who share a common interest in and passion for employment and its importance to individual, organisational and societal wellbeing and prosperity.

The Fellows will help us deliver our mission by: valuing evidence-based policy and practice; being independent of employment-related dogma, popular opinion, fads and fashions; promoting debate with others on the nature and practice of the employment relationship; and helping to shape our agenda by offering views or advice on our research topics and work with employers.

We are excited about this new area of association for IES, and look forward to announcing our list of Honorary Fellows very soon.

Follow IES on twitter or LinkedIn for regular updates on the Fellowship launch and other IES news.

# Vocational Education Research at IES



**Stefan Speckesser**, Chief Economist

## Technical and professional skills and prosperity

In the summer of 2015, a plan for 'Creating a more prosperous nation'<sup>1</sup> was presented to Parliament, outlining major policy initiatives for both the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and HM Treasury to help reduce the productivity gap between the UK and other G7 countries. According to this document, in Germany, France and the USA, GDP per hour worked is about 30 per cent higher than in the UK. One of the key policy areas identified was to improve vocational education and training (VET), with the ambition of a 'reversal in the trend of employer underinvestment in training, which has seen a rapid decline in the amount and quality of training undertaken by employees over the last 20 years'. It also described concrete policy reforms to strengthen employer engagement in VET and thus improve workplace productivity.

Looking at the international evidence, for example as summarised by the OECD<sup>2</sup>, the Government's focus on more and better quality technical and professional education for today's and future generations of young people, for example through high quality apprenticeships, as a source of future prosperity seems well justified.

## A multi-year research programme on the impact of VET

The high-level policy change towards enhanced professional skills creates a number of research questions on the impact of VET and how the existing education system can be improved. The most important are:

- How does VET affect individual prosperity, firm productivity and profitability, and economic growth?
- How can the quantity of 'high quality' VET provision be improved?

- How do the costs and benefits of VET influence individuals' participation decisions?

In order to answer these fundamental questions, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills funded the new Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER), a multi-year research programme. The Centre aims to become a world-class research hub with the potential to generate a step-change in our understanding of the nature, significance and potential contribution of VET to individuals and the wider economy.

Dr Stefan Speckesser (IES Chief Economist) leads IES's engagement in CVER, a partnership with other leading academics on the empirical economics of education from the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics and Political Science (Professor Sandra McNally, who is also CVER's Director), the University of Sheffield (Dr Steven McIntosh) and London Economics (Dr Gavan Conlon).

## Towards better, more robust evidence

Previous research has uncovered evidence on the high earnings and employment returns associated with some forms of VET, creating strong incentives for individuals and employers to invest<sup>3</sup>. One of the main objectives of CVER's research is to provide a better, more complete picture of the impact of the full range of specific VET options, so that individual decisions to engage in particular learning can be better informed by expected benefits.

In order to quantify a broader range of impacts, the Centre has started to exploit an unrivalled database of administrative records on individual education participation, both from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the Individualised Learner Records (ILR) linked to subsequent earnings and employment data (from Her Majesty's

Revenue and Customs) at individual level. This empirical approach will yield robust estimates of the impacts of education investments considering the full diversity of young people's previous education experiences, as well as local labour market and education options.

CVER's work programme also aims to understand how high-quality VET can be provided, ie which institutional features and resources have to be in place to produce good professional and technical skills, and how careers advice and better information can help young people passing through initial vocational education to make successful transitions to the labour market.

Initial findings from CVER's research are already being disseminated at conferences, via its website (<http://cver.lse.ac.uk>), and through meeting policy makers, VET education practitioners and young people. The Centre also actively engages with the research community at home and abroad by running a seminar series, conferences, discussion papers and academic journal outputs, publications for non-specialist audiences, the internet and social media.

- 1 HM Treasury and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015), 'Fixing the foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation', Presented to Parliament by the Chancellor of the Exchequer by Command of Her Majesty, available online [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/443898/Productivity\\_Plan\\_web.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/443898/Productivity_Plan_web.pdf)
- 2 OECD (2012), Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives, Highlights of the OECD Skills Strategy, page 21
- 3 Buscha, F and P. Urwin with D. Thomson, D. Bibby, T. Knight and S. Speckesser (2012), Estimating the labour market returns to qualifications gained in English Further Education using the Individualised learner Record (ILR), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

# Publications

Details of all published work by IES authors can be found on our website: [www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs/](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs/)

## Understanding employers' graduate recruitment and selection practices

Pollard E, Hirsh W, Williams M, Buzzeo J, Rosa Marvell, Tassinari A, Bertram C, Fletcher L, Artess J, Redman J, Ball C, Research Paper 231, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

This research examined the approach to graduate recruitment adopted by employers and how this has evolved in recent years. In particular the study aimed to explore patterns in graduate recruitment, behaviours of graduate employers and interactions between graduate employers and universities. It therefore provides a picture of long-term trends in practice from pre-recruitment activities through to entry, induction and beyond, and before, during and after the recession; and indicates the ways in which employers' thinking about recruitment and selection have, and are, changing and developing.

## The contribution of Further Education and skills to social mobility

Gloster R, Buzzeo J, Marvell R, Tassinari A, Williams J, Williams M, Swift S, Newton B, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

This report investigates how taking part in further education – such as an apprenticeship, work-based learning, community learning and adult education – helps people get better jobs and wages. It also looks at the effects further education has on the prospects for the children of learners. It is a review of published research from government, academics and think tanks.

## Understanding provision for students with mental health problems and intensive support needs

Williams M, Coare P, Marvell R, Pollard E, Houghton A-M, Anderson J, Higher Education Funding Council for England

This report presents the findings of a research project undertaken for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to update its understanding of institutional support provision for students with mental health problems and other impairments with high cost or intensive support needs.

## Evaluation of the 2010–13 Fit for Work Service pilots: final report

Hillage J, Williams M, Marvell R, Shiels C, Gabbay M, Weston K, Humphreys, Department for Work and Pensions

This report presents the available

evidence on whether the Fit for Work pilots achieved their aims, in particular, whether the Year 2 and 3 pilots succeeded in providing biopsychosocial support to sickness absentees, improving their health, and helping them to return to work.

## Employment Conditions in the International Road Haulage Sector

Broughton A, Curtarelli M, Bertram C, Fohrbeck A, Hinks, R, Tassinari A, European Parliament

This study on employment conditions in international road haulage aims to provide the EP EMPL Committee with information about trends in the employment conditions of drivers in this sector. In particular, it aims to review whether the current regulatory framework is achieving the desired balance between market integration and social protection of workers, and what steps can be taken to ensure this balance in the future.

## Impact evaluation of the Employer Investment Fund and Growth and Innovation Fund: project level learning and performance

Mackay S, Cook J, Agur M, Daff K, Hallam R, MacLeod K, Cox A, UK Commission for Employment and Skills

This report sets out the evidence from a review of evaluation and monitoring evidence on the performance of two of UKCES' investment funds, specifically the Employer Investment Fund (EIF) and the Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF). The report takes stock of the evidence on what the funds have achieved up to Summer 2014, and provides a summary of lessons to inform other investment programmes as well as policy development work.

## Youth transitions to and within the labour market: A literature review

Kirchner Sala L, Nafilyan V, Speckesser S, Tassinari A, Research Paper 255a, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

IES was commissioned by BIS to undertake a study on young people's transitions to, and within, the labour market.

This literature review investigates the ways in which young people's movements between education and work have changed over the past 30 years. It provides information on long-term education and labour market trends affecting 16 – 24 year-olds.



institute for  
employment  
studies

IES is an independent centre specialising in research, evaluation and consultancy on employment policy and practice. The Institute is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision-makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.

The Institute has over 40 staff and associates, skilled in the full range of social research methodologies for data collection and analysis. Techniques employed include: quantitative surveys (using face-to-face, telephone and postal methods); expert and informant interviews; case studies; qualitative interviews; and focus groups.

Clients include major public agencies involved in the development, design and delivery of public employment policy at local, sectoral, regional, national and international level.

### Key contacts

UK labour market and employment policy: Jim Hillage, Annette Cox

International labour market and employment policy: Nigel Meager, Andrea Broughton



INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE

### Head office:

Institute for Employment Studies  
City Gate, 185 Dyke Road  
Brighton BN3 1TL, UK

### London office:

2 Dean Trench Street  
Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3HE

T +44 (0) 1273 763 400

E [askies@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:askies@employment-studies.co.uk)

The articles from this newsletter are also posted on our website: [www.employment-studies.co.uk](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk)

IES is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered charity 258390





# Is work getting worse, and worse for the workers?

Several articles in this issue are linked to an underlying theme of work, health and wellbeing. Indeed, the related questions of how work affects people's wellbeing (for good or ill) and of how people's wellbeing affects their performance at work, are of growing interest to both policy-makers and employers and have been an increasing part of the Institute's work portfolio for several years.

A bit of cursory Googling of public debate and media coverage of these topics reveals a somewhat pessimistic and sometimes sensationalist tone. It seems to be almost received wisdom that job quality is deteriorating everywhere and that work is becoming harder and more intensive, with people subject to ever-longer working hours and working with less autonomy and discretion. Further, it is often implied that, linked to all this, there is an increasingly negative impact of work on wellbeing and health, with commentators in the HR and popular press highlighting an 'epidemic' of workplace stress<sup>1</sup>.

While there are serious and important concerns raised in these kinds of discussion, the evidence suggests a less clear-cut, more nuanced picture.

For a start, we're not working longer hours: average working time in the UK has been falling for decades and continues to fall, and the UK does not stand out (again in terms of averages) as a long-hours working culture in international comparisons. Of course, averages conceal much variation, and where the UK does differ is in the wide and unequal distribution of working hours (with high rates of both very long and very short hours – but even here the proportion working long hours has been steadily coming down over time).

Similarly, no-one would minimise the potential damage of workplace stress, and IES research over the years has evaluated HR management practices which can identify and mitigate this. However, sober official statistics do

not justify some of the more alarmist commentary. If anything, things seem to have improved somewhat over time: the Health and Safety Executive's most recent report<sup>2</sup> notes that *"During the 1990s, there was a considerable rise in the number of people in the UK workforce reporting the experience of work-related stress. Since 2001/02 there has been in general a flat trend albeit at a significantly lower rate than that seen in the 1990s"* (my emphasis).

Turning to the broader, related question of job quality and whether it's getting worse, a new book<sup>3</sup> brings together a set of studies on this theme using a longitudinal data source (the Skills and Employment Surveys – SES)<sup>4</sup> going back to the mid-80s (shameless self-promotion alert: I have a chapter in the book). The book contains too much to summarise adequately here, but again it tells a more nuanced (and interesting) story than might be expected. Thus, widespread perceptions of the end of 'a job for life' and the growth of insecurity and the so-called 'precariat' are not confirmed by these data: indeed the SES data suggest that perceptions of job insecurity fell in the 1990s and early 2000s (although unsurprisingly there was an increase following the recent financial crisis). Labour Force Survey data<sup>5</sup> reinforce this picture, showing that overall job stability has been largely stable, or even increasing on some measures. Similarly, the SES shows that the physical environment of work has improved over time, with fewer people working in harsh or unsafe conditions, and that the overall skill level of jobs has increased,

as has the 'quality of working time' (with fewer people working extremely long hours and many more receiving paid holidays). The findings on task discretion – the extent to which individuals have autonomy over their work activities – are more mixed: this declined throughout the 1990s, and has been broadly stable since 2000, but has not recovered to its level of the early 90s. The only indicator of job quality which appears to have moved in an unambiguously negative direction is work intensity, which rose in the 1990s, flattened off somewhat after 2000 and then rose again.

Overall, the evidence does not support the notion that working life is steadily getting worse – on some indicators it is, but on many it's getting better, and on others there's no clear trend. What does emerge strongly from the SES book and other recent research is that job quality is very unequally distributed between social classes, between men and women, between people of different ages and between people in different types and levels of jobs, and where we have comparative data these inequalities tend to be greater in the UK than in many other economies. The debate on inequality at work in the UK currently focuses on *pay* inequality, and policies to reduce pay gaps. As the authors of the SES book imply, there may be a case for more policy emphasis on 'the inequality of job quality'.

- 1 Two recent examples: <http://www.hrzone.com/perform/people/a-ticking-time-bomb-the-workplace-stress-epidemic> and <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-18951/The-stress-epidemic-work.html>
- 2 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/stress.pdf>
- 3 Felstead A, Gallie D, Green F (eds) (2015) *Unequal Britain at Work*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- 4 Felstead A, Gallie D, Green F (eds) (2015) *Unequal Britain at Work*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- 5 Gregg and Gardner (2015): <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/a-steady-job-the-uks-record-on-labour-market-security-and-stability-since-the-millennium/>