

Executive Summary

Young People & Employment

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Introduction

Our aim with this project was twofold. First, to try to gain a better understanding of the extent and implications of “zero” or “nil” hours contracts, particularly as to how employment practices impact on those employed under this kind of arrangement. Secondly, we hoped to examine what action could be taken, whether by statutory or other means, to tackle the potential for abuse inherent in these relatively new forms of employment.

We were similarly interested in other forms of temporary employment practices that have recently become more prevalent, such as the use of unpaid interns.

This report focuses on the Liverpool City Region, an economic and political area of England, incorporating the areas of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral. The population of Liverpool City Region is 1,506,500¹ with an unemployment rate of 9.9% (ibid.).

Methodology

In order to examine the project aims, we used two methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data:

- Data collection via an online survey
- An informal discussion group hosted in Liverpool where participants were given the opportunity to discuss their experiences whilst working on zero hours / casual contracts

The online survey was distributed via social networks – Twitter & Facebook, via MPs’ websites and contact/ mailing lists.

Key findings

87 people completed the online survey and we have used four case studies to highlight the respondents’ employment experiences. The feedback from respondents focused on five areas

- Number of hours received/Underemployment
- Flexibility
- Managing factors outside the workplace
- Terms and conditions (i.e. sick pay, holiday pay)
- Communication with employer

4 Case studies provide detailed accounts of employees’ experiences whilst working on zero hours/casual employment contracts.

¹ NOMIS [Liverpool City Region profile](#) 2011-12

Conclusions

- We would like to recommend that companies using zero hour contracts, other forms of part-time and temporary employment practices sign up to a code of practice.
- We acknowledge that there are circumstances in which, as a consequence of uneven demand for labour as a result of seasonal pressures or other sources of unpredictability, the use of part-time or temporary employment can be appropriate for some employers. We also recognise that some employees, as a result of family and caring responsibilities or out of choice, might find such employment appropriate to their personal circumstances.
- We firmly conclude, however, that there is a fine line between part-time and temporary work being used responsibly and sensitively and practices which are, frankly, exploitative.
- We have found convincing evidence that some high-profile and other companies are using employment agencies in order to meet uneven demand, as a means of evading their responsibilities - both moral and statutory – normally associated with good employment practice.
- Zero hours contracts, whereby employers are given little or no notice of their hours in advance, are neither ethically acceptable or conducive to good relations between employers and those they employ by such means.
- Whilst we acknowledge some short and unpaid work experience can offer some benefits, we do believe that long unpaid internships are unfair and exploitative in practice.
- We believe strongly that membership of a trade union can be a vital protection against exploitation and arbitrary and unfair treatment in all workplaces.

Draft Code of Practice

We have drafted a **Code of Practice** which aims to provide guidelines for the use of part-time and temporary workers where the circumstances are justified. The key points of the Code of Practice are:

- Working hours should be allocated with fair notice.
- Employers will undertake to provide appropriate opportunities for equal access to internal training and career development opportunities to enable career progression.
- Employers should take into account family commitments, the availability of public transport in relation to working hours and equal treatment in terms of conditions of employment regardless of age, belief, disability, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, between part-time and temporary workers and those employed full-time.
- Other than in circumstances in which the part-time or temporary worker wishes to maintain their current employment status, employers should commit to trying to find either full-time or, alternatively, permanent part-time opportunities for those who would wish to attain such employment status.
- Other than in short-term or emergency situations, employers should directly employ part-time and temporary employees rather than through employment agencies.
- Employers should not deliberately break contracts solely in order to prevent part-time or temporary workers acquiring statutory employment rights.