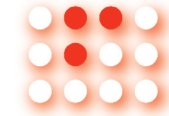


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Annual Subscription £84.50 (£71.50 for LRD affiliates)

Volume 77, Issue 46, 19 November 2015

Depressing effects of fit-for-work scheme

Hundreds of suicides and thousands of prescriptions for anti-depressants are directly linked to the government's Work Capability Assessment, a study by Oxford and Liverpool universities has revealed.

In total, it showed that the Conservative's work capability assessment policy could be associated with 590 suicides, 279,000 mental ill-health cases and 725,000 prescriptions for anti-depressants across England between 2010 and 2013.

"This policy may have had serious adverse consequences for mental health in England, which could outweigh any benefits that arise from moving people off disability benefits," the researchers concluded.

The new research, published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, said that the assessments may have taken a "serious" toll on mental health.

Researchers analysed disability assessments carried out in 149 local authorities in England between 2004 and 2013 and looked at local trends such as suicide rates among 18 to 64-year-olds.

In the five years between 2010 and 2013, more than a million people in England claiming disability

benefit were reassessed using the Work Capability Assessment.

People who were reassessed were more likely to live in deprived areas.

The results showed that in those areas with higher rates of reassessment, there was a corresponding rise in suicides, mental health issues and anti-depressant prescribing.

The mental health charities Mind, the National Autistic Society and Rethink Mental Illness have called for reforms.

"This fundamentally flawed system is also costing the public huge amounts of money, because a high proportion of decisions are overturned at appeal," they said.

www.morningstaronline.co.uk/a-3e26-590-suicides-linked-to-fit-for-work-tests
<http://jech.bmj.com/content/early/2015/10/26/jech-2015-206209.full>

Retail price inflation down again

Retail price inflation edged down for the second consecutive month.

In October, the annual rate of inflation – as measured by the Retail Prices Index (RPI) – was down to 0.7% from 0.8% the previous month.

LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

Published weekly by LRD Publications Ltd, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF. 020 7928 3649 www.lrd.org.uk

Falls in food, alcohol and tobacco, offset in part by dearer clothing, were the main factors in the fall, the Office for National Statistics said.

Inflation under the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) remained at minus 0.1% in October.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Zero inflation is not the mark of a healthy economy. While downward pressure on prices may be providing some temporary relief for families, it is not a long-term fix.

"In order to have a lasting recovery that benefits everybody, we need urgent investment in skills, innovation and construction projects."

Price inflation				
	% increase on a year earlier			
	RPI ¹	RPI	RPIX ²	CPI
Sept 2014	257.6	2.3	2.3	1.2
October	257.7	2.3	2.4	1.3
November	257.1	2.0	2.0	1.0
December	257.5	1.6	1.7	0.5
January 2015	255.4	1.1	1.2	0.3
February	256.7	1.0	1.0	0.0
March	257.1	0.9	0.9	0.0
April	258.0	0.9	0.9	-0.1
May	258.5	1.0	1.1	0.1
June	258.9	1.0	1.1	0.0
July	258.6	1.0	1.1	0.1
August	259.8	1.1	1.2	0.0
September	259.6	0.8	0.9	-0.1
October	259.5	0.7	0.8	-0.1

¹ January 1987=100 ² RPI except mortgage interest payments

Nine of the 14 groups that make up the basket of goods used to calculate the RPI increased by more than the overall rise of 0.7%.

The clothing and footwear group's increase of 8.0%, as the price of men's outerwear, women's outerwear and children's outerwear rose this year by more than a year ago.

The housing group's increase of 2.5% included a 3.1% increase in rents.

The food group posted a fall of 2.5% with prices down for most components, including eggs (-8.6%) fresh milk (-8.0%), poultry (-7.7%), and bread (-7.4%). There were rises of 1.0% for beef and 0.7% for coffee and sweets and chocolate.

The fuel and light group posted a 4.9% decrease on the back of a 26.5% decrease in oil and other fuels and a 6.5% decrease in gas prices.

The motoring group's 4.4% fall included a 14.2% drop in the price of petrol and oil.

More than 0.7%	%	Less than 0.7%	%
Clothing & footwear	8.0	Alcoholic drink	-0.6
Fares etc	4.1	Leisure goods	-0.7
Tobacco	4.0	Food	-2.5
Leisure services	2.7	Motoring expenditure	-4.4
Housing	2.5	Fuel & light	-4.9
Household goods	2.2		
Household services	2.0		
Catering	1.4		
Personal goods & services	0.8		

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/cpi/consumer-price-indices/october-2015/index.html
www.tuc.org.uk/node/124055

Annual survey of hours and earnings 2015

Adjusted for inflation, full-time average weekly earnings increased, while the gender pay gap closed by a narrow margin in April 2015, according to official figures.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) reveals that in April 2015, median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees were £528, up 1.8% from the £518 the year before.

Taking inflation into account, weekly earnings increased by 1.9% compared to 2014. This is the first real terms increase since 2008, and is due to a combination of growth in average earnings and a low level of inflation.

Median gross weekly earnings — April 2015 ¹			
£ per week	Full-time	Part-time	All
Men	£567.20	£155.50	£517.50
Women	£471.20	£171.80	£338.00
All	£527.70	£167.00	£425.80
% increase 2014-15			
Men	1.5%	2.7%	2.0%
Women	2.1%	3.5%	2.3%
All	1.8%	3.7%	1.9%

¹ Employees on adult rate, pay unaffected by absence

Gender pay gap The gender pay gap, based on median hourly earnings excluding overtime, has narrowed for full-time employees to 9.4% from 9.6% in 2014. This is the lowest figure since the survey began in 1997, but the gap has changed little in the last four years.

The gap for all employees (full-time and part-time) was unchanged at 19.2%.

For part-time employees, the higher rate of pay for women than men results in a "negative" gender pay gap of 6.5% in April 2015 against 5.5% in 2014.

Sam Smethers, chief executive of the women's campaign group the Fawcett Society, said: "The pay gap for full-time work is closing but by the narrowest of margins. When you include part-timers there is no change. This is no cause for celebration and proves again why we must speed up the pace of change or future generations of women at work will continue to lose out.

"Employers need to review their pay systems, publish their pay gap figure and develop an action plan.

"Government must invest in our childcare infrastructure and support mums and dads to share caring responsibilities, and we must remove barriers to career progression and career choices."

In terms of age group, for full-time workers, the gap in hourly earnings was marginally in favour of women aged 22-29. However from 40 upwards, it widens to 12.2% for 40-49-year-olds, 17.2% for 50-59-year-olds, before slipping back to 13.2% for those aged 60 and over.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady called for stronger action from the government on tackling the gap. "While bringing in mandatory pay gap reporting is a welcome step it must not be delayed," she said. "David Cameron should extend the law to medium-size companies as well as large employers, and companies that don't comply with the law should be fined."

Distribution of earnings The monetary gap between the top 10% of men and women and the bottom 10% in April 2015 was at least £738.00 a week – based on the distribution of gross median weekly earnings for full-time employees on adult rates.

For full-time adults, the top 10% had weekly earnings of over £1,034.90 or 196% of the £527.70 median, while for the bottom 10% on less than £296.90 it was 56% of the median.

The weekly earnings figure of at least £1,139.40 for the top 10% of men was 201% of their median figure of £567.20, while for the bottom 10% on £317.30 or less it was 56% of the median.

The top 10% of women had earnings of over £879.30 or 187% of the median figure of £471.20, while for the bottom 10% on less than £277.00 it was 59% of the median.

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_424052.pdf

www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/2015/11/new-data-on-the-gender-pay-gap/

www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues/pay-parity-between-full-time-men-and-women-could-still-be-50-years-away-warns-tuc

Roache is new GMB general secretary

Tim Roache, regional secretary for Yorkshire and North Derbyshire region, has been elected to succeed Paul Kenny as general secretary and treasurer of the GMB general union.

Roache secured 56.7% of the vote against 43.3% for the other candidate, Paul McCarthy, regional secretary for the North West and Irish region.

www.gmb.org.uk/newsroom/new-gmb-general-secretary-elect?

Poorest hit hardest by tax credit cuts

Chancellor George Osborne's tax credit cuts will hit the UK's poorest regions and nations the hardest, the TUC says.

A TUC analysis shows that more than nine in 10 (91%) working tax credit households in the UK will be worse off as a result of the government's cuts, and sets out the average loss in each part of the UK.

In Northern Ireland, where average income per head is the lowest in the UK, the average loss to working tax credit claimants will be £1,480 – the highest of any UK nation and region.

By contrast, the average loss for a losing household in London will be £1,110. This is despite the fact that London has the highest average income per head in the UK.

Working tax credit households in every UK region and nation will suffer larger average losses than London despite having lower incomes.

In the North East, for example, where average income per head is more than £7,500 lower than London, households will be £1,410 worse off from the chancellor's tax credit cuts.

And in Yorkshire and the Humber, where average income per head is more than £7,000 lower than the capital, households will lose £1,440.

In total the TUC estimates that over £4.5 billion will be lost from working recipients of tax credits across the UK as a result of the cuts.

The TUC said the analysis demonstrates that the tax credit cuts will worsen regional income inequalities. The government should be supporting families on lower incomes rather than making them even worse off, the TUC said.

Although the chancellor has now indicated that he will modify the plans in the government's spending review on 25 November, it is currently expected that he will propose transitional arrangements which may delay the full impact, but will not stop them taking place.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "The prime minister and the chancellor seem to be the last people in Britain who still think the tax credit cuts are a good idea. They don't seem to understand that people in work deserve a decent income. These cuts should be ditched altogether."

www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/tax-credit-cuts-will-hit-poorest-uk-regions-hardest-tuc-research-reveals?

Low pay in April 2015

Well over 200,000 jobs were paying less than the statutory minimum wage in April 2015, official figures show.

The Office for National Statistics put the figure at 209,000 jobs – down from 222,000 the year before. The figures were drawn from the 2015 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

There were 115,000 jobs held by full-time employees (0.6% of jobs in this group) paying less than the National Minimum Wage (NMW).

For part-time employees, there were 94,000 jobs (1.2% of jobs in this group) paying less than the NMW.

A breakdown by age and the proportion of jobs paying less than the NMW showed:

- there were 28,000 jobs for 18 to 20-year-olds (2.6% of jobs in this age group) paying less than the NMW; and
- there were 176,000 jobs for workers aged 21 and over, (0.7% of jobs in this age group) paying less than the NMW.

Employees in part-time work were more likely than those in full-time work to be paid less than the NMW, with 1.2% of part-time jobs and 0.6% of full-time jobs falling below the NMW in April 2015. And jobs held by women were more likely to be paid less than the NMW than jobs held by men (0.9% compared with 0.7%).

It will come as no surprise that it is the elementary occupations – bar staff, waiters and waitresses, for example – that has the highest proportion of low paid jobs with 1.7% of jobs pay below the NMW.

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_424107.pdf

Councils pay Living Wage but £10 is aim

The GMB general union has published the names of 175 local authority employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland paying and nine councils committed to pay a Living Wage.

A regional breakdown of the councils can be accessed by following the link at the end of the article. London and the South East both have 25 councils paying the Living Wage, but in the North East the number is just four.

However, the union will continue to press for a Living Wage of £10. Justin Bowden, national officer for local authority workers, said that its members have made clear that "in their experience you need at least £10 an hour and a full working week to have a decent life free from benefits and tax credits".

"Less than £10 an hour means just existing not living. It means a life of isolation, unable to socialise. It means a life of constant anxiety over paying bills and of borrowing from friends, family and pay day loan sharks just to make ends meet," he said.

www.gmb.org.uk/newsroom/list-of-councils-on-living-wage