



Bevan Foundation

My job, my future

Summary of a dialogue with young workers on flexicurity in a UK cohesion region

What is flexicurity?

Flexicurity is a way of managing employment in a member state which involves combining greater flexibility for the employer to dismiss workers with greater security for workers in the form of unemployment benefits and help to find a job if they are out of work. It is argued that flexicurity will help to create jobs and make the economy more competitive.

The European Commission and member states have agreed that flexicurity should be introduced across Europe, although there are different 'pathways' to achieve flexicurity depending on a member state's current approach to employment protection and social security.

A dialogue about flexicurity

The Bevan Foundation, an independent think tank, held a dialogue about flexicurity with young people in West Wales and the Valleys, a cohesion region in the UK. The discussions occurred in the last quarter of 2007 and first quarter of 2008.

We disseminated information about flexicurity to more than 11,000 people and organisations, designed a website which was visited by more than 1,000 people, and gathered the views of more than 100 people via an online survey, a forum and three discussion groups. The

findings are not statistically representative but nevertheless provide a very useful insight into the current thinking of young people and the wider public about flexicurity in a cohesion region.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the European Commission's Plan D programme; the help of BT, DVLA, Ystrad Mynach College, PCS union and UNISON in organising the discussion groups; and the contributions of all those who made their views known.



West Wales and the Valleys

West Wales and the Valleys has a population of 1.9 million. After a long history of declining employment, the number of jobs and the region's employment rate are increasing. However the labour market remains weak with:

- high levels of economic inactivity compared with the UK average, especially amongst minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities;
- poor job quality, with low pay, job segregation by gender, over-representation of part time and temporary work;
- low levels of skills and qualifications in the population and little work-related training;
- relatively weak labour market support, with low rates of job placement and retention of people moving off unemployment benefits into work.

Attitudes to flexicurity

Our overall conclusion is that people in West Wales and the Valleys are sceptical about flexicurity. This is partly a response to any new idea, but there were other reasons which were:

- Most people wanted a career because it represented a degree of stability and progression. They did not see that flexicurity could provide these features.
- Most people were wary of any attempt to reduce employment protection because they believed that employers already have many rights to dismiss employees in the UK.
- There was considerable unease about the provision of higher unemployment benefits to provide security to workers, which reflected current debates about benefits and help to find work. People were generally hostile to the idea of increasing benefits to people who they perceived do not want to work.
- Almost all people were sceptical of the ability of state support to help people to find work. They held current welfare to work provision and careers advice in very low esteem and they could not see that these services might be useful.

- Most people had received some job-related training, but felt that the education system over-emphasised academic qualifications at the expense of vocational training.

It was also pointed out that moves towards flexicurity would require considerable adjustment of other policies, such as the age of compulsory retirement, credit-scoring and pension arrangements.

We conclude, therefore, that there is considerable resistance to the idea of flexicurity in this region of the UK. We have no doubt these views are informed by the current climate of opinion about welfare and benefit reform in the UK, but we also consider that the relatively poor labour market in West Wales and the Valleys plays a part in shaping these opinions.

Taking all these points together, any moves towards the flexicurity model in the UK are likely to be highly controversial at the present time. There will need to be a major discussion to engage the public with a relatively difficult concept if it is to have popular support.

A copy of the full report of the project (in English only) is available from:

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