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Working All Hours:
The part-time poverty trap

Paul Blyton and Jean Jenkins

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Introduction

In March 2007 the Burberry garment factory in Treorchy closed its doors and 309 people lost their jobs. The work of this long-established manufacturing plant in the heart of the Rhondda Valleys was transferred to a factory in China. As researchers documenting the workers' campaign to try to reverse the closure decision, we continued to follow the employees' journey after redundancy as they moved into job search and alternative employment.

For some, redundancy provided a stimulus for retraining, a shift in direction and a change for the better. But for many others, their experience of the search for new employment was a difficult and dispiriting one. At the time of the plant closure, opportunities in the local labour market were limited and mainly confined to part-time jobs. Further, with many of the jobs being offered on terms involving variable hours, these mainly service sector jobs were far less favourable in terms of both income and work-life balance than the full-time, manufacturing jobs the ex-Burberry workers had lost. There were also further disappointments for those people who secured a new job only to be laid off again within months, as well as those who were able to find only seasonal work with limited prospects of work beyond periods of peak demand. For individuals who had been employed at Burberry since leaving school, confronting the job search process and being new entrants to different working environments was often personally traumatic. Their experiences serve to highlight more

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general issues surrounding redundancy, job search and much of the part-time work on offer in today's labour market. In this report, while the former Burberry workers were the inspiration for our study and allowed us to gain insight into their situation, our aim is to focus on the wider issues raised by their experiences. In so doing, we draw on comments and examples from our respondents, but we endeavour throughout to develop a more generalised perspective on the experience of redundant job seekers, the operation of benefits alongside work, and the reality of working part-time in today's labour market.

We begin by discussing the challenges of job search in the context of redundancy and tight labour markets. In a period of recessionary pressures and cuts in public spending this is an area of on-going concern. We then move to our main focus: the nature and consequences of employer-driven 'flexibility', involuntary part-time work and unpredictable working patterns. Our findings contrast the supposed benefits of part-time working with the reality facing many low-skilled, part-time workers in the service sector, where employment is increasingly characterised by limited choice, low pay, unpredictable hours of work, and insecurity. This is work that is associated with underemployment, and potentially embeds people in poverty to a greater extent than lifting them out of it.

3 The impact of redundancy: what happens when a 'skilled employee' becomes an 'unskilled' job seeker

The shock and ramifications of losing one's job can be incalculable and they are put beyond easy measurement precisely because it is so personal an experience. For some of course, the event can open the way to a different course in life and the chance to embrace a different direction. For many others, however, the unexpected curtailing of their established pattern of working life is an event difficult to recover from, both in terms of material factors like lost earnings, as well as the emotional impact of job loss. In the case of the Burberry workers, for example, workers had built up lifetimes of skill and experience within their factory yet many had no formal qualifications. Thus while they regarded themselves as trained employees, with years of experience as garment cutters, machinists, supervisors and inspectors – and possessed skills which were critical to the firm's shop-floor operations – once the factory had closed, workers entered the job search process classed as unskilled.

Individual responses to the change of circumstances brought about by redundancy varied tremendously, but very few of our respondents described it as a positive experience. Many found themselves having to 'begin again' in early to late middle age, leaving behind a status established over a lifetime of employment for new jobs where they were seen as inexperienced (despite their relatively advanced age) and did not feel highly valued. In contrast, their ties within the Burberry plant crossed generations and the workplace was generally described by employees as having be-

come a ‘community within a community’. The overwhelming majority of our respondents regretted the loss of that social network long after the factory closed, even where they felt that eventually they had settled into new employment reasonably well. In many respects, parallels might be drawn with redundancies that have affected other occupational communities in earlier times, including coal, steel and other manufacturing industries, with the added consideration that the context of industrial decline left the Burberry employees with little prospect of alternative comparable employment in their immediate locality. In this respect, the experiences of our respondents, who were mainly female, highlight the challenges of being low skilled job seekers in twenty-first century Wales.

An initial point is that there is a significant ‘pay penalty’ and disadvantage for those in the labour market in Wales with low educational attainment and either few or no qualifications. This has been shown to be particularly so for younger workers in Wales (under 25 years), women, ethnic minority groups and people with disabilities, and these are also the groups more likely to figure in jobs with low hourly pay and low weekly pay.[1] Indeed, current statistics on Wales present a picture of a labour market that exhibits a comparatively high level of low paid and low skill jobs, with 26 per cent of employees in Wales falling below the low-pay threshold (defined as two-thirds of UK median earnings), compared with 22 per cent of employees in the UK as a whole. If we disaggregate the statistics further, we see not only higher rates of low paid workers and low hourly earnings in Wales compared with the UK average, we also see low

weekly earnings associated with shorter hours of work more evident in the Welsh labour market.

Across the UK, part-time employment is located in both private and public sectors. In the latter, this has been particularly evident where provision of services – such as home care for the elderly, for example – is contracted out to private enterprise. Though the number of men working part-time has increased over the past two decades, it remains the case that most part-time workers are women: over four in every five part-timers are female according to the latest national workplace survey.[2] In those sectors where women make up the greater proportion of the workforce, the proportions of women working part-time are particularly high, in contrast to those industries where the workforce is male dominated. While approximately three-quarters of jobs in the UK labour market are full-time, the portrayal of part-time employment as an option chosen mainly by women to accommodate the domestic responsibilities of home and child care, while supplementing the primary (usually male) breadwinner income, is inaccurate. Today, *involuntary* part-time working, underemployment and variability in working patterns are increasing features of mature labour markets[3] and Wales is no exception. Rather, Wales is the third highest user of part-time work of all UK regions for women, and the fourth highest for men.[4]

It is not the case that part-time work is necessarily worker-driven or freely chosen. In Wales, part-time jobs now account for a quarter of all employment[5] and at the time the redundancies were declared by Burberry, opportunities in the local labour market

were dominated by low skilled work, mainly in the retail and care sectors, at little more than National Minimum Wage (NMW)[6] and part-time hours of work. While employed at Burberry, the sewing machinists had been earning just above the NMW and were not highly paid, but they were at least working full-time, in permanent jobs with clear expectations of their earnings week on week throughout the year. However, by 2007, not only were the unskilled jobs the women could apply for generally low paid and part-time, they were also likely to be seasonal, casual or temporary, with variable hours and patterns of work. If we correlate this pattern with the statistical evidence showing that the probability of low hourly earnings in Wales is more than doubled if you are a woman working part-time (47 per cent as opposed to 22 per cent if full-time),7 then it is clear that the redundant Burberry workers entered a highly unfavourable labour market.

When surveyed a year after the closure, two-thirds of our respondents who had found work were in service sector jobs – mainly in retail and social care – and were typically working part-time. Retail and social care are two categories high on the list of the Low Pay Commission's 2010 definition of 'low paying occupations'[8]. In our research, we did indeed find that the ex-Burberry employees generally fared worse in terms of earnings and job security in the part-time jobs they entered after their factory closed. Much of the fall in earnings was due to people working fewer than full-time hours.[9] Their experience is symptomatic of a more widespread trend in Wales, and as Parken (2011)[10] has argued, if jobs at part-time hours dominate the vacancy board, this hardly

makes part-time work a 'choice'. Further, as it is generally clear that the NMW is itself 'insufficient to sustain the basics of family life'[11] even at full-time hours (hence the on-going battles for 'living wages'), it is highly improbable that part-time hours at the NMW could reasonably be expected to offer any serious prospect of financial independence for the workers concerned. The growth of 'in-work poverty' is an issue that policy makers need to take more seriously in recognition of the vicious cycle of employer-driven, unpredictable working patterns, low skill and low pay which simply does not provide workers with a viable weekly income.

This begs the question of how our respondents - and low skilled job seekers more generally - might have put themselves in a position to achieve better earnings potential. One solution might be to retrain, while another would be perhaps to relocate in search of work. We discuss both these propositions in the following section.

'Getting on the bus' – earnings and skills

In October 2010, Iain Duncan Smith, Work and Pensions Secretary, made comments in an interview on BBC2's *Newsnight* to the effect that the unemployed in some regions (he was using the unemployed in Merthyr Tydfil as his specific example) have become 'static' and should be more ready to 'get on a bus' and be mobile in their search of work.[12] Broadening one's geographical range of job search following redundancy is undoubtedly relevant for improving prospects of re-employment. However, the image of an

unemployed person as one who lacks the enterprise and effort to travel in search of gainful occupation reflects a stereotype which tars all job-seekers with the same simplistic brush. When classed as low-skilled and earning low pay, going beyond the local labour market in search of better opportunities is far from being as simple an exercise as it might sound.

A 2008 study of redundancy in the Birmingham region[13], showed that following redundancy, those who were able to travel beyond their immediate local labour market for work, were much more likely to cope with the effects of job loss, and did indeed stand a better chance both of finding new employment and achieving the same (or better) level of pay in their new employment. The complicating factor for the low paid – something of a 'Catch 22' – is that in a context of increasing 'labour market polarisation and inequality',[14] one generally needs to have been (or be) in a higher paying job, and have a higher level of skill, in order to contemplate absorbing the extra costs of travelling longer distances in search of alternative, perhaps better paid, work. Higher-skilled workers are usually able to command higher salaries, thereby mitigating travel costs as well as increasing the likelihood of there being a higher paying job at the end of the journey. Hence, for the low paid and low skilled, relocating or commuting to new employment is not as simple as getting on a bus, or (to coin an earlier version of this same comment) 'getting on their bike'. There are three important considerations to resolve: first, low-skilled jobs generally offer low hourly wage rates that do not support the cost of travelling; second, those with past experience of job loss may well fear that new opportunities

may be similarly vulnerable to financial cutbacks and be short-term rather than permanent opportunities; and third, the type of low-skilled jobs on offer may involve less than full-time hours, as is now widespread in many service sector activities. Each of these factors exposes the low paid, low skilled job seeker to the risk of worsening rather than bettering their financial situation by relocating or commuting.

It is worth noting at this point that the use of the South Wales Valleys as an example of a region where the working population fails to recognise that 'jobs don't come to you'[15] is not an accurate representation of workforce behaviour in the region. In 2009, for example, the Vale of Glamorgan, Blaenau Gwent and Rhondda Cynon Taf reflected some of the highest rates in Wales for commuting 'outflow' as a proportion of working residents; whereas 81 per cent of Cardiff residents worked in their own home authority for example, the equivalent rate for Merthyr was just 64 per cent. In Wales as a whole, commuting flows are apparent in both directions between towns and local authority areas of the south, around Swansea, Newport and Cardiff and in the north, between Flintshire and Wrexham.[16] It is clear that people *do* move and commute in search of work, but these are primarily people who have relevant skills and can afford to do so. Indeed, this is the crux of the matter: appropriate and transferable skills enable workers to maximise the scope of their job search and better respond to job loss and unemployment. But who is responsible for developing skills?

In terms of the provisions that British employers are expected to make for workers they make redundant,

there is a tendency for corporate ‘retraining packages’ associated with severance to focus on short term initiatives, along with the provision of consultants’ help in drafting curriculum vitae. This is intended to serve as adequate preparation for redundant workers in their job search. Such help may indeed prove useful, not least in helping workers to ‘frame’ their experience under labels which may be in vogue yet unfamiliar to the individuals concerned. One former employee told us, for example, that she had not realised that in her job at Burberry she had been exercising ‘organisational skills’ and showing ‘qualities of leadership and communication’ until a CV consultant pointed this out to her. But while companies frequently offer this sort of support to redundant employees, the depth and detail of such provision is relatively shallow and only rarely appears to add appreciably to workers’ employability or their real earnings potential. The training required under British regulation bears no comparison with the social provisions demanded from corporations in continental Europe and it would appear that at the present time the sort of long-term support and training that can assist the search for new employment[17] is neither provided sufficiently well by corporations nor, it seems, national or devolved governments.

If people are to be ‘got back to work’, research in other regions of the UK[18] highlights the importance of an infrastructure of long-term training and support that is appropriate not only for the jobs currently available, but more importantly, for the high quality jobs of the future – jobs that Welsh politicians claim their policies are targeted towards.[19] Where these jobs will be found in Wales is a moot point.

The country remains dogged by a reputation for its 'legacy of low skilled unemployed' and although the Wales Manufacturing Forum emphasises the need to expand and invest in manufacturing,[20] there is limited evidence of success. In September 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government's publication *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales* set out proposals for a 'transformation policy' designed to 'secure a workforce that is sufficiently skilled to access future high level employment opportunities' by better integration of education and training provision.[21] However this rhetoric, though welcome in terms of its intent, glosses over the fact that the current labour market offers little escape or prospect for self-improvement for existing low skilled workers. Assertions of the need 'to improve the quality of work-based learning provision throughout Wales'[22] aside, the industrial base as currently configured provides only a 'weak demand for skills'.[23] 'High performance', high-technology jobs are in limited supply and levels of actual employment in the manufacturing sector continue to fall. While figures suggest it is Welsh manufacturing that is currently driving economic growth,[24] the regional economy experiences a continued shift away from manufacturing, and a disproportionate reliance on employment in the public sector. In Wales, a quarter of the national workforce is employed in the public sector, significantly higher than the proportion in the UK as a whole. This is a cause for concern in times of public sector cutbacks; as reported by BBC Wales News, among others, the Welsh economy is likely to be 'more vulnerable to public spending cuts'[25], and as the public sector jobs axe falls, where will increasing numbers of redundant employees turn in search of employment?

In this context, it is clear that much remains to be done to address the need for innovation and job creation in the Welsh economy; the particular challenges faced by the low or inappropriately skilled worker are far more wide-ranging than those currently being addressed by the services of CV-writing consultants and the like. In the absence of coherent state-led initiatives which deliver (rather than advocate) a well-trained national workforce, employer-led training is task specific. Low skilled workers who enter low-skilled jobs are unlikely to leave such employment with appreciably higher levels of transferable skills or qualifications than when they entered. The prognosis for wealth creation for individuals and their local communities looks bleak in this context: low skilled occupations perpetuate low skill, and low skill perpetuates low pay. Over 50 per cent of part-time workers in Wales are in low wage occupations[26] and it is this sector, rather than higher skilled manufacturing jobs, which is on the increase. In a situation where the country is experiencing a decline in full-time hours and its replacement by part-time work, [27] such jobs do not allow the low skilled to take charge of developing their own human capital. The very impermanence of contracts and the unpredictability of work patterns makes any planning – of, for example, family commitments or a course of adult education and training – extremely difficult. This brings us to the nature of the insecure and unpredictable nature of the low skilled, low paid part-time labour market which threatens to capture those with low qualifications and further distance them from prospects for self-development or increased future earnings.

13 Insecurity and unpredictability: employer-driven flexibility and the offloading of risk

There is a well-discussed debate around the issue of workforce 'flexibility' which frequently takes polarised positions. On the one side, the worker is characterised as a 'flexible specialist', empowered and a source of greater adaptability and competitiveness through their potential for flexible working. On the other, the worker is seen as subject to increased insecurity, intensification of effort and erosion of working conditions as employers seek to maximise the flexibility of their labour input.[28] In this latter view, the portrayal is that flexibility *for* the employer requires the flexibility *of* the worker, rather than it being a balanced and mutually beneficial exchange. While the extent of different forms of flexibility remain open to debate, it is a reasonable proposition that reciprocity in any employment relationship is less likely to favour a low skilled worker who is easily replaceable from the external labour market. Thus employers are in a position to use part-time hours, shift-work and a range of temporary contracts to offload the risks associated with the need for variability in response to the peaks and troughs of customer demand. In this desire to maximise the means of adjusting labour input at short notice, little account is taken of how this impacts upon workers' lives. The uncertainty of flexibility is visited on the individual worker, who has to be adaptable in order to retain their employment; if they cannot, as low skilled workers they can more easily be replaced from the external labour market. Many of our respondents reported further experiences of redundancy and job loss in the months and years following the Bur-

berry factory closure, and provided many examples of the deleterious impact of variable hours and unpredictable patterns of work at low rates of pay.

In areas of the service sector such as retail and hospitality, as well as social care in the community, there is an increasingly evident expectation by employers that their workers must be available for variable patterns of shift work and/or part-time working. The predominance of female labour in these sectors is accompanied by low hourly rates of pay which do not allow the worker to offset the extra costs they incur as a result of being available to work any and all hours, as required by the employer. In a commonfound version of variable hours in retailing, for example, employees are contracted for a minimum number of hours per week (typically 16 hours, but can range from 0 to 30) but agree to work additional hours as management judge necessary. Where businesses operate across the 24 hours and 6 or 7 day periods, this can mean working additional hours at any time during the operating period. These arrangements are not only evident in retail work, however. In the care sector, contracted hours for many workers now range from 0–30 hours, organised in varying forms and patterns (such as split-shift arrangements) to ensure appropriate care provision A more regular pattern tends to develop only when the worker is assigned 'permanent' status and is removed from the probationary 'casual' list of workers. Being 'casual' is a status that normally lasts a number of months, but in our study we witnessed one case that lasted several years. In that case, the employee had suffered the misfortune of needing emergency surgery and hospitalisation within her first year of employ-

ment and had been retained as ‘casual’ as a consequence. The effect was that her hours had varied from four per week to thirty, with little prior warning, for a period of over three years.

For management, variable hours allow adjustments to labour input to cover instances such as absence, training, or increased customer demand. The increased flexibility that management derives from variable hours contracts, however, contrasts with the reduced predictability that employees have over their working time and presents a range of practical problems. First, work shifts scheduled to accommodate twenty-four hour, seven day customer / client service, mean that public transport is unlikely to be consistently available at required times. This can necessitate some form of private transport, which is a major expense for those on low incomes. Second, shifts may be rostered for a comparatively short number of hours, increasing the relative travel costs of getting to and from work and placing further strain on low levels of income. Third, if child-care is required to allow parents to go out to work, it may not be available if shifts are at unsociable hours. However, on low pay, private child care is an expense that may in any case be beyond many families, even if timing is not so central an issue. A conservative estimate of the current average cost of a day nursery is currently around £35 per child, per day. An eight-hour shift at the current adult rate of the NMW yields £47.44. It is immediately clear that these costs are prohibitive without some other means of support. There is (at present) state support in the form of Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits, but these benefits are set for individuals for twelve month periods, and are not designed to ac-

commodate the variability of hours evident in service sector work. Recent threats and cuts to a range of child benefits and child care support will only intensify the challenges for working people on low and unpredictable incomes, making the support of a local social network of family and friends a necessity rather than an option – another factor which ties people to their locality and constrains their scope for job search.

Further, variability in weekly hours is exacerbated by the degree of unpredictability of the work hours. In both survey responses and interview comments during our study of the Burberry workers, for example, it was evident that in their subsequent jobs, many were subject to working time patterns that not only varied from week to week but were highly unpredictable, in terms of both timing and duration. For many of those on variable hours contracts, their forthcoming weekly schedule was frequently made known to them only at the end of the previous week. Indeed, as well as the lateness in publishing forthcoming shift schedules, it is clear that many managers were also regulating working time patterns through various informal mechanisms, including *ad hoc* arrangements with employees to complete particular work assignments. In interviews, many of our respondents commented on the difficulties created in their home lives by this variability and unpredictability.

Thus, the aspect that much low paid service sector work has in common is the vulnerability of the worker to the employer's discretion. Workers have to be available for work, but their contractual terms allow hours to vary in accordance with their employer's

need. This trend is being witnessed across Europe: in the UK as a whole, vulnerable insecure work is receiving considerable attention[29] and in larger surveys, such as the European Foundation's 2010 European Working Conditions Survey we see that the proportion of workers starting and finishing work at different times every day is increasing – almost two-in-five by 2010, compared to just over one-third ten years earlier. The same survey shows that one third of people (33%) work different hours each week, and 42 per cent don't work the same hours each day.

What does all this mean for the low-paid, insecure, part-time worker? Primarily, it means that workers in this situation are largely at the mercy of the employer's demand for working hours and consequently neither earnings, nor events outside work, from childcare to enrolment in adult education and training, can be planned with confidence. The variability of hours can also inhibit the development of on-going relationships with fellow workers. Further, alongside the relative instability of employment is a high degree of 'representation insecurity'[30] in the sense that trade unions are likely to find such workers far more difficult to reach in order to organise. For the workers themselves, major decisions such as house purchases and even family formation, are made more difficult to plan for. Many workers are kept in a position of dependence on their supervisors and managers to allocate them work, to convert contracts from temporary to permanent status, and to provide sufficient advance notice of forthcoming work rosters. On the whole, for example, while written contracts normally state that workers will be given a week's or a month's notice of shifts and working patterns, we observed that these

agreements were very often, and regularly, broken in practice. Individuals spoke of being frightened to refuse hours of work in case this damaged their relationship with their supervisor, and generally our respondents tried to cope with seasonal employment and variable weekly hours by accepting any offer of work whenever it came, often at a cost to their family commitments.

The likelihood of low hourly rates and low weekly earnings make such jobs economically unsustainable for the workers involved, and necessitate reliance on some form of additional state benefits. Some of our interviewees were clear that although they found the system of claiming Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits onerous and complex, and would rather not have to deal with the agencies concerned, they could not afford to go out to work without the benefits, as their employers were not offering them regular or increased hours. This phenomenon has been noted by others working in the field of poverty and social exclusion in Wales[31] and we believe our findings are of wider relevance. In effect, we concluded that such credits are working as much as a subsidy for low paying employers as they are as a support for the workers concerned, who find themselves trapped in conditions of underemployment and dependence. When politicians and others speak of moving people ‘off benefits’ more emphasis needs to be given to moving employers off benefits also. The ‘flexible’ but insecure and low-paid short-time working many employers currently offer the low skilled do not allow for those workers to advance their social or economic status. Indeed, a major beneficiary of these workers’ continued dependence

on different forms of welfare payment, are their various employers.

Conclusion

In the current labour market in Wales, the majority of opportunities for low skilled workers lie in the service sector, particularly within retail, call centres and the delivery of community care for vulnerable groups such as disabled people and older people. Workers entering these occupations can do so with limited prior training, educational attainment or expertise. Many of these will be women. On-the-job training caters for the task-related functions they need to perform while at work, but do not necessarily increase the *level* of skill of individual workers in such a way as to allow them to change their fundamental classification as a low-skilled member of the wider labour market. Thus, while it seems an obvious thing to say, it should be recognised that low skilled workers who enter low skilled occupations are likely to remain low skilled. The link between low skilled work, low earnings and reliance on forms of state benefits to supplement weekly earnings which, on their own, fail to sustain basic needs is important here, because being 'in work' in this context is by no means a guaranteed route out of poverty.

While entry into employment is important for self-esteem (our respondents certainly believed so) and perhaps promises better prospects than worklessness, it is important to be aware that where such jobs are not only low-paid but also organised by employers on casualised terms, at short hours of work in variable patterns and often involving unpredictable times, this all has a potentially serious impact on workers and

their families. They are left low paid and insecure, and with limited prospects for effecting a meaningful change in their condition through their own efforts. The ever-present need to be 'available' for work constrains the individual's ability to engage in family responsibilities – things as basic, for example, as parents' evenings at schools, medical and dental appointments, planning a mortgage and so on – and it most definitely inhibits engagement with any programme of self-improvement through adult education. This truly is a 'poverty-trap'. It is likely to be made even more difficult to escape by existing and proposed cuts to different forms of child support and the possibility of growing numbers of redundancies, reductions in hours of work and cuts to public services associated with on-going budgetary pressures.

With these issues in mind, we need to be more critical in our engagement with what a 'flexible labour market' actually means for low skilled workers. The lack of choice available to increasing numbers of people demands a re-evaluation of the impact and consequences of under-employment and poor skills development, and raises particular issues in relation to women's economic power and status in the labour market. Part-time jobs may indeed provide a measure of flexibility for caring needs; seasonal employment may provide a welcome boost to student incomes or family budgets in the run-up to Christmas and holidays; shift work across twenty-four hour periods and a seven day week may be welcomed by those who can use it to accommodate family responsibilities; all of this is true, but this is what a short-term, stop-gap labour market looks like. It is not the basis for longer term stability or progression, either

for the individual worker or for an economy with ambitions to grow a reputation for high skilled productivity. On the contrary, the current flexible labour market for low skilled workers means little more than precarious economic survival and longer term skills depletion. Further, at a time when equality and diversity are supposedly high on the political agenda, impermanent, unpredictable, low paid jobs in the service sector are being organised on terms which reflect old stereotypes of a double income household with a (usually male) breadwinner on full-time hours whose earnings were supplemented by part-time (usually female) income seen as 'pin-money', which was useful but not necessarily to be relied upon. How else can a job offered on terms like 0-30 hours at the NMW (or little more), hours to be determined one week ahead of working, be regarded? This type of work is neither economically nor socially viable in the longer term, and as it is associated with work which promises little in the way of skills development, is hardly a springboard to better times and a better job for the individual worker. It is, quite frankly, a dead end in terms of both skills and income, and the fact that jobs like this are increasingly dominant not only in the private sector *per se* but also in private sector provision of public services, must be a source of concern for future policy makers.

Inaccurate criticisms about static communities who lack the 'get up and go' to find new jobs do not reflect the very real barriers faced by low paid, low skilled workers in today's labour market in Wales. Job quality is just as important as the numbers of jobs on the vacancy list, and should be recognised as such. If pol-

icy makers do not take account of these issues with a view to effecting strategic change to support skills development and improve labour market opportunity, low pay and insecurity will increasingly become the norm as greater numbers of workers become isolated from the capacity to create their own modest levels of wealth.

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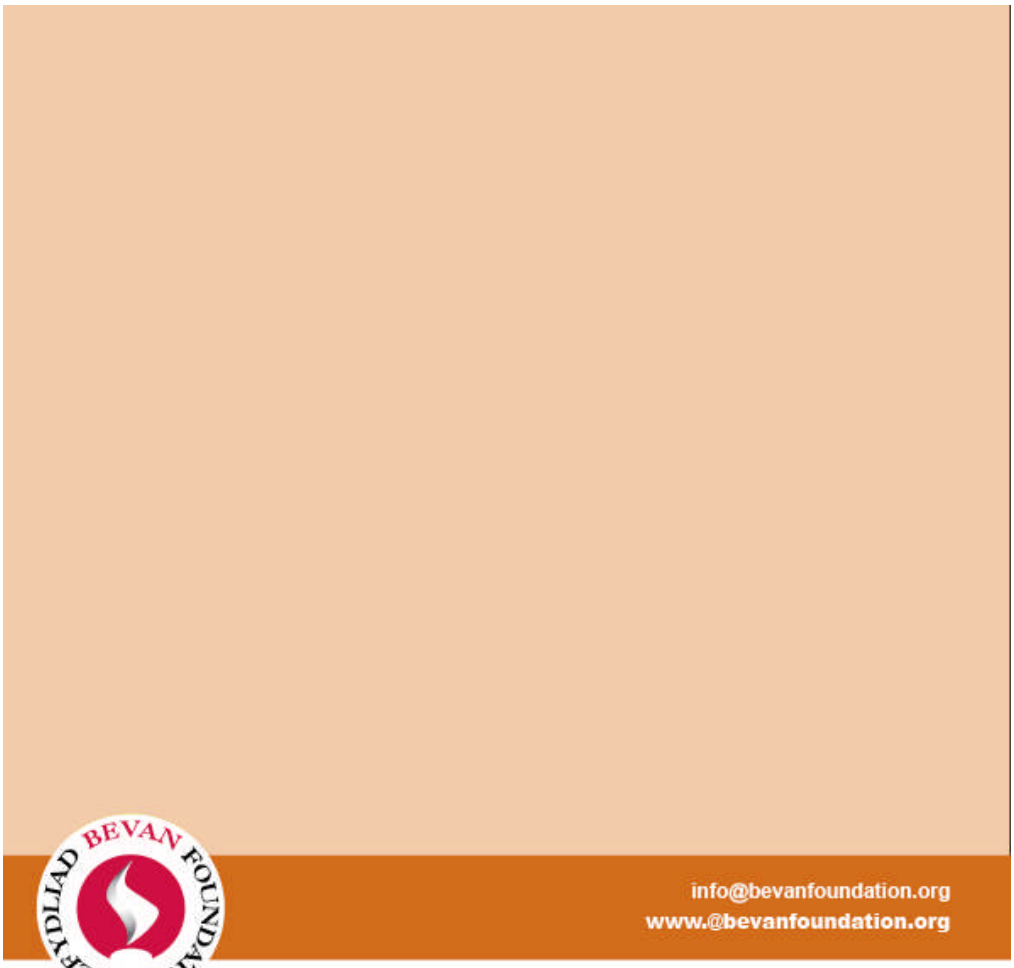

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