



# Changing Times News

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The Changing Times E-bulletin is the TUC's online news service on work-life balance issues. It is written by the [Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion](#) and edited by the TUC. Comments should be sent to [Nicola Smith](#). If you have stories that you would like us to include in this bulletin please email [Nicola](#) directly.

This is the penultimate edition of Changing Times News. We would like to thank our readers and contributors for all of their support for the newsletter. Ongoing news on the TUC's work on flexible working can be found on the [TUC website](#), and work life balance issues will continue to receive coverage in the TUC's union reps newsletter, which can be subscribed to [here](#).

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## Legislation and Regulation

### Responses to Queens Speech

The TUC has given its reaction to legislative proposals for this Parliamentary session, announced in the Queen's speech. General Secretary, Brendan Barber, said:

“We welcome today's measures to lay the foundations for a National Care Service for the elderly, although we are concerned about how best to fund this. We welcome the commitment to support the creation of green jobs in carbon capture storage.”

“It is good news for vulnerable workers that Agency Work Regulations giving agency workers equal treatment with permanent staff on pay and holidays after 12 weeks in a job, but there are important details to get right and they need to be in place before the end of this Parliament not put off until late 2011.”

“But the Deficit Reduction Bill is a mistake. The deficit is just one symptom of the financial crash. Reducing it will largely depend on getting the economy growing again, and if the recession deepens then the deficit will automatically widen whatever the law says. It is poor economics - and even worse politics - to single out the deficit in this way.”

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) also responded, and Director General Richard Lambert said:

“Although more must be done to close the gender pay gap, mandatory reporting is not the answer, and does not address the root causes of inequality. There must be better careers advice to help young women choose more financially

rewarding careers, as well as better advice on parental rights and improved state-funded childcare.”

The TUC believe that the Equality Bill is an important step forward in promoting equality and giving workers and unions the tools they need to tackle unfairness in the workplace. They would like to see the Government take bolder steps to close the pay gap, particularly in the private sector where it stands at over 20 per cent.

**European Commission takes legal action against Hungary on parental leave**

The Commission has sent a ‘reasoned opinion’ to Hungary for incorrectly implementing the Parental Leave Directive (96/34/EC). The directive aims to improve work-life balance and gives working men and women the right to parental leave on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child for at least three months.

The [Commission claims](#) that Hungarian national law fails to meet the Directive in three ways:

- in the armed forces, unpaid parental leave is only available after the end of the maternity leave
- national law does not protect workers against dismissal on the grounds of an application for parental leave
- national law does not give the right to return to the same job or equivalent job after taking parental leave.

**Families and Carers**

**Union calls for employment rights for specialist foster carers**

Children’s services union Aspect has called for a new employment deal for frontline childcare workers.

Aspect General Secretary, John Chowcat, said, “We welcome moves by the Children’s Workforce Development Council to recognise the professional status of specialist foster carers.

“In the broad spectrum of childcare, specialist foster carers provide vital support to the most challenging young people. However, to meet the

needs of these children and young people at risk it is necessary for these key workers to move from self-employed status and to be employed on permanent contracts with pay, pensions and conditions that reflect their specialist roles.”

**US government could save millions with better parental leave policies**

The US federal government could save \$50 million by adopting private sector paid leave benefits used by fortune 100 corporations, according to a report by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

“The government is splurging on turnover costs by skimping on paid leave benefits that most Fortune 100 companies use to keep their best employees loyal and avoid costly recruitment and retraining,” according to Kevin Miller, one of the authors of a report, ‘The need for paid parental leave for federal employees: adapting to a changing workforce’.

Most Fortune 100 companies offer paid maternity leave and one third also offer paid paternity leave, according to the report. The federal government, America’s largest employer, offers neither. The authors of the report argue lack of parental leave benefits costs the US government thousands of trained workers every year.

**Fathers work longer hours and take advantage of flexible working options**

Almost all male, full-time employees have made use of some form of flexible working option in the past year, according to a report published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The report, entitled ‘Father’s working hours: parental analysis from the third work-life balance employee survey and maternity and paternity rights and benefits survey of parents’, found that flexi-time and working from home were the most favoured options by fathers and men who were not fathers, with significantly greater use by fathers.

**Job satisfaction increases with family friendly policies**

Employees experience enhanced levels of job satisfaction when working in family friendly

environments, according to a [study](#) by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The report, ‘Family structure and work satisfaction: can work-life balance policies foster happiness in the workplace?’ suggests that both male and female employees with dependent children who work in family-friendly workplaces show higher levels of job satisfaction than those who do not.

**TUC welcomes extra childcare places for low earners**

Commenting on the government’s plans to provide free childcare places to low-income families, TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, said:

“More free childcare places for less well-off parents would help thousands of families send their children to nurseries and playgroups which they currently cannot afford. This support would help many low-paid workers who get little or nothing from the current system of childcare tax relief.

“But requiring parents to be means-tested before they can get a place would put many families off applying for places and the thousands who currently use childcare vouchers would find they could no longer afford them.

“It would be wrong to pay for the new free places by cutting the support for the vouchers. But tax relief is not a fair way to subsidise childcare and in the longer term the Government should be working towards offering free childcare places to everyone.”

**Returning to work after maternity leave remains difficult according to new survey**

Returning to work after maternity leave is still a hugely daunting and difficult experience for many mothers, according to survey published by the National Childbirth Trust.

One in three women (39 per cent) said they found going back to work after having a baby ‘difficult’ or ‘very difficult’, with 31 per cent saying their relationship with their boss had deteriorated since they had become pregnant. Despite a host of legislation and HR policies aimed at successfully welcoming mothers back

into the workplace, the survey suggests many are still not receiving the support they need.

The research involved over 1,500 mothers who have recently gone back to work, and found that one in three (32 per cent) felt their promotion prospects had been reduced since having a baby, while 13 per cent had reduced seniority since returning to work.

**Save the Children analyses public spending on children in the UK**

Save the Children has published a report that focuses on public expenditure on children and the extent to which it is directed towards the poorest. The report, ‘A child’s portion: an analysis of public expenditure on children in the UK’, aims to build on United Nations Committee recommendations that focus on the rights of the child, and suggest that more analysis of spending on children needs to take place.

The report focuses on key sectors of public spending for children, including early years services, education and personal social services.

**Lone parents given more help to move into work**

Lone parents with children aged ten and over will now be required to move off Income Support and onto Jobseeker’s Allowance if they are able to work, under government welfare reforms which came into effect on 26 October. When on Jobseeker’s Allowance, lone parents will be offered support and training packages through Jobcentre Plus, intended to enable them to move back into work. They will also receive advice on childcare and entitlements to benefits through the New Deal for Lone Parents initiative, which has already helped over 600,000 parents into work to date.

**Moving into work may not be guaranteed route out of poverty, says Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

Research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that moving into work does not guarantee a route out of poverty. The report, ‘Work and worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods’, highlights the belief that many

people in disadvantaged communities are trapped in a cycle of ‘poor work/no work’.

The study examines the experiences and perceptions of work among residents living in six deprived areas across the UK. Many respondents acknowledged the value in terms of increased self-esteem and reduced isolation, but they gained little financially. Poverty-level pay can mean those in employment have to work long hours, harming the quality of their family life. For those out of work, this can act as a disincentive to leave benefits, according to researchers.

**Unemployment creates new child poverty crisis, warns End Child Poverty**

The Campaign to End Child Poverty has reported that two million children now have no parents in work and the number of children who live in families relying solely on benefits has increased by 170,000 in 12 months.

Child poverty is growing in affluent areas as well as deprived areas. The report ‘Through thick and thin: tackling child poverty in hard times’, by Donald Hirsch, has found the number of children in families where no one is working is set to reach the highest number for a decade. End Child Poverty is calling on the government to implement a ‘recession recovery package’.

**Supporting disadvantaged parents in Scotland into employment**

The impact of the Scottish Government’s Working for Families Fund has been assessed in a research paper in the Local Economy Journal. The article, ‘Getting disadvantaged parents into employment: the Working for Families fund in Scotland’ investigates how the Fund differs from other national welfare to work programmes, such as New Deal for Lone Parents.

The ‘Working for Families Fund’ was established by the Scottish Government in 2004 and has offered support to families to help them move into or towards employment and training. By April 2008, the initiative had enrolled over 25,000 clients, 66 per cent of whom have achieved a successful employment outcome during the life of the programme.

**US lags behind other countries on worker benefits**

The US is behind other economically successful nations in adopting policies that support workers and families, according to a book published by Stanford University Press. Reported in the Medical News, the study finds that:

- Fourteen of the world’s 15 most competitive countries provide paid sick leave
- Thirteen of them guarantee paid leave for new mothers
- Twelve provide paid leave for new fathers
- Eleven provide paid leave to care for children’s health needs
- Eight provide paid leave to care for adult family members
- Seven guarantee breastfeeding breaks to nursing mothers on the job.

At the federal level, the United States offers its workers none of those supports.

‘Raising the global floor: dismantling the myth that we can’t afford good working conditions for everyone’ examines policies, protections and supports in 190 of the world’s 192 United Nations countries.

**Childcare funding must double to achieve high quality**

The Daycare Trust, the National Childcare Campaign, has published research which defines high quality childcare and sets out how much it will cost to fund its roll-out across England.

‘Quality costs: paying for high quality early childhood education and care’ is the culmination of a year-long research project in which the the Daycare Trust worked with the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Social Market Foundation to identify the necessary elements required for early childhood education and care to be of ‘high quality’, and to cost a high quality model for England.

**Carers welcome Government's change of heart on parents of disabled children**

Carers and children's charities have welcomed a statement by Lord McKenzie that the government has accepted an amendment to the Welfare Reform Bill exempting lone parents with children under the age of 16 on lower levels of Disabled Living Allowance (DLA) from having to engage in work-related or job-seeking activities, according to the Child Poverty Action Group.

While the previous proposals meant lone parents with children in receipt of middle or higher rate DLA were exempt from the requirement to engage in work-related activities or face benefit sanctions, lone parents with children on the lower rate of DLA were not.

**Impact of workfare reforms for lone parents in Norway**

A paper by the Institute for the Study of Labour analyses the consequences of a major Norwegian workfare reform of the previously generous welfare system for lone mothers. It finds that reforms led to a substantial decrease in disposable income and a significant increase in poverty among lone mothers, because a sizeable group was unable to offset the loss of out-of-work welfare benefits with gains in earnings.

**Evaluating new Parental Leave Regulations in Germany**

A discussion paper from the Institute for the Study of Labour has looked at the effectiveness of introducing parental leave regulations in order to counteract low and decreasing birth rates. In general, these regulations are aimed at making parenthood more attractive and more compatible with a working career, especially for women.

Using the example of Germany, which has introduced these changes, the paper compares outcomes for parents with children born shortly after and before the law came into effect on 1 January 2007. The study shows that the reform has been generally successful in attaining its objectives. In particular, it finds a significant decrease in the probability of mothers being in employment during the 12 months after giving birth.

**Balancing work and family is more difficult for parents of a child with special needs**

According to the US Government, families with special needs children spend an extra 10 hours a week co-ordinating their children's care, reports the Labour Project for Working Families in the US. Furthermore, almost 24 per cent of these families cope by drastically reducing work hours or by one parent stopping work altogether.

Parents of special needs children have a higher than average divorce rate and experience increased physical and financial stress. Many parents face disciplinary measures when their work suffers and about 25 per cent have been fired at least once from a job because of difficulties balancing caring and work.

**Workplace issues**

**Workers cannot take the sick leave they need**

According to Labour Family News in the US, although more than a third of all flu cases are transmitted in schools and the workplace, half of all workers are unable to take paid sick leave when they fall ill. Only one third of workers can take paid sick days to care for their sick child.

Recently, regulatory changes were proposed in the US to protect federal workers from the spread of communicable disease by expanding sick leave. Under the proposed changes, federal workers could use sick time to care for themselves or a family member because exposure to a communicable disease, whether or not they display symptoms.

**Productivity undermined by people coming to work with poor mental health**

Productivity across UK business is being significantly undermined by people coming to work with poor mental health as a result of stress and conditions such as anxiety and depression, a survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development reveals.

The survey of over 2,000 employees finds more than a quarter of UK workers describe their mental health as moderate or poor, with more than 90 per cent of those suffering from poor

mental health saying it affects their performance at work.

Although more than half (56 per cent) of employees with poor mental health say they have taken time off sick as a result, almost all (98 per cent) continue to attend work regularly.

The survey also highlights the need for employers to focus more efforts on managing this issue, as only a third (37 per cent) of workers say their organisation supports people with mental health problems well.

**Unite outraged as firm docks workers' wages for loo breaks**

Workers at a Lancashire meat firm are outraged about the company's toilet break policy, which says that their pay is cut every time they visit the loo, according to Unite the Union.

The union represents workers at Dunbia, a meat processing plant, where workers are being forced to take unpaid toilet breaks during work time. This means they must clock off to go to the toilet and then clock on again, after suffering a pay cut.

After unsuccessful union attempts the company is still refusing to hear a collective grievance, signed by over 100 union members at the site, to defend a basic human right, to use the toilet, which should be a right on paid work time.

**Pay push for social and community workers: ACTU backs major new test case**

Tens of thousands of low paid social and community services workers could receive pay rises of more than \$100 a week as a result of a landmark pay equity test case, launched by unions, according to the Australian Council of Trade Unions

The case will be the centre of a new push by Australian unions to reduce discrimination against women workers by lifting wages and creating better career opportunities across the workforce, but especially in the traditionally female-dominated caring professions.

The case will be run by the Australian Services Union with the backing of the ACTU, and aims to secure pay rises for workers in the female

dominated non-government social and community services sector.

**Forced moves to cut costs will be opposed, says PCS**

The government risks "playing politics with public sector workers' lives" in plans to move civil servants out of London and the south east, according to the Public and Commercial and Services Union (PCS).

While relocating public sector jobs can help regenerate less economically active regions of the UK, the union argues that PCS members have found it is often a 'thinly disguised attack on jobs, wages and services'.

PCS urges the government to consider carefully the disproportionately negative impact relocation has on black workers. According to PCS, previously the government has been reluctant to carry out its legal duty to assess the policy's impact on BME workers before any changes are made. The union states it has successfully challenged relocations on that basis.

**New guidance on preventing workplace harassment and violence launched**

Employers, unions and the government have come together to promote new guidance on preventing harassment and violence in the work place. The guidance follows a Europe-wide agreement between employer organisations and unions. It hopes to give practical advice and guidance to firms and their employees.

The guidance is supported by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). It is the first time Confederation of British Industry, Partnership of Public Employers and the Trades Union Congress have come together to develop guidance on how to tackle workplace violence and harassment.

**One in 10 employees affected by workplace bullying**

Employment relations service ACAS reports that workplace bullying is a persistent problem, affecting one in 10 employees, and can be damaging to both employees and business. As

well as the personal emotional distress that bullying in the workplace can cause, bullying can lead to employees taking more days off, lower productivity and can affect staff morale.

This year's anti-bullying campaign, which began on 16 November, and focused on 'cyber-bullying', could be a prompt to help employers identify and address bullying in the workplace, ACAS says.

**Nearly 22 million hours spent commuting in UK per day**

UK workers spend 21.8 million hours travelling to and from work every day, according to a TUC analysis of official statistics published in November.

Using the Labour Force Survey the TUC has calculated that workers spend on average 52.6 minutes commuting every day. Workers in London have the longest commute, followed by workers in the South East. Workers in Wales and the South West have the shortest journeys to work.

TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, said: 'UK staff experience a double whammy of working some of the longest hours in Europe and then spending nearly an hour every day getting to and from work.'

"All that wasted working time spent stuck on crowded trains and congested roads costs the economy over a quarter of a billion pounds every day, not to mention the stress it causes staff and the time it means they miss spending with friends and family."

**Low earners squeezed by recession**

Low earners are close to crisis as a result of the recession, and will continue to be exposed and vulnerable to job losses long after the country technically recovers, says the Resolution Foundation. The report, 'Closer to crisis? How low earners are coping during the recession', argues that low earners miss out because they are 'too rich' to qualify for state support and yet 'too poor' to access the benefits of private markets. Low earners typically earn around £15,800, are unlikely to have savings and very likely to have high levels of debt. The report considers what

more can be done to enable low earners to stay in work and in their homes and to help low earners to maintain their economic independence as the recession plays out.

**Wage rates still rising despite falling jobs**

Most workers do not appear to be subject to wage freezes in New Zealand, according to a recent labour cost index, which shows hourly wage rates are still rising in spite of the recession and falling job numbers, says the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions

Average total hourly earnings (including overtime) in the private sector increased 4.2 per cent for the year to September 2009 and 5.8 per cent in the public sector, or 4.9 per cent for all employees.

**Fewer hours worked and more part-time work in the EU27**

A release from Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, has revealed that in the year up to the second quarter of 2009, the average number of actual hours worked per week by those in full-time employment fell by 0.7 hours in the EU27 and by 0.8 hours in the euro area.

Between the second quarters of 2008 and 2009, the number of weekly working hours of a full-time worker went down in 24 out of the 27 member states. The largest falls were registered in Estonia, Austria, Slovakia and Finland, Germany and Sweden, Denmark and Slovenia.

**BALPA in talks with BMI**

BMI has announced its intention to cut 600 jobs – 129 pilots in BMI Mainline and 49 pilots in BMI Regional, according to British Airline Pilots Association.

Jim McAuslan, General Secretary of the Association, said: "We understand the company's situation. They have been hit by the downturn in the economy like other airlines. But we are going to work hard with the company to limit the number of compulsory redundancies. We have done this successfully in other airlines, using a number of imaginative options like early retirements and part time working."

**Employers lack guidance on improving the quality of jobs in UK**

Employers are committed to improving the quality of jobs in the UK but lack guidance about how to achieve it, according to a report from the Work Foundation. Far from seeing decent quality jobs and commercial or organisational success as conflicting objectives, the report, ‘Good Jobs’, shows that growing numbers of employers see both aims as mutually supporting goals. There is also a broad consensus about the characteristics which define ‘good jobs’.

**Half a million fewer workers earning overtime pay**

The number of people working paid overtime in the UK has fallen by nearly half a million in the last year to just under four million, a TUC analysis of official figures has revealed.

Official data shows that in summer 2009, 15.8 per cent of employees in the UK earned paid overtime, a fall of 1.5 percentage points since Summer 2008. Employees were working an average of six and a half hours paid overtime per week this year, a fall of 12 minutes on 2008.

The average amount of weekly overtime works out at £2,888 a year per employee. Workers across the UK earned a total of £10 billion in paid overtime, £1 billion less than last year.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: “These workers are the hidden victims of the recession. Job security remains the number one concern for workers across the country but the sharp drop in paid overtime shows that many people in work are also suffering financially. Even those that are still earning overtime are often no longer able to claim double pay.”

**Equality and discrimination**

**Pay gap narrowing but still unacceptably high**

In 2009 men’s median hourly earnings rose by 3.8 per cent to £12.50. In contrast, women’s rose by 4.3 per cent to £11.39, according to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. The gender pay gap has decreased by half a percentage point to 12.2 per cent. The gap in the

public sector has decreased by one percentage point (to 21 per cent), but in the private sector, inequality between men and women has worsened. Women in the private sector are now paid 28.8 per cent less than men.

In April 2009, median gross weekly earnings for full time employees increased by 2 per cent to £489. Median gross annual earnings for full time employees were £25,800 an increase of 2.6 per cent in comparison to the previous year. Managers and senior officials received the highest weekly earnings, while sales and customer service occupations earned just £256 per week on average.

Responding to the annual pay figures, TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, said:

“It’s encouraging to see the gender pay gap narrowing but it is still unacceptably high. The day when men and women are paid equally looks as distant as ever.

“Women moving into part-time work will be shocked to learn that the part-time gender pay gap is 35.2 per cent. Millions of highly skilled women are being forced to sacrifice decent wages and their careers to combine work and family life.

Ceri Goddard, Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society, said:

“While the slight narrowing of the gender pay gap is a cause for celebration, we cannot afford to become complacent. The rate of change over the past four decades has been glacially slow, and while some employers are taking positive action to root out pay inequality, most are not.

“That is why the government’s Equality Bill – set to increase transparency around pay – is so important. The bill is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to introduce measures preventing pay discrimination and enabling women to access justice when it occurs. The Equal Pay Act promised women equal pay with men nearly forty years ago. And while today’s figures show we are slightly closer to the day women are paid equally with men, it remains scandalously far in the future.”

**Women doctors: making a difference**

A report has been released by the Department of Health, ‘Women doctors: making a difference - report of the Chair of the National Working Group on Women in Medicine’.

The report notes that despite a large increase in the number of women entering medical school, there remains an under-representation of women in senior grades of the medical profession. While women account for between 44 and 59 per cent of the workforce at other grades, at consultant level they still account for only 28 per cent.

In August 2008, the Chief Medical Officer asked Baroness Ruth Deech to chair a national working group on women in medicine to consider the opportunities available to women working in the medical profession.

The working group met over the course of one year, and collected oral evidence from representatives of professional organisations. Its report considers the current situation, reviews existing work and recommends a programme of action to improve opportunities for women in medicine.

**Research shows lack of pro-age recruitment**

Age management research, undertaken jointly by the Institute for Employment Studies and the Policy Studies Institute, shows that many employers are nervous about discussing age-related issues with staff, for fear of causing offence or risking discrimination, especially as they near retirement. Only half of employers have a pro-age recruitment policy. However, the research also found that many employers are happy to let employees carry on in their roles beyond the normal retirement age of 65 and that many would also like to see compulsory retirement abolished. The research highlights older workers in sectors with skills shortages as being a valuable resource.

**Government Equalities Office report: working towards equality**

The Government Equalities Office has released a report outlining areas where further progress needs to be made in obtaining equality in the workplace, including widening access to

childcare and training, enabling more women to reach the boardroom and breaking down the assumption that real jobs cannot be done on a flexible basis.

The report, ‘Working towards equality: achieving equality for women and men at work’ builds on conclusions of the Women and Work Commission in July 2009. It marks the first step in producing a strategy for strengthening gender equality in the workplace. The Government Equalities Office is now engaging women, the business community, trade unions and other stakeholders on how best to take these issues forward.

**Over half of Europeans worry that recession means more age discrimination in labour market**

One in six Europeans reports they have personally experienced some form of discrimination over the past year, with 64 per cent of those surveyed worrying the recession will mean more people experience age-related discrimination in the workplace, according to an opinion survey released by the European Commission.

Although the levels of personal discrimination on a variety of grounds have remained largely unchanged over the past year, the survey finds that there has been a marked increase in the levels of discrimination that people are experiencing on the basis of age and disability. Increased discrimination may reflect rising unemployment amongst young people in European countries but could also reflect rising awareness among Europeans of these forms of discrimination.

**ETUC and Social Platform urge EU policy makers to take more effective action on equality**

At an Equality Summit organised by the Swedish Presidency in Stockholm, the European trade union movement and social non-governmental organisations presented a joint declaration to representatives of member states and EU institutions to combat discrimination in the EU.

The declaration, ‘Fight discrimination and guarantee equality for all’, was issued by the

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and Social Platform (the platform of European Social NGOs).

**Increasing diversity on boards**

The Government Equalities Office has published research from Cranfield School of Management on diversity on boards of directors in the public and private sectors. The project sought to address two main questions:

- Why are there so few women and other under-represented groups on public and private sector boards?
- What is being done in order to increase diversity on boards?

Part 1 of the report reviews the obstacles to boardroom diversity, while Part 2 maps out current practices aimed at increasing board diversity, both in the UK and internationally.

**Healthy workplaces**

**Valuing good health in New York: costs and benefits of paid sick days**

Policymakers across the US are increasingly interested in ensuring that workers have paid sick days, according to a report by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research. In addition to concerns about workers’ ability to respond to their own health needs, the report argues that there is growing recognition that, with so many dual earner and single-parent families, family members’ health needs can be addressed only by workers taking time from their scheduled work hours.

**Health and welfare of workers to be improved by £4 million fund**

Minister of State for Work and Pensions, Lord McKenzie, has announced that small businesses and local partnerships will be able to benefit from a share in a £4 million fund set aside to help improve the health and wellbeing of workers. Small and medium-sized businesses and local partnerships will be invited to bid for a share of the ‘Health, Work and Well-being Challenge Fund’, in the hope that improvements in the health and happiness of workers will be

achieved. Projects should aim to:

- reduce stress and improve other mental health conditions
- provide healthy activities
- ensure a work-life balance.

**US Council for International Business announces support for better work**

The US Council for International Business has announced support for ‘better work’ by five of the biggest US apparel companies: Gap Inc., Levi Strauss and Co., Nike, Walmart and the Walt Disney Company. This will contribute over \$1 million to better work through the council’s foundation, according to the International Labour Organisation.

The programme will use contributions to support the development of labour standards compliance assessment and training tools, benefiting the companies’ supplier factories, among others, the ILO reports.

**Society welcomes Government promise on NHS staff health**

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy has welcomed the Government’s pledge to implement an independent expert’s ‘groundbreaking’ proposals to improve the health and well-being of NHS staff.

Occupational health specialist and former GP, Dr Steve Boorman, published the final report of his review of the health and well-being of NHS employees last month. He called for all NHS staff to receive comprehensive, ‘proactive’ health and well-being services as part of initiatives to cut staff sickness and absence that could save the NHS up to £555 million a year.

**NICE argues flexible working reduces stress**

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has called on employers to institute flexible working to help reduce stress, anxiety and depression in the workplace, according to the Morning Star.

The Institute warned £28.3 billion a year was being lost through absences because of work-related mental illness.

Publishing the watchdog's guidance on the issue, Professor Mike Kelly said that the guidance "explains how employers can make simple changes that will improve the management of mental health in the workplace, including prevention and early identification of problems."

Unison's general secretary Dave Prentis said: "Employers could save millions and deliver a better service by digging into the underlying causes of stress and depression in their workplaces."

"While the recession inevitably takes a toll on public health, employers are burying their heads in the sand and failing to tackle workplace bullying, impossible workloads, long hours and insecurity, all of which can lead to anxiety and stress".