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**JOINT STUDY OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS  
“THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FLEXICURITY AND THE ROLE OF THE  
SOCIAL PARTNERS”**

**NATIONAL FICHE:**

# **United Kingdom**

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## Preface

This national fiche is part of the EU Social Partners’ Study “The implementation of flexicurity and the role of social partners” carried out in the context of the EU Social Dialogue Work Programme 2009-2011, which includes “*Jointly monitoring the implementation of the common principles of Flexicurity, notably in order to evaluate the role and involvement of the social partners in the process and to draw joint lessons*”.

To implement this task in the best possible way and to involve national member organisations actively in the gathering of data and information, the study applies a methodology that consists of multiple levels of analysis using a variety of instruments to be implemented with the help of a team of experts:<sup>1</sup>

- The expert team, with the advice of European Social Partners, agreed on a *set of selected statistical indicators* in the field of employment and economic and social development with labour market relevance.
- National social partners were asked to participate in a *questionnaire-based survey* focussing on the relevance of the flexicurity concept within national labour markets, the role of the social partners in policy implementation and their views of the flexicurity concept. To complement the research, the expert team visited a number of countries and carried out interviews with national social partners.<sup>2</sup>
- Based on the two sources above and a review of available written materials and information, the expert team prepared *29 national “fiches”* on the implementation of the flexicurity principles and the role of social partners in the respective national contexts.
- Results of the questionnaire survey and main findings of the national analyses were discussed at four “*country cluster seminars*” that were organised by the European Social Partners with the help of national sections in Warsaw (November 2010), Lisbon (December 2010), Paris (31<sup>st</sup> January-1<sup>st</sup> February 2011) and The Hague (8<sup>th</sup> February 2011).
- In the light of the overall study results and the comments received by national social partners in the contexts mentioned above, the expert team has prepared a *comparative synthesis report* on “*Social Partners and Flexicurity in Contemporary Labour Markets*” that was presented and discussed at a *EU-level synthesis seminar* on 31<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 in Brussels.

This national fiche aims to present a broad overview on the economic and social context and the state of play with regard to flexibility and security in the labour market and current social security arrangements (sections one and two). Secondly, the report describes the role of the social partners and social dialogue in the implementation of policies and practices that can be considered under the broad umbrella of “flexicurity” (section three), also summarising inputs provided by national social partners to the questionnaire, from interviews carried out and other contributions made in the context of the study. Section three also presents brief descriptions of cases of good practice as has been indicated by the national social partners.

The text was originally prepared as draft report in January 2011 in order to facilitate the discussion at the cluster seminar in The Hague on 8 February 2011. The original dossier has been reviewed and revised to take into account the comments and discussions that took place during the seminar and received afterwards.

However, it should be stressed that this report is presented as an “independent expert report”. It represents the views of the individuals involved in its preparation and does not purport to represent the views, either individually or collectively, of the social partners’ representatives that contributed to it, or those of the European level social partner organisations that were responsible for its commissioning.

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<sup>1</sup> Expert team: Eckhard Voss (coordinator), Alan Wild, Anna Kwiatkiewicz and Antonio Dornelas.

<sup>2</sup> The following countries were visited in the context of the project between May and July 2010: Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Portugal and the Netherlands.

# 1 The economic and social context

## Economic crisis and recovery

The UK, a major international trading economy and financial centre, is one of the five trillion dollar economies of Western Europe. Agriculture is intensive, highly mechanised, and efficient by European standards, producing about 60% of the country's food needs with less than 2% of the labour force. The UK has large coal, natural gas, and oil resources, but its oil and natural gas reserves are declining and the UK became a net importer of energy in 2005.

Services, particularly banking, insurance, and business services, account by far for the largest proportion of GDP and manufacturing industry continues to decline in importance. Since emerging from recession in 1992, Britain's economy enjoyed the longest period of expansion on national records and the country's growth outpaced most of Western Europe. In 2008, however, the global financial crisis hit the economy particularly hard, due to the importance of its financial sector. Sharply declining house prices, high consumer debt, and the global economic slowdown compounded the UK's economic problems, pushing the economy into recession in the latter half of 2008 and prompting the government to implement a number of measures to stimulate the economy and stabilise the financial markets, these included; nationalising parts of the banking system, cutting taxes, suspending public sector borrowing rules, and moving forward public spending on capital projects.

Public finances, weak before the economic slowdown, deteriorated markedly during 2009, as did employment. UK public finances have been hit by a combination of the severe economic downturn, its impact on previously tax-rich income and expenditure, the operation of automatic stabilisers and the fiscal stimulus packages. Restoring public finances is a key feature of the national economic policy of the new UK coalition government elected in 2010. After a significant stimulus in 2009, the government has initiated a fiscal consolidation in 2010 with the deficit expected to fall from 11.4% of GDP in 2009 to under 9% by 2011.

### UK - MAIN ECONOMIC INDICATORS AND OUTLOOK

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>GDP</b> – annual percentage change	2.7	-0.1	-5.0	1.8	2.2
<b>Employment</b> - annual percentage change	0.7	0.7	-1.6	-0.1	0.4
<b>Unemployment rate</b> (Eurostat definition)	5.3	5.6	7.6	7.8	7.9
<b>General government balance</b> (as percentage of GDP)	-2.7	-5.0	-11.4	-10.4	-8.6
<b>General government gross debt</b> (as percentage of GDP)	44.5	52.1	68.2	77.8	83.5

Source: European Commission: Autumn 2010 Economic Forecast.

Although the full year contraction of the UK economy in 2009 was 5%, it was estimated that it bottomed out in the third quarter of the year. Weakness in domestic demand was the principal driver of the UK recession and the contraction of the UK economy in 2009 by 5%. However, the economy in 2010 began to return to growth and in 2010 net external demand is predicted to return to making a positive contribution to the GDP. The strength of the spending recovery will be limited by what is predicted to be a negative average real earnings growth in 2010 and very limited job creation reflecting the marked fall in labour productivity that occurred in 2009.

## Labour market indicators and trends

Since mid 2009, the UK unemployment levels have remained stable at around 2.5 million persons or 8%. It should be noted however, that falling full-time employment was compensated by increases in the level of part-time working. Stemming rising inactivity and preserving full-time employment are important challenges for the UK economy going forward.

The UK labour market is described in figures in the summary tables below. The table illustrates similarities as well as difference of the UK in comparison to the EU27 average:

- The employment rate in the UK is higher than the EU average and is particularly high for older workers;
- The nature of employment is geared heavily towards service, with four out of every five people working in the service sector. The incidence of work in industry has declined substantially over recent years;
- Up until the financial crisis, the general level of unemployment was low with youth unemployment being around the EU average. During the crisis unemployment rose rapidly up to the level of the EU average;
- Long-term unemployment in the UK in 2009 was significantly below the EU27 average
- Income distribution inequality in the UK in 2008 was slightly above the EU27 average

### UNITED KINGDOM - MAIN LABOUR MARKET INDICATORS 2009 IN COMPARISON TO EU27

	UK	EU27
Employment rate – % population aged 15 – 64	69.9	64.6
Employment rate older people – % population aged 55-64	57.5	46.0
Self employed - % total population	13.7	15.5
Employment in services - % total employment	81.6	70.4
Employment in industry - % total employment	16.8	24.1
Employment in agriculture - % total employment	1.6	5.6
Unemployment rate - % labour force 15+	7.6	8.9
Youth unemployment rate - % labour force 15-24	19.1	19.6
Long term unemployment rate - % labour force	1.9	3.0
Inequalities of income distribution (2008)	5.6	5.0

Source: Eurostat, *Employment in Europe Report 2010*.

The figure below on the incidence of unemployment and long term unemployment shows the UK as a better than average performer in general, and in particular in long term, unemployment in European terms but a poorer performer than the US, Australia, New Zealand and Mexico.

**INCIDENCE OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 2007**



Source: *Employment in Europe Report*, p. 73, based on OECD figures.

**Flexicurity in the labour market and labour market policy**

The following table describes a series of specific flexicurity indicators that characterises the UK in comparison to the European average:

While the educational attainment indicator on the share of the population in working age having completed at least upper secondary education positions the UK very close to the EU average, the participation in lifelong learning activities is more than double of the EU average. However, it has to be noted here, that as reported elsewhere, the provision of training in the UK has dropped by around one third over the last six years. Against the background of the major role of on-the-job training in the UK the figures on CVT participation are rather modest – here, the UK is matching the EU average with a share of around one third of employees participating in CVT courses in 2005.

A further striking aspect is that the incidence of part time working in the UK is very high – in 2009 more than 26% of the workforce was employed on a part-time basis, compared to a European average of 18.8%.

In contrast to the high share of employees working part-time in the UK, the share of those who in 2004 (latest figures available) had access to flexible working time arrangements was only slightly higher than the EU average. Unlike many other states, there is not a significant difference between the strictness of employment legislation for temporary and permanent workers - both of which are low compared to the OECD.<sup>3</sup> However, a striking feature in comparison to the OECD average is the very low EPL strictness of temporary employment in the UK.

Finally and in regard to labour market policy, the comparison between the UK and the EU27 average shows that the UK government expenditure on ALMPs is low both for active measures and in particular, for passive measures where it is one quarter of the EU average.

<sup>3</sup> The OECD indicators of employment protection are synthetic indicators of the strictness of regulation on dismissals and the use of temporary contracts. For more information and full methodology, see [www.oecd.org/employment/protection](http://www.oecd.org/employment/protection).

UNITED KINGDOM - FLEXICURITY INDICATORS IN COMPARISON

	UK	EU27
Total population having completed at least upper secondary education population (aged 25-64, %), 2009	74.6	72.0
Part-time employment - % total employment, 2009	26.1	18.8
Fixed-term contracts - % total employees, 2009	5.7	13.5
Access to flexitime, % total employees aged 15-64, 2004	33.5	31.3
Percentage of employees (all enterprises) participating in CVT courses , 2005	33.0	33
Lifelong learning participation – percentage of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2009	20.1	9.3
Job satisfaction – percentage of workers that are either very satisfied or satisfied with working conditions in their main paid job (EWCS 2010)	92.6	84.3
Strictness of employment protection – regular employment, 2008	1.12	2.11*
Strictness of employment protection – temporary employment, 2008	0.29	2.08*
Strictness of employment protection – collective dismissals, 2008	2.88	2.96*
Public expenditure on <i>passive</i> labour market policies (categories 8-9) - % of GDP, 2008	0.20	0.96
Public expenditure on <i>active</i> labour market policies (categories 2-7) - % of GDP, 2008	0.05	0.46
Persons at-risk-of-poverty after social transfers - % of total population, %, 2009	17.3	16.3

Source: Eurostat; *Employment in Europe Report 2010*; Eurofound (*European Working Conditions Survey 2010*); OECD. \*OECD average

The UK government initiated a number of special measures to support the labour market during the downturn in the economy supported by the European Social Fund (2007-2013). The government announced that an additional £158m (£188m) of ESF money in England would be spent on providing additional skills and job search support to disadvantaged jobseekers and people facing redundancy. An enhanced Rapid Response System was implemented incorporating "Train to Gain".

The government has invested heavily in the Department for Work and Pensions to improve the effectiveness of the JobCentre Plus service. Over the years 2010 and 2011, £83m (£99m) is to be invested in funding 75,000 new training places, allowing those unemployed for more than six months to train whilst seeking a new job and to carry on studying when they start work.

The Future Jobs Fund worth around £1bn (£1.2bn) over two years will aim to support the creation of jobs for the long term unemployed and those facing labour market disadvantages. Two thirds of the jobs will be targeted at young people between the ages of 18 and 24 and who have been out of work for a year. The government is also seeking to create new jobs in hospitality, healthcare and low carbon industries. Finally, start up training and funding is offered to those moving into self-employment who has been unemployed for six months.

## 2 Flexibility and security in recent labour market and social policy reforms

In its 2009 report on the country's reform programme to support the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs<sup>4</sup>, the government describes a series of measures to help those who have lost, or those who are about to lose their jobs. It reports that these measures are consistent with the medium and longer term goals of increasing labour supply by reducing inactivity, removing obstacles to entering the labour market for disadvantaged groups, and raising skills levels in order to improve productivity. It specifically references these initiatives as "consistent with the principles of flexicurity". It has to be noted here, that the UK national social partners consulted in the context of this survey commented that the term 'flexicurity' is not a phrase or a concept that is used in the public domain at all.

However, policy measures that are related to flexibility and security in the labour market in the UK are described in some detail in the EIRO report on flexicurity and industrial relations, published in September 2009<sup>5</sup> and much of the desk research material below is taken from this analysis together with the questionnaire response from the Local Government Employers, a member of CEEP.

### Lifelong learning and mobility of workers

There is not a strong culture of adult learning in the UK and investment by employers and skills levels are both comparatively low according to the Leitch Review of Skills in England, 2005<sup>6</sup>. In England, 35% of employers (employing more than 25% of workers) do not provide any training at all for employees. Where training is provided, it is skewed towards higher skilled employees. There is no statutory requirement to provide training, although there is a proposal to introduce such a policy if training investment does not increase by 2010. This area has already seen a considerable increase in policy focus in recent years with, in addition to the Leitch Review, the formation of a Learning and Skills Council in 2001 and the provision of new rights to workplace learning representatives in 2003.

The Leitch Review attracted considerable interest and the government is likely to adopt many of its proposals. These proposals can be summarised as follows:

- Routing public funding of vocational skills through existing schemes like 'Train to Gain' and 'Learner Accounts';
- Strengthening the employer voice on skills through creation of a new Commission for Employment and Skills, increasing employer engagement and investment in skills, reforming Sector Skills Councils who will simplify and approve vocational training;
- Launching a new 'pledge' for employers to voluntarily train more employees at work. If insufficient progress has been made by 2010, introduce a statutory right for employees to access workplace training;
- Increasing employer investment in higher level qualifications, especially in apprenticeships and in degree and postgraduate levels;
- Raising people's aspirations and awareness of the value of skills, creating a new universal adult careers service to diagnose skill needs with a skills health check available for all;
- Compulsory education or workplace training up to age 18 following introduction of new Diplomas and expanded Apprenticeship route; and

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<sup>4</sup> HM Government Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth: UK national reform programme 2009

<sup>5</sup> Flexicurity and Industrial Relations EIRO 30.9.2008  
[http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0803038s/tn0803038s\\_4.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0803038s/tn0803038s_4.htm)

<sup>6</sup> HM Government, *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, July 2007.

- Integrating the public employment & skills services to deliver sustainable employment, enabling more disadvantaged people to gain skills and find work, developing employer-led Employment and Skills Boards.

The involvement of trade unions in delivering the UK ‘learning agenda’ has been substantial. UnionLearn has a turnover of over £ 21m (€25m) and is entirely managed by the unions. It is responsible for the £12.5m (€15m) annual budget of the Union Learning Fund. It has two key objectives: training 22,000 workplace Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) by 2010, and giving around 250,000 learners access to training annually. As well as these objectives it runs and accredits training programmes for unions, and other initiatives to build skills training capacity.

Employer involvement in skills training is voluntary. The country's 25 Sector Skills Councils (SSC) are employer-led, independent bodies which promote skills training in particular sectors and cover around 89% of the UK workforce. They take a strategic overview of existing and future skill requirements in sectors and plan for any necessary changes. The Leitch Review plans a considerably enhanced role for SSCs.

As highlighted in a response received to the questionnaire survey from the UK CEEP member, Local Government Employers, there is also a sector skills council for lifelong learning ([www.lluk.org](http://www.lluk.org)), which along with a number of other national agencies (including our own) are able to provide a broad picture of skill shortages and therefore promote targeted lifelong learning.

### Internal/external flexicurity and contractual arrangements

According to the Eurofound study on flexicurity and industrial relations, “*The UK has one of the most flexible and lightly regulated labour markets in the EU*”<sup>7</sup> Though, as arising from implementing EU legislation there is a relatively large amount of employment protection for individual workers, hiring and firing is comparative ease, in particular if it concerns employees with less than a year of service.

However, contract security is guaranteed in cases of job loss through redundancy or if a dismissal is found to be unfair. Employers have statutory duties to consult in the case of redundancy: Individually (in the case of all redundancies), and collectively (in the case of 20 or more redundancies). Collective consultation can be with any employee representative. Further to an ECJ decision, notice cannot be issued until completion of the consultation period. Against this, many employers in the UK today believe that redundancy procedures are not relatively highly regulated and take long periods to complete. The legal minimum compensation for redundancy is on a sliding scale taking account of age, length of service and weekly pay. Employers may pay more than the statutory minima, either if they wish or through negotiation with employee representatives and more than a half of employers’ report that they do.

Employees with at least one year of service have a statutory protection against unfair dismissal. The issue of unfair dismissal at the beginning of 2011 was the issue of an initiative of the conservative-liberal coalition government which in January announced a proposal to increase the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims from one to two years. By barring workers from being able to take action against unfair dismissal claims against their employers for the first two years, the coalition government follows a route of labour law reform that has been described by the prime minister as making sure “*that employment law will not long be seen as a barrier to growth*”.<sup>8</sup> The initiative which in May 2011 was under formal consultation is a part of a broader reform package targeting the employment tribunal system that according to the government is “*costly and time-consuming*”.

<sup>7</sup> Eurofound 2008: Flexicurity and Industrial Relations, Dublin, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> See Guardian, 27.1.2011: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/jan/27/vince-cable-proposals-reform-employment-tribunals?INTCMP=SRCH>

Regarding internal flexibility, as illustrated above, the incidence of part time working is very high and around one third of employees have access to flexible working time. Internal flexibility is regulated by individual contract or through negotiation with employee representatives. There are some legal restrictions on flexibility where the changes required are not accepted by workers and were they would be a breach of contract.

### Active labour market policies

The dominant theme guiding UK labour market policy is to encourage labour-market participation. Job seekers must be available and actively looking for full-time work in order to receive Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), though carers, sick people and lone parents are able to claim other benefits.

Alternatives to work are acceptable under certain limited circumstances. These can include education/training, voluntary work or environmental work for fixed periods. Contribution-based JSA depends on National Insurance Contributions (NICs); income-based JSA applies if individuals have not paid enough NICs (or only paid contributions for self-employment) and are on a low income. The maximum weekly benefit rates are low and benefits are reduced if recipients have savings over £ 6,000 (€7,100), and if there are savings over £16,000 (€19,000) then individuals are likely to receive nothing regardless of previous contributions. JSA is not available to those who left their previous job voluntarily and penalties can be applied if applicants turn down work ‘without good reason’.

The level of assistance in seeking work increases as the length of time unemployed increases and after a set period of time specific groups are tracked into different ‘New Deal’ programmes. The programmes aim to provide individualised return to work support (job search assistance, training, subsidised employment and work placements) which failure to participate leads to benefits sanctions. There is therefore an element of compulsion in the UK system.

Employers are encouraged to sign Local Employment Partnerships which provide access to appropriate workers in exchange for providing assistance to unemployed workers (interview practice, mentoring, Work Trials, etc.), but the take up is not high. Eligible employers can take unemployed workers on a 15 day Work Trial period without cost to them and with no obligations on either side.

As the UK Local Government Employers commented in the response to the questionnaire survey, local authorities have developed their own initiatives of active labour market policy:

“Local Authorities also make their own commitments to supporting “Local Employment Partnerships” which for example state that a percentage of jobs will be filled by those furthest from the labour market via the national Public Employment Services. Employers may also commit to a number of initiatives supporting employees with skill development and opportunities to gain experience such as work placements (either paid or unpaid)” (Local Government UK)

Finally, tax credits are also an important part of active labour market policy. Essentially these are intended to remove disincentives to work by focusing tax credits at working families and those on low pay. This has been subject to considerable criticism for being a complex, bureaucratic and slow system, but is defended on the basis that it targets tax credit at very specific groups.

### Supportive social security systems

The guiding policy underpinning access to social security across the UK is one of ‘mutual obligations’ or ‘rights and responsibilities’, in placing a priority on paid work and are integrated into the active labour market policies described above. Currently, worklessness is a primary feature of inactivity, rather than unemployment, and increasing attention is being paid to those on sick leave or receiving disability benefits. Some 2.7 million people of working age currently receive Incapacity Benefit and the

Department for Work and Pensions claims that 700,000 of these would like to be in work. To address this, a “Pathways to Work” programme was established in 2008 to facilitate those claiming Incapacity Benefit moving into paid employment. In practice, this focuses on implementing disability discrimination legislation, interviewing claimants about their options for returning to work, rehabilitation advice, in-work support, and financial credit for returning to work. It should be noted there that the Conservative-Liberal Government that took office in May 2010 has announced to not continue the programme and give way to the introduction of a single “Welfare to Work” scheme.<sup>9</sup>

## High quality and productive workplaces

The national "Investor in People" scheme certifies enterprises against a benchmark associated with good human resource practices and high productivity workplaces<sup>10</sup>. “Investors in People” has grown to be the UK’s leading people management business improvement standard by delivering improved performance to thousands of organisations. Currently almost seven million employees in over 35,000 organisations have achieved Investors in People recognition and 3,000 of these have been recognised for ten or more years

## Gender equality

In the UK, employees who believe they have been discriminated against on the grounds of gender can seek redress in Employment Tribunals. There is no cap on the compensation which can be paid for acts of discrimination. In regard to combining work and family life, over the past decade, individual rights to flexible working have increased. Parents with young children (or older children if they are disabled) have the right to request flexible working. More recently, this right has been extended to carers of adults. Maternity and adoption pay also have been improved. Today, employees are entitled to paternity paid leave in cases that they have worked for at least 26 weeks up to and into the 15<sup>th</sup> week before the date of the baby’s due or the adoption agency told the adopter they had been matched with a child. Under the Ordinary Statutory Paternity Pay scheme, the employee is entitled to receive a weekly payment of either £128.73 or – if this is lower - 90 per cent of their average weekly earnings. Above that, trade unions and employees generally seek to improve entitlements at workplace and company level.

The UK local government employers’ organisation highlighted the following aspects in its reply to the questionnaire survey:

“Some local authorities have also included wider equalities principles within the scope of social clauses in procurement contracts. Gender equality is further promoted through the Equality Framework for Local Government, and there has been much work completed in terms of ensuring equal pay in the sector.” (Local Government UK)

## Financial sustainability

An important economic policy priority for the UK government is securing the affordability of public finances. As with other countries, the need to control public spending may lead to changes in benefits, services and a transfer of the burden of payment for services toward workers and employers.

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://network.civilservice.gov.uk/pg/pages/view/295278/>

<sup>10</sup> [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk)

### 3 The role of social partners

In the UK, the main divergences between the social partners relate to the field of contractual arrangements. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has made a strong case that the current labour market regulation does not sufficiently protect workers. On the other hand, employers firmly reject any labour market regulation and maintain that the UK model can in fact be regarded as 'flexicurity in action'<sup>11</sup> – thereby echoing the model of 'flexicurity through the market'. This also explains why the term 'flexicurity' is not one in common in the UK public debate on labour market policy reform.

By and large, UK employers are wary and very vocal in their opposition to any aspects of flexicurity that might lead to stronger labour market regulation. Prescriptions for progress towards a 'fully-fledged' flexicurity approach rest on whether it is accepted that the UK represents a model of flexicurity, albeit a different model to others found in Europe.

Most initiatives in the UK which follow and/or address certain aspects or principles of flexicurity, with the exception of "UnionLearn" (see below) are government led, and the engagement and involvement of social partners is through the routine processes of policy consultation. Typically, there is a twelve week consultation process during which time anyone can submit responses to a series of consultation questions. Individual unions, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and relevant employer representative bodies, present their views which are summarised and publicly reported. Skills training and lifelong learning are of particular significance and relevance to both employers and unions. Trade unions are particularly concerned at labour market flexibilisation and that flexicurity may be interpreted in this way within the UK context. Employers are particularly interested in deferring any further labour market regulation which, they feel, would harm the competitiveness of the UK economy.

An exceptional policy field that is characterised by a high degree of joint interest between employers and trade unions however is the field of qualification, skills and lifelong learning. Against the shortcomings of the UK system of vocational education and training, a number of joint initiatives have been developed here in recent years.

A particularly interesting independent social partner initiative in the UK is "UnionLearn". The mission of the organisation is - *"We will transform workers life chances through lifelong learning"*

*UnionLearn* aims to:

- Help unions to become learning organisations, with programmes for union representatives, regional officers and strategic support for national officers;
- Help unions to broker learning opportunities for their members, running phone and online advice services, securing the best courses to meet learners' needs and kitemarking union academy provision to a quality standard;
- Research union priorities on learning and skills, identify and share good practice, promote learning agreements, support union members on learning and skills bodies, and help shape sector skills agreements.

By 2010, *UnionLearn* aims to have 22,000 union learning representatives in place with 250,000 learners going through union-organised training.

Flexicurity arrangements may be bargained at the enterprise level between companies and trade unions. As there is no obligation to register collective agreements the monitoring of their content is difficult. According to the Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004, bargaining over training occurred in

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<sup>11</sup> See Eurofound 2008: Flexicurity and Industrial Relations, Dublin, p. 18.

only 9% of workplaces with a recognised union, though this has increased from 3% in 1998. In 55% of unionised workplaces, unions are informed or consulted about training, leaving 36% where training is decided unilaterally by management. In workplaces with non-union representation, 2% negotiate on training, 84% inform or consult, and only 14% impose unilaterally (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

Significantly there have been a number of examples of innovative approaches to supporting redundant workers during politically sensitive restructuring (particularly around training provision where large numbers of redundancies are announced in one area), but again, these are not the norm in UK employment relations.

## 4 Key points arising

From the point of view of the author of this report the following key points are arising in regard to flexicurity in the United Kingdom:

- *Though the government has referred in the context of EU reporting to the concept, the term ‘flexicurity’ so far has not been common to the domain of public policy debate and discussions on labour market reforms in the UK.*
- *However, the employers and trade unions engage in collective bargaining over matters of job security and flexibility but this is not carried out within a conscious concept of ‘flexicurity’.*
- *In the context of the current economic and financial crisis situation but also resulting from the change of government in the UK in May 2010 many previous initiatives as well as labour law regulations (e.g. employment tribunal law) are currently under reconsideration following the notion of “eliminating red tape” and labour law regulations that are regarded as barriers to growth. It will be interesting to analyse the effects of these reform initiatives on the balance between flexibility and security in the UK labour market in more depth in the future.*

## Sources and references

### Replies to the questionnaire survey, interviews and other contributions

A questionnaire reply to the survey was delivered by the CEEP national member in the UK, the Local Government Employers. Furthermore, a written comment to the first draft of this national dossier was received from Local Government UK that contributed to the revision of the draft report.

### Further resources

Flexicurity and Industrial Relations EIRO 30.9.2008

[http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0803038s/tn0803038s\\_4.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0803038s/tn0803038s_4.htm)

Flexicurity and Industrial relations EIRO 5.9.2009

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