

No Returns: a new direction to tackle insecurity in retail following COVID-19

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Responsibility for the accuracy of any of the information contained within this briefing belongs to the authors.

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Introduction

The retail sector is the largest source of private sector employment in the UK, with 2.8 million workers employed as of 2020. It plays a key role in the national economy, and is a crucial source of employment in many local places across the country.

But as a result of long-term trends driving changes in demand and consumption behaviours, as well as the seismic shifts now taking place as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, hundreds of thousands of employees in the sector face an increasingly insecure working life, characterised by low pay, temporary contracts, irregular hours and limited opportunities for career progression.

As the analysis in this paper demonstrates, it is highly likely that the sector will employ fewer people in the future than it does today, in jobs that look quite different to those that have traditionally been associated with retail businesses.

This presents a dual challenge for Government and the sector that must be tackled proactively now. On the one hand, it is vital that the necessary support measures are put in place for retail workers facing acute insecurity as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, longer term interventions are required to help retail workers transition into new roles in the future, whether within retail or in different sectors altogether.

An overview of the retail sector

The retail sector encompasses a wide range of businesses and activities, from high street shops, markets and stalls to online platforms selling a host of goods and services. It is also home to a diverse range of jobs, from managerial and executive posts to customer facing and logistical roles. Unsurprisingly given its scale, the retail workforce includes both people looking for part time, short-term, or flexible opportunities to work, as well as others who plan on building a career in the sector for most of their working lives.

Yet despite retail playing such a significant economic role locally and nationally, for several years *the sector has been in contraction from an employment perspective*. In 2016 the British Retail Consortium estimated that there could be up to 900,000 fewer jobs in retail by 2025.¹ This prediction has since been borne out: in 2019 alone, 57,000 retail jobs disappeared, and store growth had hit its lowest point since 2016.² Because of this, last year was widely described as the sector's "worst year on record," but within the first three weeks of 2020, a further 9,940 jobs were lost within the sector³, and retail job adverts were down by 14% year-on-year.⁴ Many of these jobs have been lost from UK high streets.⁵

A snapshot of the retail workforce⁶

- There are roughly 2.8 million workers in the UK retail sector.
- There is a higher proportion of women working in the sector - 58% women compared with 42% men.
- Median hourly pay in retail is £8.75, which is £3.41 lower than the UK average.
- A large portion of retail workers are on part-time contracts (48% compared with 27% on average).
- About 14% of retail workers wanted more hours at the same rate of pay compared with 8% in the wider workforce.
- Full time students make up 9.8% of workers in retail compared with 3.5% on average in the wider workforce.

This contraction is in large part the result of a series of long-term, interrelated trends, themselves driven by fierce competition between businesses in the sector. They range from the adoption of new technologies and the decline of traditional high street models of retail, to the rise of online sales and the importance of rapid distribution infrastructure and networks.

For example, as a result of the rise of e-commerce and the adoption of scan-and-go apps and self-checkout machines in stores, customer interaction with businesses has changed in ways that displace some workers, such as cashiers, sales assistants and customer service roles.

Further recent examples can be seen with Amazon Go, a supermarket without checkouts now open in west London⁷, and internet electronics retailer AO, adopting AI to enhance their online customer service⁸.

New kinds of retail related jobs are being created, but worker insecurity is rising

The rise of online sales together with the decline of traditional high street models of retail mean we have seen a significant shift away from customer facing jobs in shops, to roles in logistics to support rapid shipping of goods. This means that when we look at the range of workers now involved in the wider network of businesses facilitating retail, while there are fewer workers employed on shop floors, an increasing number work in distribution centres, warehouses and driving delivery vans.

This has significant implications for the quality of jobs on offer in the sector, where those jobs are located, and who within the labour market are able to access them. For example, the majority of jobs lost in retail over the last decade tended to be occupied by women,⁹ and newer roles are more likely to have been taken by men. Contracts without guaranteed hours and gig economy work are more common in these newer roles.¹⁰

More recently, significant parts of the sector have been particularly badly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, with public health restrictions meaning huge numbers of retail businesses have been unable to operate in recent months. Early evidence suggests the trends and developments

described above are being further accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, with more consumers looking to online platforms for their goods and services.

All of these factors mean that an ever-increasing number of retail workers face insecurity in their working lives, and not just as a result of the threat of their job disappearing due to the COVID-19 crisis. Insecure work, characterised by low pay, temporary contracts, having irregular hours and limited opportunities for career progression, has long been common in parts of the retail sector.

Job insecurity in the retail sector

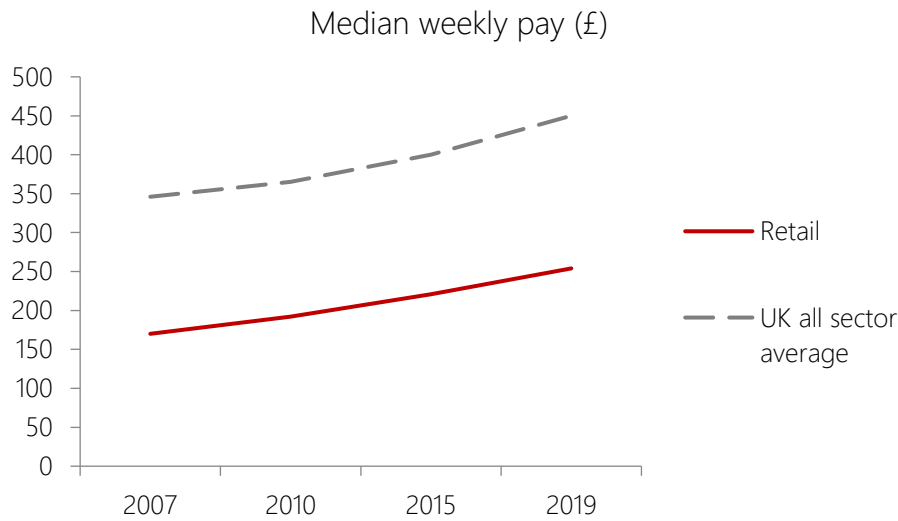
While the kinds of trends and developments described in the previous section may have led to increased profits for the businesses best able to harness them, as well as an improved customer experience for many consumers, they have posed significant challenges for many working in the sector. Pressures to cut costs have heightened for retailers over recent years, which has led to a reduction in job quality within organisations driven by price competition¹¹. Although it's important to recognise that the experiences and career aspirations of workers across the sector vary, retail has become increasingly characterised by high levels of job insecurity, with many workers finding themselves stuck in low paid roles, with unpredictable or insufficient hours, and without access to job progression or a range of employment protections.

A prevalence of low paid work

Our analysis found that average pay in retail is much lower than in other sectors, with one in three workers paid the minimum wage.¹² The median hourly wage in retail is £8.75, which is £3.41 lower than the UK hourly median, equating to a difference of £196 in median weekly earnings.¹³ While part-time work is usually lower paid, this is not the sole factor behind this pay gap, which remains at £135 per week when comparing full time workers in retail with the average across sectors.

Despite increases over recent years, the National Minimum wage is not sufficient to meet essential living costs, which have spiralled over recent years.¹⁴ Having low wages can make it difficult to cover monthly expenses and bills, with a greater proportion of retail workers relying on social security to meet their living costs than workers in other sectors. Our analysis found that 23% of retail workers are receiving a welfare benefit, three percentage points higher than the workforce average.¹⁵ As a result, retail workers are more vulnerable to a sudden loss of income through job loss or a reduction in hours.

Figure 1: Median weekly pay 2007 - 2019



Source: Work Foundation analysis of the ONS Labour Force Survey April - June 2007, 2010, 2015 and 2019

Wage growth in the retail sector since 2016 has largely been driven by increases to the National Living Wage.¹⁶ Yet evidence suggests that *in some cases, increases in pay within the sector have been offered in conjunction with changes to terms and conditions*, including the potential removal of elements of premium pay or non-pay benefits.¹⁷

This financial insecurity impacts retail workers' wider wellbeing. A survey conducted in 2018 with over 10,000 retail staff revealed that more than three quarters had been forced into a cycle of debt to make ends meet, and two thirds reported their mental health had been affected by financial worries.¹⁸

Part time and temporary contracts

Part-time contracts are very common in retail, with 48.5% of the sector working part time, compared to only 26.5% across the UK.¹⁹ In addition, a quarter of retail workers (24.8%) work variable hours, causing fluctuations in earnings and potentially presenting challenges in balancing work with childcare. This has likely been influenced by changes in regulatory requirements, allowing retailers to shift the structure of employment towards part-time roles or those with flexible hours or zero hours contracts to keep staffing costs down.²⁰

It is however important to note that many retail workers actively choose to work part-time. For example, our analysis found that 56% of part-time retail workers sought a shorter working week because they don't want a full-time job, and a further 23.6% of those working part-time are balancing work in retail with education. Crucially, 87.1% of women aged over 25 in retail wouldn't want to increase their working hours if given the option, and this group comprises 40% of the workforce²¹. Clearly, retail remains a source of part-time work for those balancing their jobs with other responsibilities.

However, our analysis found that 16% of part-time retail workers were working part-time because they could not find full-time employment, and 23.3% of part-time retail workers want more hours than they currently have, compared to just 16.9% for the whole workforce²².

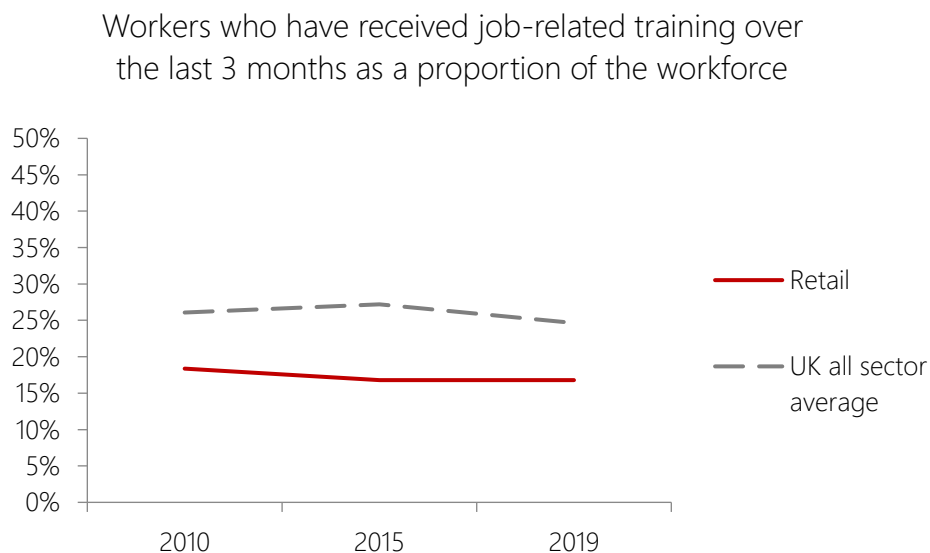
Limited opportunities for professional development

Career progression is an essential route out of low paid and insecure work, but few workers in retail have opportunities to develop new skills and earn a more stable, higher wage. For example, just 5.5% of workers had spent any time in training over the previous four weeks, and *only 16.8% of retail workers have received job related training within the last three months, (18.3% of full-time workers and 13.9% of part-time workers), compared to 24.6% across the UK workforce as a whole.*²³

The British Retail Consortium has highlighted that high levels of turnover within the sector mean many employers limit their learning and development offer to basic induction and health and safety training.²⁴ This was reflected through our analysis, which found that workers who been in the industry for longer are less likely to have had recent access to training: 20.3% of workers who had been in their role for 3-6 months had recently taken part in training, falling to just 14.3% of those who had been in the industry for five to ten years²⁵.

As the retail sector continues to experience job losses and shifts in the kinds of roles being created, progression routes and training offered need to support workers to gain transferable skills to adapt to retail work of the future.

Figure 2: Percentage of workers who received job-related training in previous 3 months



Source: Work Foundation analysis of the ONS Labour Force Survey, April-June quarter, 2010, 2015 and 2019.

Managerial pay increases are low

In much of the retail sector, the pay differential between more junior roles and managers doesn't properly reflect the additional responsibilities managers hold. Our analysis found that hourly pay for *managers in retail was only £3 more than pay for entry level roles. Crucially, this is £6 less than the £9 average hourly differential for managers across all sectors.* This leads to the prospect of promotion being disincentivised within retail.

It also appears that working part-time has implications for career progression to managerial levels for some retail workers, particularly at store level. This can be caused by the HR policies and managerial structure of larger retail organisations – exemplified by the five main supermarket chains, which require trainee managers to work varied shift patterns and to spend periods working at other stores across a particular region. Most senior staff in the sector do not work part-time, reinforcing the perception that moving into store management requires full-time working.²⁶

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on retail workers

Since COVID-19 sent the UK into lockdown, *estimates regarding reductions in the retail workforce have worsened*. Retail accounted for the largest number of workers furloughed through the crisis (1.9 million, or 42% of retail workers as of August 2020²⁷), while McKinsey estimates that 22% of all jobs at risk following the crisis are in retail and wholesale (approximately 1.7 million jobs).²⁸

Perhaps most importantly, early evidence suggests that the COVID-19 crisis is accelerating the longer-term trends that have been re-shaping the sector, which is highly likely to lead to heightened job insecurity for large numbers of retail workers over the months and years to come.

When national lockdown occurred in March 2020, *online sales shot up to over 30% of all sales* (See Figure 3).²⁹

Figure 3 Average Weekly Online Retail Sales in Great Britain June 2017-June 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Monthly Business Survey – Retail Sales Inquiry. Great Britain.³⁰

This growth, if sustained, could signal even greater upheaval in the retail sector, as more businesses might begin to invest further in their e-commerce, logistics and delivery branches. Logistics giant Hermes have already announced plans to create 10,000 new UK jobs following their online sales boom in 2020³¹ and Tesco are running a recruitment drive to support online grocery sales and deliveries.³²

Likewise, *early indications suggest that the decline of the high street is being rapidly accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis*. All retail spaces saw increases in vacancy rates over the 2nd quarter of 2020, when lockdown was in effect.³³ While supermarkets experienced a boost in sales through the lockdown, not all food retailers prospered, with high street and town centre supermarkets seeing a decrease of 4 percentage points compared the same period last year.³⁴

Sales within non-food retail, largely considered 'non-essential', were down by 41.7% during the lockdown period.³⁵ To an extent, this was a mechanism of the lockdown measures; sales reduced because stores were closed. It also reflected a reluctance amongst consumers to spend, given the uncertainties facing the wider economy³⁶ – concerns which may persist for many months to come as the UK comes to leave the European Union.

While headline figures suggest retail sales have largely recovered overall since the lockdown period ended,ⁱ the extent to which consumer spending will return to pre-crisis levels over the longer term is entirely dependent on how the public health crisis is managed over the coming months. With social distancing and other public health measures likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future, many consumers may continue to spend more online than they did in the past. And continued remote working, together with limits on social gatherings, events and nightlife could all impact both how we shop and what we buy over the medium to longer term.

The introduction of measures to reduce the risk of infection, including more frequent store/warehouse cleaning, using protective equipment and enabling physical distancing has also had significant resource implications for retail businesses. One prominent footwear brand estimated the cost of drawing up the required new health and safety procedures at £75,000 per store to implement this year.³⁷ Unfortunately, these measures may not be sufficient to assuage consumer concerns. Only 50% of UK consumers reported they felt safe going into a store in June (although this was an improvement of 20% from mid-April).³⁸ If consumer confidence remains unsteady over the coming months, parts of the in-store retail sector may struggle to recover.

For many working in retail, from warehouses to customer support and in-store roles, easing of lockdown restrictions has meant working away from their home on site during periods of high risk of infection through frequent contact with colleagues and customers with varied access to PPE. In this context, those workers needing to shield or care for vulnerable people who cannot come in could face a loss of income.

In addition, many working part-time in lower paid roles aren't eligible for sick pay if they aren't well or are required to self-isolate to limit infection risk. Our estimates suggest that more than 400,000 retail workers are earning less than the threshold to qualify for Statutory Sick Pay. Looking at workers in routine or semi-routine roles in retail, we estimate that 19.1% of women and 10.9% of men could be ineligible for any pay when off sick or self-isolating³⁹. This is also concerning for the management of the public health crisis. Early research has found workers who aren't eligible for sick pay were more likely to continue working away from home while experiencing cold-like symptoms than those who had access to some form of support.⁴⁰

ⁱ Retail sales were 3% higher in July than pre-pandemic levels in February

Taken together, these factors have already led to speculation that the retail sector as we know it will not recover post the COVID-19 crisis. Perhaps with such fears in mind, some large retailers have already announced that they are exploring how they might repurpose retail space for use as affordable housing within city centres in the future.^{41,42}

Such a shift would clearly present enormous implications for city centre labour markets and leave many retail workers facing the prospect of unemployment.

Who will be most impacted by heightened insecurity in the retail sector in the future?

Although the scale of the challenges and shifts facing the retail industry mean that almost all workers in the sector will be impacted in some way, there are particular groups of workers who are likely to be at greatest risk of heightened insecurity and least able to cope with its effects.

Workers with limited access to protections and entitlements

We estimate that a third of those currently working in retail wouldn't qualify for any redundancy pay if they lost their job. Eligibility for redundancy pay is limited to those who have been working with their employer for two years or more. Overall staff turnover is high in retail and temporary work and seasonal work are more common, meaning that large numbers of workers would have no pay to fall back on if they were to lose their job.

Our analysis also found that more than 128,000 retail workers are currently on temporary contracts, and the proportion of workers on temporary contracts within the sector increased from 3.3% in 2019 to 5.2% in 2020⁴³. Across the economy, temporary work had been reducing before the last recession, and has since started to increase as a proportion of all employment.⁴⁴ People working on temporary contracts are more likely to be categorised as workers than employees, meaning they aren't entitled to a minimum notice period or protected from unfair dismissal.⁴⁵ As a result, temporary workers in retail will be at acute risk of changes to their working hours or losing their job altogether as we enter a recession.

Just 12.3% of retail workers are members of a trades union, reflecting an overall picture of lower engagement with unions in lower paid roles, in the private sector and among part-time workers.⁴⁶ More limited worker voice within the sector means that workers may not have channels to influence decision-making within their organisation at a time of unprecedented upheaval.

Workers in retail could therefore be particularly vulnerable to changes to terms and conditions introduced by employers in response to the crisis. Early evidence indicates some employers are introducing multifunctional roles, requiring workers to take on new responsibilities beyond their job description, such as cleaning stores or working across multiple departments. While this change in roles may bring positive changes for some, without defined routes for worker engagement, there is a risk that retail workers won't have a say in key changes to their work or working conditions.

More than a third of the retail workforce are aged under 30 and full-time students make up 9.8% of workers in retail compared with 3.5% on average across the other sectors. Younger retail workers face additional forms of financial insecurity; the minimum wage is lower for workers under 25, and the amount of support they can receive through welfare benefits is much lower too.

In addition, we estimate that two thirds of retail workers under 25 wouldn't be entitled to redundancy pay if they were laid off⁴⁷. But with more limited experience of work, younger people are also at greater risk of job loss through the recession, which could have impacts throughout their working lives: evidence suggests that periods of unemployment early in a career can have a scarring effect, leading to higher unemployment and lower wages over the longer term⁴⁸

Those who are unlikely to access new jobs created within retail

As the retail workforce has contracted over recent years, the majority of job losses have been among women. *Between 2010 and 2019, the number of women working in the sector fell by 55,544, while the number of men increased slightly overall.*⁴⁹ Women, and particularly older women, are more likely to be working in lower paid roles in retail. Two fifths (38%) of women working in routine and semi-routine roles in retail are aged over 50. Analysis from the Centre for Ageing Better has found that "losing a job when aged 50 and over is more likely to lead to long-term worklessness relative to job loss earlier in life".⁵⁰

The adoption of new technologies and the growth of online retail is driving shifts in the composition of the workforce. The RSA found that the retail jobs being displaced by automation were often held by women, with the newly created roles more often held by men.⁵¹

For those working in store-based roles, transitioning to a role in logistics or distribution would present significant changes. Warehouses are often located close to motorway networks rather than in town or city centres, and see greater use of variable hours contracts.⁵² While eight of the top ten UK retailers hold a high street presence,⁵³ this suggests that as retailers affected by the recession close stores and recruit into warehousing and distribution roles to bolster increased online activity, the gender composition of the workforce is likely to change.

Those who are unlikely to access jobs in other sectors

Despite Government measures to mitigate the impacts of the crisis, retail is already seeing large numbers of redundancies across the sector.⁵⁴ Those who are laid off may face acute challenges in securing work in other sectors.

Recent analysis by Professor Geraint Johnes of the trajectories of retail workers who experienced a period of unemployment found that, with the sector experiencing contraction, those who were able to re-enter the labour market did so by moving to a role in a different sector.⁵⁵ The analysis found that workers with higher qualifications and those with experience in managerial roles were able to 'bounce back' to work after losing a retail job much sooner than those with lower qualification levels or more junior roles.

This is significant given our analysis has found that *retail workers are also slightly more likely to hold no qualifications than average across the workforce* (8% compared with 5% across the economy). We found that retail workers are less likely to have completed a degree or higher level qualification (20% of retail workers have a degree compared with 36% of the workforce overall)⁵⁶.

Retail workers who do hold a degree are more likely to be in junior level roles (20.7% compared with 4.1% on average across the economy), and so may not have sufficient experience to transition in to more senior roles in other sectors.

In addition, Johnes found that men, people without health conditions and people living in London and the South East re-entered the labour market much sooner. By contrast, women, older workers and those in entry level positions faced an extended period of unemployment after losing a job in retail.⁵⁷

Recommendations to mitigate the immediate crisis, and support the creation of higher quality, more secure retail jobs in the future

The analysis in this paper has shown the extent to which retail work is often low paid, with a large proportion of the workforce on the minimum wage and accessing welfare benefits to supplement their earnings. Part time work and temporary contracts are prevalent and opportunities to progress or find more secure work are often limited. COVID-19's impact on the retail sector and its workforce has been substantial, affecting almost all parts of the industry, and, in many areas, will likely lead to permanent change.

This set of circumstances could lead to hundreds of thousands of retail workers losing their jobs over the coming months, and those that remain employed in the sector seeing their pay and conditions worsen. This requires Government and industry bodies consider both short term measures that can mitigate the risk of immediate job losses and reinforce the safety net for retail workers, alongside longer-term measures to support those groups of workers most at risk of displacement, and to ensure that those who do remain working in the retail sector benefit from better paid, more secure jobs than is the case today.

Short term policy measures

Extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme through any future local lockdowns

As one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic, 1.9 million retail and wholesale staff were on furlough by August.⁵⁸ With the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme due to finish in October this year, any localised lockdown measures introduced after that will leave retailers highly exposed, potentially leading to a regional spike in layoffs. To guard against this, once the national CJRS ends, the Treasury should continue to offer the scheme to employers operating in areas where lockdowns are advised as a public health measure.

Replace staff retention bonuses with more substantial retention subsidies

Government has committed to rewarding businesses who keep their staff on until at least January 2021 with £1,000 for each employee paid out through the Job Retention Bonus. However, this measure could incentivise employers to reduce their workers' hours in order to qualify for the bonus while still managing to decrease costs, and so is unlikely to be sufficient to prevent heightened insecurity in retail.

More effective interventions could include the provision of temporary support in meeting staff costs, through a wage subsidy or tax reduction, which would offer breathing space to enable workers and employers to take stock of the changing landscape and make informed, longer term decisions. For example, offering a reduction in Employer National Insurance Contributions to those employers who offer targeted training and redeployment support within the business for workers at risk could avoid a surge in layoffs when the Job Retention Scheme ends this autumn.

Similarly, building on the 'flexible furlough' measures introduced in July, a 'working time reduction scheme' would allow employers to reduce working hours for some staff, and receive a subsidy for hours that aren't worked, allowing more workers to participate in shifts. One example of such a programme is the 'short -time working allowance' (Kurzarbeit) scheme run in Germany and Austria during economic downturns. The scheme allows employers, in consultation with affected employees, to reduce the number of hours each individual works, with the employer paying for hours worked and the short work-time scheme supplementing 60% of the remaining wage, and up to 67% for parents. The scheme is estimated to have saved between 300,000 and 350,000 jobs during the financial crisis⁵⁹, and the German Government estimates 2.35 million people will be supported through it this year.⁶⁰

Reinforce Universal Credit to ensure work pays

More than a third of workers in retail receive welfare benefits, with workers in the sector often finding that they have limited weekly hours, and limited opportunities for progression.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown the vital role that Universal Credit (UC) can play in supporting the incomes of workers in lower paid roles. However, there are various ways in which the benefit could be improved to ensure that work pays, and that employment can become a route out of poverty. For example, access to work allowances – an amount that claimants can earn through work before Universal Credit payments are reduced – should be widened to all, which would help ensure that retail workers on lower incomes are supported to stay in work. Alongside this, bringing down the taper rate at which Universal Credit payments reduce as earnings rise will support individuals in lower paid roles to take on additional hours.

Finally, more flexibility over assessment periods and the frequency of UC payments would provide greater support for workers whose earnings vary, including those on temporary contracts, contracts without guaranteed hours, or those working overtime.

Enhance statutory sick pay provisions

With a large proportion of part-time workers on low pay, the retail sector employs approximately 400,000 workers who currently aren't eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).⁶¹ This means that as we approach the autumn, and preparation begins for further waves of COVID-19, workers who become unwell or are required to self-isolate may face extended periods with no income, potentially disincentivising compliance with advice to quarantine.

Government has recently announced a pilot of a new payment for workers receiving Universal Credit who have COVID-19 or have been advised to self-isolate through the track and trace system paid at the same rate as SSP.⁶² However, as currently planned, the payments wouldn't be made to people receiving other benefits, or those who don't qualify for SSP or receive benefits.

Ensuring the system meets the needs of lower paid part-time workers will be essential to providing a comprehensive safety net for workers, and ensuring full compliance with public health guidance. Government should reform Statutory Sick Pay, bringing up rates to prevent workers experiencing financial hardship while off work, and extending eligibility to all workers, including those working part time.

Longer term policy measures

Expansion of the National Retraining Scheme to support workers to transition to new sectors

The Chancellor has committed to doubling the number of work coaches at Job Centres to support people to find work. This is a positive step, but many people out of work, particularly those seeking to transition to new sectors, will require more in-depth support than that typically available through Job Centre Plus, and jobseekers will be looking for work in an economy where employers are shelving hiring plans.⁶³ To provide more intensive support, the National Retraining Scheme should be rapidly expanded beyond the 6 pilot areas and re-purposed to assist job seekers across the UK. The scheme has been developed in response to the changing nature of jobs, in recognition of the impacts of automation affecting workers on low incomes and barriers they face to taking up training⁶⁴. As a result, it is well placed to support retail workers affected by the recession to develop new skills and transition to more secure work.

Enhance protections and drive up working conditions in the retail sector

As the sector responds to the crisis, there is a risk that new jobs created are even less secure than those they replace. Use of varied hours contracts, limited break times and, in some cases, underpayment of wages have all been identified as trends within the growing warehousing sector. Furthermore, a large proportion of those in delivery driver roles working in the gig economy lack access to basic protections like minimum wage rates, sick pay, redundancy pay or notice periods.

Government has announced it will introduce legislation to 'protect and enhance workers' rights' and 'promote fairness in the workplace' over this parliament. The anticipated Employment Bill offers the potential to reinforce more secure work, through establishing a requirement for employers to offer true 'two way flexibility' to their workers as recommended through the Taylor Review of modern working practices.⁶⁵ This should include opportunities for workers on part-time contracts to revisit their agreed working hours and patterns with their employer at regular intervals.

In addition, Government should work with industry to ensure that all retail employers pay at least the Real Living Wage to all workers by 2023, and offer workers more stable working hours, in line with proposals made through the Living Hours campaign and recently taken up by Ikea.⁶⁶ Alongside increases in pay, employee benefits are another route to mitigate insecurity. Work Foundation research has found that low earners particularly value fringe benefits that mitigate high living costs, such as food and leisure, travel and childcare.⁶⁷

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