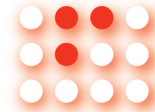
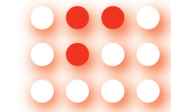


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Annual Subscription £67.50 (£57.20 for LRD affiliates)

Volume 70, Issue 34, 28 August 2008

Fears pensioners could lose out

Pensioners have just over a month to make a claim for Pension Credit and receive up to a year's backdating of the benefit.

From 6 October, the maximum period for backdating will be reduced to just three months – similar cuts will apply to Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit for which many pensioners also qualify.

An estimated five million pensioners are eligible for Pension Credit, a means-tested benefit which tops up those on low incomes to £124.05 a week for single pensioners or £189.35 a week for couples, but because of the complex application procedures many do not claim.

Age Concern, the charity working with and for older people, says that some six out of 10 pensioners are not claiming because of the complexity of making an application and the necessity to answer intrusive questions aimed at means-testing pensioners.

Gordon Lishman, director general of Age Concern, warned that "many pensioners are put off claiming benefits because they find the system confusing. Pension Credit is one of the main benefits avail-

able for older people and putting in a claim can actually open the door to receiving other money benefits".

"We would urge any older person who finds their income stretched to see if they could claim. Older people shouldn't let the system get the better of them," he said.

The amount of money that is not being claimed rose from £1.3billion in 1997-98 to a high of £3.6 billion in 2006-07.

The move to cut backdating of Pension Credit to three months will save the Treasury an estimated £100 million in 2009 and 2010 as well as savings of £35 million in 2009 and £70 million in 2010 because of the reductions in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/Content/Detail.asp?ReleaseID=377526&NewsAreaID=2>

Economy at a standstill

UK economic growth ground to a halt between April and June, according to the latest official figures from the Office for National Statistics. It said the economy had stalled with no growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in the 1st quarter of 2008 compared with the previous quarter.

GDP was 1.4% higher than a year earlier.

LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

Published weekly by LRD Publications Ltd, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF. 020 7928 3649 www.lrd.org.uk

The 0% growth figure was down from an earlier estimate of 0.2% and lower than the 0.3% growth recorded in the first three months of 2008.

It ends a run of more than 15 years of consecutive growth in the UK and raises the possibility that the Bank of England will cut interest rates by the end of the year.

The output of the production industries fell by 0.8% and within that figure manufacturing output showed a similar fall.

For other sectors, output of the construction industries fell by 1.1%, while the service sector grew by just 0.2%.

www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/oie0808.pdf

Directors' pay

Twenty-nine top executives on pay and benefits of over £500,000 a year, including 10 on over £1 million, feature in the table below. The figures exclude share bonuses and pension payments unless as an extra.

Steve Holliday, chief executive (CEO) of energy distributor National Grid, tops the list with over £2 million a year and finance director Steve Lucas takes fourth spot with £1.2 million.

Neil Carson, CEO of speciality chemicals group Johnson Matthey, took second spot with £1.4 million in pay and benefits.

John Pluthero is executive chair of Cable & Wireless group's Europe, Asia and US operations and picked up £1.3 million in the job last year and finance director Tony Rice got £1.2 million.

Year-on-year comparisons could be made for 24 executives and 19 got a pay rise. Fifteen of the rises were 12.2% or more at a time when average earnings for the whole economy were rising at less than 4.6%.

Steve Holliday once again tops the list with a 59.6% rise largely as a result of an annual bonus worth 1.4 times his basic salary.

Stefan Barden, CEO of ready-made meals group Northern Foods, is close behind with a 58.6% rise – a bonus worth 90% of his basic salary or nearly £398,000 is responsible.

Two executives of mobile phones retailer Carphone Warehouse took the third and fifth spots – David Goldie with a 33.8% rise and Roger Taylor got a 30.5% pay rise.

Alan White, CEO of home shopping and financial services group N Brown, took the fourth spot with a 33.0% rise.

Director	Company (year end)	Pay (£000)	% rise
Steve Holliday	National Grid (3.08)	2,062	59.6
Neil Carson	Johnson Matthey (3.08)	1,389	28.6
John Pluthero	Cable & Wireless (3.08)	1,255	-9.1
Steve Lucas	National Grid (3.08)	1,183	27.5
Tony Rice	Cable & Wireless (3.08)	1,155	-16.1
Tom King	National Grid (3.08)	1,149	n.a
Charles Dunstone	Carphone Warehouse (3.08)	1,117	1.9
Edward Astle	National Grid (3.08)	1,070	26.3
Roger Taylor	Carphone Warehouse (3.08)	1,064	51.4
Mark Fairbairn	National Grid (3.08)	1,010	n.a
Alan White	N Brown (2.08)	996	33.0
Nick Winser	National Grid (3.08)	964	19.6
Stefan Barden	Northern Foods (3.08)	836	58.6
Bob Catell	National Grid (3.08)	818	n.a
George Battersby	Cable & Wireless (3.08)	804	-22.2
John Sheldrick	Johnson Matthey (3.08)	795	29.9
Graeme McFaul	Wincanton (3.08)	786	8.3
Larry Pentz	Johnson Matthey (3.08)	774	8.9
David Goldie	Carphone Warehouse (3.08)	748	33.8
Jon Florsheim	Homeserve (3.08)	708	n.a
Pelham Hawker	Johnson Matthey (3.08)	688	29.3
Brian Whitty	Homeserve (3.08)	672	-10.6
Jez Maiden	Northern Foods (3.08)	650	n.a
Graham Love	Qinetiq (3.08)	640	17.4
Gerard Connell	Wincanton (3.08)	625	8.1
David Morgan	Johnson Matthey (3.08)	618	30.7
Richard Harpin	Homeserve (3.08)	614	-9.3
Andrew Harrison	Carphone Warehouse (3.08)	603	30.5
Dean Moore	N Brown (2.08)	515	12.2

Source: Company remuneration reports

Employment advisers on bad employers

Hard pressed employment advisers are struggling to meet the needs of the UK's most vulnerable workers, says a new TUC report.

Employment advisers receive daily reports of mistreatment from workers across low paid and female dominated sectors of the economy – such as care, catering and cleaning – but often feel they do not have the necessary resources to challenge this exploitation.

Researchers from the Centre for Employment Studies Research at Bristol Business School, commissioned by the TUC's Commission on Vulnerable Employment (CoVE), interviewed employment advisers from Citizens Advice (CABs) and the Law

Centres Federation across the UK. The research highlights the extent of the problems that vulnerable workers face:

- over three-quarters (79%) of advisers receive reports of unfair dismissal weekly or more frequently;
- over two-thirds (67%) of advisers receive reports of problems with pay weekly or more frequently; and
- almost two-thirds (60%) deal with problems with working time/contractual rights weekly or more frequently.

These problems are concentrated in low paid sectors where most jobs are held by women. Employment advisers told the researchers that workers experiencing problems were most likely to work in private care homes, hotels and restaurants, hair-dressing and beauty, wholesale and retail, or for cleaning companies.

For each of the main problems that workers experienced, more than half of advisers said that they often came across employers who were "repeat offenders".

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said that CoVE was "shocked" at the extent of abuses of employment rights reported.

"It is unacceptable that these practices exist today," he said, "and equally unfair that when they do, services to help vulnerable workers are left over-stretched and under-funded."

Funding The research highlighted the lack of funding and resources available to help vulnerable workers – seven out of 10 (70%) CABs and eight out of 10 (80%) Law Centre advisers felt they had too few advisers to deal with the number of enquiries they received about mistreatment at work.

Advisers also reported spending more and more time fund seeking so time available for advocacy work was decreasing.

Only one in three CABs have a specialist volunteer employment rights adviser; and not one of the Law Centres employed more than two full-time paid employment specialists.

Around two-thirds of advisers from both CABs and Law Centres felt they had too little legal experience to assist migrant workers, and almost three-quarters of CABs and over six out of 10 Law Centres also felt they had too few resources in terms of people to provide advice and support to workers who do not have English as their first language.

Brendan Barber said: "Sustainable funding is also needed for independent employment rights advice, so that when workers experience problems they can access support. Government, trade unions and employers need to work together to make sure this happens."

www.tuc.org.uk/newsroom/tuc-15213-f0.cfm

CWU TV

The CWU communication workers' union is launching its own TV programme on 31 August. CWU TV is a magazine-type programme created by the CWU for its members and produced by the union's broadcast partner, Flawless Media.

The first programme includes features on postal liberalisation, pensions in both Royal Mail and BT, and the work of the CWU Youth section.

CWU TV is on Sky channel 167.

www.cwu.org.uk/news.asp?step=3&NID=2090

Water madness

The madness of transporting bottled water from as far away as Fiji, Norway, France and Tasmania and around the UK has been exposed by public sector union UNISON. As a part of International Water Week, the union showed just how far 10 non-green bottles of water travelled to reach the UK – or London, if produced in the UK – to highlight the environmental consequences of the bottled water industry.

Senior national officer Steve Bloomfield said: "Some of our 10 non-green bottles have travelled from as far away as Tasmania and Fiji, and together they have clocked up some 40,000 kilometres.

"Environmentally this is madness – it takes up to a quarter a litre of oil and nine litres of water to produce every one-litre of bottled water.

"In the UK, we are lucky enough to have access to some of the best tap water in the world – but we still drink more than two billion bottles of water each year.

"Employers, staff and the public need to get wise to their water footprint and ditch the bottle, get green, stay healthy and hydrated by making the switch to tap water."

Over the past 12 months, the bottled water industry has begun to shrink, with sales down by 9% to March this year. But industry insiders still predict that sales will grow by 30% over the next four years.

UNISON's water@work campaign, which was launched in January 2007, aims to promote the benefits of drinking tap water, and to encourage as many employers as possible to provide their staff with safe, mains-fed drinking water.

Drinking water makes sense for employers – just a 2% loss of body water can result in a 10% drop in physical and mental performance.

For outdoor workers, UNISON has produced a re-useable, washable water bottle. Mains tap water costs less than 1p a litre – bottled water routinely costs more than 150 times that price.

UNISON has banned water coolers and banned bottled water in meetings and has installed mains-fed water chillers in all the union's offices.

www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=4762
www.wateratwork.org/

Primary academies on the timetable?

Academies specialising exclusively in primary school children should be opened, Lord Adonis, the schools minister, has said.

In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Adonis, the architect behind the academies programme, indicated that he wanted it to spread as widely as possible.

However, he shied away from a commitment to government funding for the project, saying he would "encourage local authorities to think about the potential of developing primary-only academies".

Academies – state schools run with sponsorship from the private sector or charities – have been up and running for six years but so far have been concentrated in the secondary sector.

Adonis's desire reflects a wider ambition to reduce the role of local authorities in managing schools – by turning them into academies or other forms of semi-independent schools such as trusts.

"All the evidence is that schools work best when

they have strong independent managements and are not run directly by local authorities," he said.

Adonis made clear local authorities would have to find their own money to extend the programme.

"The budget we have for academies nationally is targeted at our most immediate priority, which is the transformation of under-performing secondary schools," he said.

www.ft.com

College threatens to sack all staff

The management of Bishop Auckland College, County Durham have issued notice of their intention to dismiss all staff who are not prepared to accept new terms and conditions of employment.

The college signalled its intention to sack 305 staff then re-engage them on inferior terms and conditions in a legal notice issued to the UCU university and college lecturers' union.

UCU has condemned the move as an outrageous way to treat staff, and an affront to decent industrial relations. The union fears that such a move would seriously jeopardise the quality of education offered by the college.

The college signalled its intention on 4 August while lecturers were on their summer break, meaning staff are currently unaware of the threat to their jobs.

UCU officials in the region have pledged that, when lecturers return to work at the end of the month, they will discuss the most robust of responses, including industrial action.

Iain Owens, a UCU regional official in the North East, slammed management's macho posturing, saying "The proper way to conduct industrial relations is to sit down and talk".

"Instead, we are witnessing longstanding teachers, who have given years of commitment and hard work to this college, suddenly being threatened with dismissal," he said.

www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3465