IRRUBRIEFING

Examining the Business Case for the Employment of Disabled People

Ardha Danieli. The business case is widely seen as holding considerable promise for achieving equality for under-represented groups in employment. For disabled people, however, official statistics demonstrate that employees with disabilities remain far from achieving equality at work with non-disabled staff.

A team of researchers, led by Ardha Danieli, have conducted a two year research project, funded by the European Social Fund, to examine in-depth in two large organisations what the barriers to implementing the business case for the employment of disabled people are in practice.

The two organisations participating in the research were a leading UK-based private sector company and an English local authority. Both organisations were given assurances of anonymity in subsequent reports of the research findings, and have been labelled PSO and ELA respectively.

The research had two main strands. First, an analysis of demographic data of each organisation's workforce, supplied by their respective HR functions (see box on page 3 for key findings). Second, a programme of 260 personal interviews across the two organisations with disabled and non-disabled senior managers, line managers, non-managerial employees, and also trade union officials. Focus group interviews with disabled employee representative groups were also undertaken in both organisations.

Operation of the business case in PSO
PSO had a clear corporate commitment to the business case for the employment of disabled people, and equality and diversity policies based on best practice advice. Yet in practice respondents found it difficult to make a business case in relation to disabled employees, since this was often interpreted as requiring an economic justification.

Disabled people did not view the organisation's culture as disability friendly. Indeed many described it as one of fear, and cases of bullying and harassment were reported.

Respondents said that there was a stigma attached to disability,

Also in this issue

Survey Highlights Active Employer Responses to New Employee Consultation Law

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Exploring 'Legal Mobilisation'

Four decades ago, workplace relations were regulated principally through voluntary agreements between employers and representative trade unions Prominent employment lawyers were able to observe that, 'most workers want nothing more of the law than it should leave them alone'. Collective bargaining has receded significantly since then and the law has come to play a much expanded role, establishing a broad range of statutory individual rights enforceable through the employment tribunal system.

In this Issue

Welcome to this redesigned issue of IRRU Briefing, which carries features from three current research projects and an update on our research activities.

The business case for promoting equal opportunities at work for disadvantaged groups within the workforce has been forcefully advocated by governments, public institutions and influential practitioners in the UK. Yet research on womens' position in the labour market and within organisations, including studies undertaken by IRRU researchers, has pointed to the limits of the business case in promoting gender equality. In recent years awareness of the disadvantages in employment encountered by workers with disabilities has increased. This is reflected in the strengthening in 2004 of the UK's Disability Discrimination Act, which provides disabled people with legal entitlement to equal treatment at work. The first feature, which reports key findings from a project funded by the European Social Fund, focuses on policy and practice towards the employment of workers with disabilities in two large organisations. It demonstrates that for disabled employees too the business case has evident limits in advancing equal treatment. In considering the differences between the two organisations, the research points to the importance of an additional rationale of social justice mobilised in one of them.

The development of legally-based rights to employee information and consultation in the UK has been a focus of IRRU research in recent years. The second feature reports findings from a small-scale survey looking at whether, and how, employers are responding to the requirements of the UK's new Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations. It is based on returns from member organisations of the West Midlands Employment Relations Forum, which IRRU jointly organises with Midlands Acas, together with the Midlands TUC, West Midlands CBI and West Midlands EEF.

The third feature analyses the ways in which trade unions are responding to the rise of statutorily enforceable individual employment rights. It draws on in-depth studies of two trade unions.

The issue also includes an IRRU research update, covering new research projects, selected new publications and forthcoming events. We hope you enjoy IRRU Briefing and would welcome any feedback on our new design and content.

Paul Marginson, IRRU Director

Examining the Business Case for the Employment of Disabled People

and to declare oneself as disabled amounted to "career death". The contradiction experienced between corporate policy of valuing diversity and actual organisational practice led to a significant degree of cynicism towards the organisation on the part of disabled employees. A variety of structural and procedural dimensions were highlighted as contributing to this.

The constant drive to improve productivity with ever decreasing resources, together with the divisionalised structure of the business, outsourcing of HR administration and decentralisation of people management and budgets to line management, were seen to create an inconsistent approach to the employment of disabled people in PSO. Whilst this was often explained in terms of 'good' or 'bad' line managers, respondents also pointed to a number of structural factors which constrained the behaviour of line managers. These included:

• An appraisal system which values the achievement of performance targets over people management skills

• A performance management system which links productivity targets and sickness/absence statistics to bonus payments for managers

• The charging of occupational health and safety (OHS) referrals and, in some divisions, the costs of reasonable adjustments to line managers' budgets

• High levels of turnover amongst line managers which made for inconsistency and created time delays in making reasonable adjustments

• A lack of understanding of disability amongst line managers due to inadequate training

• A sickness/absence system which made no distinction between impairment related absence and general sickness absence

Profile of Disabled Employees in the Two Organisations

Proportion of the workforce declaring themselves as disabled

ELA: 7.4%
PSO: 2.1%

Gender
ELA: disabled people more likely to be female than male
PSO: no difference

Hours of work
ELA: no difference
PSO: disabled people more likely to work full time than non-disabled

Salary
ELA: no difference
PSO: disabled people less likely to be on higher salary points than non-disabled

Promotion
ELA: disabled people more likely to be promoted than non-disabled
PSO: no difference

• A divisionalised business structure which militates against the redeployment of disabled people across the organisation

In combination, these cultural and structural features resulted in poor implementation. A number of procedural problems were also evident, including inconsistency of treatment of disabled people, which emanated from the conflicting pressures on line managers and the lack of training; appraisal systems which did not take into account the impact of individuals' impairment(s); and failure to implement OHS recommendations for reasonable adjustments. Informal practices, which undermined formal policies, included a tendency for disabled staff to be less likely to be offered prestigious work which might subsequently enable them to apply for promotion; denial of opportunities to work flexibly and/or from home; and pressure to return from sick leave before they were fit and/or to take annual leave instead of time off sick, in order that sickness statistics did not reduce managers' bonus payments. And whilst the existence of the Two Ticks policy ensured that disabled redeployees who met the job criteria generally achieved an interview, line managers reported that they were unlikely to appoint from this group.

Operation of the business case in ELA
The employment of disabled people in ELA presented different problems than in PSO. Respondents at ELA were aware that the organisation had a corporate commitment to supporting the employment of disabled people, and some felt that the business case was being emphasised more at corporate level than in the past. Yet many felt that the business case was overridden by moral and social justice considerations. Line managers and disabled employees were generally unsympathetic to the business case as a rationale, arguing that the language and the economic rationale underpinning it did not sit well with the ethos of public service.

Disabled employees reported that a sense of corporate social responsibility was embedded within the culture of the

> **The findings suggest that ELA is making more progress towards removing differences between disabled and non-disabled employees than PSO. The implication is that the business case alone is unlikely to lead to an improvement in the employment of disabled people**

organisation, creating a disability friendly culture which valued diversity. There was little perceived contradiction between corporate policy and organisational practice. Disabled people were generally not reluctant to declare a disability in ELA because they did not believe that it would have negative consequences.

Some of the structural factors which inhibited the employment of disabled people in PSO were not evident in ELA. Employees were subject to performance development reviews which were used primarily to consider training and development needs for their current job and did not play a role in promotion or redeployment decisions. Quantifiable performance targets were set at departmental level, but not for individual managers or employees. Neither the performance management system nor the sickness/absence statistics were linked to managers' financial rewards. The departmental structure did not inhibit the redeployment of individuals between departments. Nevertheless, other structural factors were highlighted as problematic.

• Physical access to buildings and within buildings was cited most often as inhibiting the employment of people with mobility problems. This was primarily a result of the age of buildings and the cost of adaptations.

• Finite budgets for adaptations which once spent, resulted in an inability to fund further adaptations until the next financial year

• A lack of understanding, due to insufficient training, amongst line managers of disability related issues

• A lack of promotional opportunities

• A sickness/absence system which made no distinction between impairment related absence and general sickness absence

Most of the procedural factors which inhibited the implementation of the business case in PSO were not evident in ELA. Aspects identified as problematic included: insufficient information to line managers on central funding available for reasonable adjustments; long time delays in securing reasonable adjustments; and implementation of redeployment leading to inappropriate alternative employment being offered, with the result that disabled employees leave. The scale of informal practice mitigating against policy objectives was also noticeably smaller than at PSO, but included a feeling by disabled employees that they have to "make a nuisance of themselves" in order to have their needs recognised

Conclusion

The findings suggest that ELA is making more progress towards removing differences between disabled and non-disabled employees than PSO. The implication is that the business case alone is unlikely to lead to an improvement in the employment of disabled people. Organisations have also to create a culture in which difference can be valued in practice by those charged with its implementation. This requires that HR systems and procedures enable difference to be accommodated rather than ignored. In PSO the approach to disability can be characterised primarily as one of assimilation. Line managers believed that once specialist equipment had been provided for disabled employees they should then be treated as though they were no different to non-disabled people. In contrast, driven by a social justice rationale ELA appears to be generating a more disability friendly culture. Whilst there is still scope for improvement, the over arching approach to managing disabled employees in ELA is one based on integration in which difference is accommodated beyond the provision of specialist equipment.

Survey Highlights Active Employer Responses to New Employee Consultation Law

Mark Hall
Aristea Koukiadaki
Duncan Adam

Research commissioned from IRRU by the West Midlands Employment Relations Forum shows that almost two-thirds of member companies surveyed are actively responding to the introduction of legislation on employee information and consultation in April 2005. Companies recognising trade unions are more likely to have responded to the new legislative requirements than those which do not.

In September/October 2005 IRRU carried out a small-scale survey for the West Midlands Employment Relations Forum (WMERF) to gauge what sort of steps, if any, member organisations have been taking in response to the new Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) Regulations, which came into effect in April 2005.

Under the Regulations, employees have the statutory right to be informed and consulted by their employer on a range of key business, employment and restructuring issues. A key question is the extent to which the ICE Regulations will result in 'legislatively-prompted voluntarism', with the prospect of recourse to statutory procedures driving the voluntary introduction or reform of organisation-specific information and consultation arrangements.

The survey
A brief questionnaire designed to collect basic data on employers' arrangements for informing and consulting their employees and their responses to the ICE Regulations was distributed to 50 WMERF member organisations. Twenty-eight returns were received – a 56% response rate which is good for this type of exercise. In addition, the regional CBI and EEF circulated the questionnaire to member firms which generated a further six responses from non-WMERF companies, giving a total of 34 responses.

In terms of the number of workers employed, the great majority of respondents – 28 or 82% – fell into the 150+ size bracket, i.e. they are organisations which are already subject to the Regulations. A further three (9%) organisations have between 50 and 149 employees, so will be in the second or

third wave of organisations covered by the Regulations in 2007 or 2008. Three (9%) have fewer than 50 employees and therefore will not become subject to the legislation.

Respondents were equally split between manufacturing/production and services with 15 (44%) in each case, with the remaining four (12%) coming from the public sector. Twenty-two organisations (65%) recognised trade unions for at least some of their employees. The remaining 12 (35%) did not.

Main findings
The survey asked what types of information and consultation arrangements existed within the respondent organisations. Fourteen

organisations (41%) report they have an information and consultation body or employee forum. Seventeen (50%) inform and consult via recognised trade unions, but the most popular practice amongst our respondents was information and consultation directly with employees, reported by 20 organisations (59%). A majority (21) report using more than one method, including five organisations that use all three methods. Five organisations (15%) said they have no current arrangements.

Figure 1 below shows that information and consultation via recognised unions is the most widespread practice among unionised organisations, reported by over three-quarters of relevant respondents (17 out of 22). Direct information and

Figure 1
Existing information and consultation arrangements

Key

Information and consultation body or bodies

Information/consultation via recognised trade unions

Information and consultation directly with employees

No current arrangements

Trade union recognition for any group of employees?
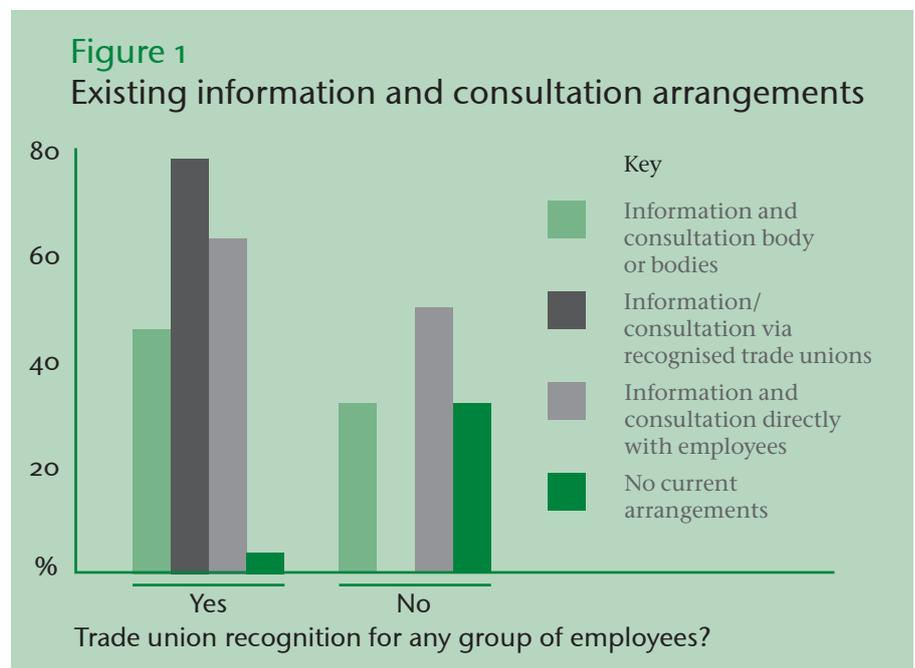
consultation takes place in 64% of unionised organisations (14 of 22) and 46% have information and consultation bodies (10 of 22). Only one unionised organisation said they had no current arrangements.

Amongst the non-union organisations, Figure 1 indicates that direct information and consultation is the most popular practice, reported by 6 out of 12 respondents (50%). Four out of 12 (33%) have information and consultation bodies. Thus, non-union organisations in the survey are less likely than unionised organisations to inform and consult directly and less likely to have information and consultation bodies. They are also more likely to have no information and consultation arrangements at all (4 out of 12). Given the importance attached by the Regulations to agreed arrangements, organisations were also asked about the status of their information and consultation practices. Of the 29 respondents who had information and consultation arrangements, 14 respondents (48%) have written agreements with trade union representatives and six (21%) have arrangements based on written agreement with non-trade union reps. In only two cases (7%) were the arrangements reported to have been approved by employees. In ten organisations (35%) there were formal arrangements introduced by management.

Arguably the most interesting findings concern the impact of the ICE Regulations on organisations' information and consultation arrangements. Organisations were asked which of a number of different statements most accurately described their response to the ICE Regulations. Excluding three respondents who are too small to be covered by the Regulations, even when their coverage is widened in 2007 or 2008, and one which did not answer this question, 11 (37%) of organisations said they had already modified their information and consultation arrangements in response to the Regulations. This is a higher figure than might have been expected given

the widely held view that relatively little seems to be happening on the ground in relation to the Regulations. Six organisations (20%) said they intended to review their current arrangements in the near future, and a further three (7%) that they intended to introduce new information and consultation arrangements.

Eleven or 37% of the respondents said they were not planning to take any action in response to the Regulations, including eight that already have one or more types of information and consultation arrangement but three which have nothing.

As Figure 2 below shows, unionised organisations are proportionately more likely to have already modified their information and consultation arrangements in response to the Regulations than non-union organisations (38% compared to 33%), and are more likely to intend to introduce new arrangements (10% compared to none). Non-union organisations are more likely to say they are not planning any action in response to the Regulations (44% to 33%). Respondents without any

> 6 6 11 organisations said they had already modified their information and consultation arrangements in response to the Regulations. Six organisations said they intended to review their current arrangements in the near future, and a further three that they intended to introduce new information and consultation arrangements 9 9

Figure 2 Organisational responses to ICE Regulations
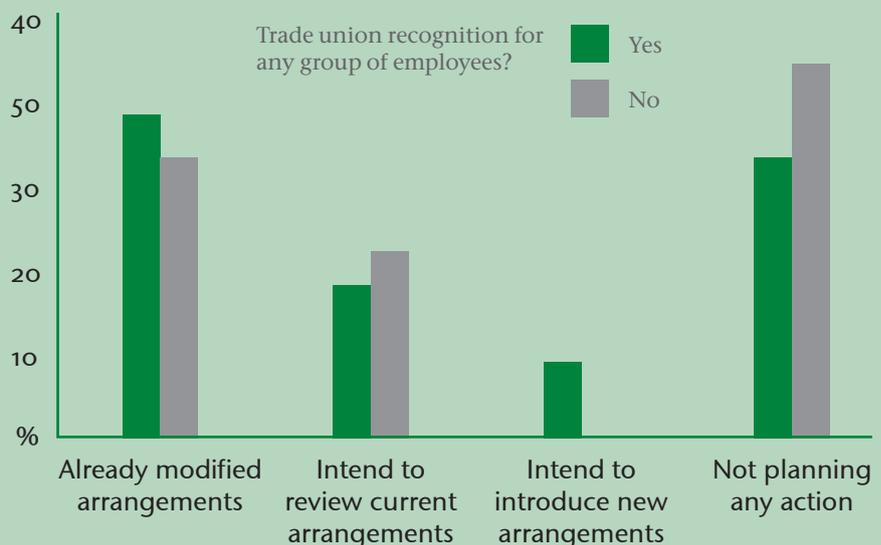
current information and consultation arrangements but who are not planning to take any action in response to the Regulations, although a small group, are more likely to be non-union organisations.

Overall, therefore, these figures suggest an association between union recognition and active compliance strategies on the part of employers.

One final and very striking statistic is that no fewer than 33 of our 34 respondents said that they do not expect their employees to request negotiations under the Regulations on the establishment of new information and consultation arrangements. (The one company that did expect a request already has an information and consultation body in place, but this was introduced by management and has not been agreed with the union(s) it recognises or with employees.) This finding suggests another reason why 37% of the respondents who are covered by the Regulations feel able to say they are not planning to take any action in response to the new legislation. This is that, particularly in undertakings with no union presence,

the 10% threshold of active employee support required by the Regulations to trigger negotiations over new information and consultation arrangements looks like being a high hurdle (except perhaps where significant in-company events, such as redundancies, provide the catalyst). The pressure on employers to respond to the Regulations may not necessarily be very strong in practice.

Conclusion
The respondents in the survey were not representative of the economy or the region in general. Also, the low numbers in some of the categories used mean that the results should be treated with some caution. However, the survey does provide a snapshot of what information and consultation practices employers belonging to WMERF are using and how they have been responding to the ICE Regulations. Most notably, it suggests that the new legislation is far from being the damp squib that some commentators have predicted, with almost two-thirds of respondents indicating that they are actively responding to the Regulations by modifying or reviewing their procedures or putting new arrangements in place.

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Exploring 'Legal Mobilisation': Trade Union Action to Enforce Statutory Individual Employment Rights

Trevor Colling

Four decades ago, workplace relations were regulated principally through voluntary agreements between employers and representative trade unions. Prominent employment lawyers were able to observe that, 'most workers want nothing more of the law than it should leave them alone'. Collective bargaining has receded significantly since then and the law has come to play a much expanded role, establishing a broad range of statutory individual rights enforceable through the employment tribunal system. This shift is reflected in the incidence of employment disputes: whilst organised strike activity fell throughout the 1990s, claims to tribunals trebled. Some employers now express concern about a 'compensation culture'. Whether or not this is justified, it is clear that workers are now much more reliant on the law than they once were. What role remains for unions in these processes? Is the extension of legal regulation another manifestation of their decline? Or have unions adapted to an increasingly legalistic environment?

On the face of it, representation through trade unions and the increased reliance on the law seem mutually exclusive processes. Overall, workers in unionised workplaces contribute relatively little to the workload of employment tribunals. In part this is because statutory rights are more developed. New legal standards, such as paternity leave, are adopted and improved upon through negotiation and unions tend to lift minimum statutory entitlements to sick pay, pensions, and holidays. The availability of representation also ensures that disputes are generally resolved more effectively within the workplace. Employment security is highest where unions are present: formal disciplinary sanctions are less likely in these workplaces and dismissals much less so.

Employment tribunal applications come disproportionately from the growing number of small non-union organisations. Workplaces with fewer than fifty employees, where only one in five employees is covered by collective bargaining, contribute nearly two-thirds of tribunal cases. Claims concerning redundancy payments and unlawful deductions from wages come overwhelmingly from employees in such workplaces. Explanations lie in the generally lower awareness amongst employers of their legal obligations. Formal policies and procedures are less prominent, which tends to push employees to seek redress in external hearings.

On closer examination, however, legal pressures and voluntary initiatives through unions are bound to interact. Unions increasingly use the law as a floor to collective bargaining activity, as suggested above. Unions have also become involved in the formal enforcement of individual rights through the tribunal and senior court system. This is not entirely novel: unions have always offered advocacy and legal services to individual members, particularly in relation to personal injury claims. For some time, though, there has been suggestive evidence of a more sophisticated approach to the

law in which individual claims are used to build support for collective interests. Cases taken under the discrimination jurisdictions have been used to demonstrate union capacity to represent the interests of marginalised groups. For example, the GMB was the first union to take an equal value case through the British courts and on to the European Court of Justice, and the positive outcome was used in recruitment literature for some time afterwards. The law might also be used as an additional lever to pressure employers during collective bargaining. Discrimination legislation was used by unions to challenge pay arrangements in the National Health Service and similar tactics were used in the retail sector, in the utility industries and in local government. These kinds of approaches might be termed 'legal mobilisation', since the formal enforcement of individual legal rights is used by unions as part of a strategy to attract new members, to mobilise existing ones around particular issues, or to bring employers to the bargaining table.

Data from the Survey of Employment Tribunal Applications offer some indication of union involvement in the tribunal system. In the 2003 survey, 26 per cent of applicants reported union involvement in their case. This figure is roughly proportionate to trade union membership but it may understate the scale of legal activity within unions and its impact in particular areas of the law. In complex areas, such as transfer of undertakings, significant case authority stems usually from union backed cases. Discrimination claims, broadly defined, are brought disproportionately against large employers and those in the public sector where union involvement in the origination and resolution of such cases is likely.

Case study research confirms broad features of this picture. Interviews were conducted in two medium-sized professional unions, Prospect and NATFHE, operating in the public sector and the quasi-public sector (e.g., universities, former public enterprises, and civil service agencies). Both unions might be considered 'legal activists'. Each had sophisticated legal functions that played important roles in facilitating high-level strategic challenges to employers, securing important case authority in the senior courts, in relation to transfer or undertakings and discrimination legislation.

Yet scant evidence of 'legal mobilisation' in the terms indicated above emerged from these cases. Indeed, they revealed deep scepticism within unions about the value of legal tactics overall; a strongly selective approach to their use; and the possibility that they are likely to vary between unions of different types. Increased legalism within tribunals, where employers usually retain qualified legal representation, had raised the risks and the costs associated with litigation. There was increasing pressure for specialist legal officers to co-ordinate tribunal activity or to appoint barristers where in the past officials had represented members. One consequence was to reduce significantly opportunities to shift from the legal to the negotiating arena; a pre-requisite of successful 'legal mobilisation'. This was

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because the responsibility for resolving the case was transferred from industrial relations specialists (union officials and personnel/human resources managers) to legal counsel, a process associated with a distinct hardening of positions. The 'win or lose' nature of subsequent legal judgments was contrasted with the more nuanced outcomes delivered by negotiation and the greater possibilities of diffusion beyond the immediate individual case that these offered.

As a consequence, both unions had sought to restrict their resort to tribunals. Legal support was focused on cases with significant legal merits, or those which involved issues of principle for the union. Otherwise demand from members for legal representation tended to be deflected, so that cases were resolved within workplaces by lay representatives wherever possible. This kind of approach was made possible by the specific organising contexts in which these unions operated. Employers were relatively sophisticated, bargaining relationships were mature, and whilst

considerable effort was being expended on strengthening lay representation, it existed in skeleton form at least in most workplaces. Conversely, it was suggested, unions needing to recruit in smaller workplaces and greenfield sites were likely to use the law more extensively to gain access and influence over employers. Use of the law has become a familiar tactic for trade unions but their methods and objectives are likely to vary significantly according to their particular membership constituencies and the organising challenges that they face.

These issues are explored in more detail in: Colling, T. (2006, forthcoming) "What space for unions on the floor of rights? Trade unions and the enforcement of statutory individual employment rights." *Industrial Law Journal*.

Research Update

New research projects

Information and consultation of employees – longitudinal employer case studies: this major study of up to four years' duration will investigate how employers are responding to the UK's Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) Regulations which came into force in April 2005. Based on case studies of 24 companies in the private sector, the research will gauge the diversity of arrangements being adopted and evaluate the quality and impact of the consultative relationships that ensue. The perspectives of management, trade unions (where these are recognised) and employee representatives will be addressed through in-depth interviews, and those of employees through attitude surveys conducted amongst a representative sample of the workforce in participating companies.

The field research will be undertaken in successive waves, commencing with the larger undertakings employing 150 or more already covered by the ICE Regulations and moving on to smaller undertakings which will become covered from either 2007 or 2008 (depending on their size). A key feature of the research is its longitudinal dimension, under which developments in participating companies will be tracked over a 2-3 year period. This will facilitate understanding of the dynamics involved in the establishment of new, and the modification of existing, arrangements and in the evolving impact of information and consultation practice.

The research, which started in early 2006, is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and involves collaboration between Mark Hall and Michael Terry at IRRU and John Purcell at the University of Bath. Jane Parker will be employed as a research fellow.

European Working Conditions Observatory: as a result of a successful tender, IRRU became the first UK centre for the European Foundation's developing European Working Conditions Observatory (http://www.eurofound. eu.int/ewco) as from April 2005. Currently covering sixteen European countries , the Observatory monitors developments in and research findings on forms and security of employment; work organisation and work practices; workers' health and well-being; skills and training; and work-life balance. Coordinated by Jane Parker and Paul Marginson, IRRU contributes reports and secondary analysis on subjects under these four main themes.

The work for the European Working Conditions Observatory complements IRRU's long-established role as national centre of the European Foundation's European Industrial Relations Observatory.
http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int

Publications

IRRU staff generate a considerable volume of reports, articles, chapters for edited books and papers. Here we highlight two key publications which appeared during the second half of 2005:

• *The Politics of Working Life* by Paul Edwards (IRRU) and Judy Wajcman (Australian National University and IRRU Associate Fellow). The book is about the realities of working in organizations. Aimed at the interested reader, it makes no assumptions about previous knowledge and is written in a lively and accessible style. It takes the reader into key and complex issues about how organizations work, such as what is happening to careers, the nature of power, and the impact of globalisation. It rests on a strong analytical approach that provides a consistent perspective on these issues. Published by Oxford University Press (2005): ISBN 0-19-927190-0 (hardback) 0-19-927191-7 (paperback).

• *Review of Research into the Impact of Employment Relations Legislation* by Linda Dickens and Mark Hall. Since 1997 there has been a significant extension in the legal regulation of the employment relationship. The report reviews research that has been undertaken into the impact of this legislation. As well as highlighting key findings, it identifies the factors affecting impact / compliance, and suggests reasons for the relatively limited amount of primary research in this area. Published as part of the DTI's Employment Relations Research Series No. 45 (October 2005). ISBN 0-85605-375-9. Available online at: www.dti.gov. uk/er/inform.htm

IRRU Staff

Forthcoming events

2006 Warwick-Acas Lowry lecture: Tuesday March 21st 2006. The Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, will be give the fifth lecture in the series at Warwick Business School, University of Warwick. His theme will be 'the world of work'.

Further information and an invitation can be obtained from IRRU's research coordinator, whose contact details are given on the back page.

West Midlands Employment Relations Forum 2006. Launched in 2004, the Forum is organised by Acas Midlands region and IRRU together with the West Midlands CBI, the West Midlands EEF and the Midlands TUC. It aims to help foster good employment practice across the West Midlands and to raise the profile of employment relations within the region. The Forum held three successful half-day events during 2005. These focused on training and skills at work; tackling stress at work; and responding to the UK's new employee information and consultation legislation.

In 2006, three further events on topical employment issues are being planned the first of which will address flexible working arrangements. Membership of the Forum is open to companies, public service organisations, trade unions and employment relations professionals within the West Midlands.

Further information on Forum activities, and on membership, is available from Georgina Sutton, Acas Midlands, Warwick House, 6 Highfield Road, Birmingham, B15 3ED (Tel 0121 452 7925) or from IRRU's Research Coordinator.

During 2005 IRRU welcomed Trevor Colling and Melanie Simms, appointed to a senior lectureship and lectureship in industrial relations in Warwick Business School, respectively. Duncan Adam was appointed as survey research assistant. Shafaq Afraz and Sam Bairstow left at the end of their project-based contracts and Valeria Pulignano moved first to the European Trade Union and Institute and then to the Catholic University of Leuven after leaving her lectureship at Warwick.

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ABOUT IRRU

IRRU embraces the research activities of the industrial relations community in Warwick University's Business School (WBS). There are currently 20 academic staff. Our work combines long-term fundamental research and short-term commissioned projects. In both instances, we maintain the independence and integrity of the work, which have been the hallmark of IRRU since its establishment in 1970. We aim thereby to improve the quality of data and analysis available to industrial relations policy-making by government, employers and trade unions. Current funded research projects include: employment practice in multinational companies in organisational context; the impact of inward investment on employment practice in central eastern Europe; stake holder involvement in managing diversity; evolving practice in the employment of disabled people; womens' organisation in trade unions; employee information and consultation practice in the UK; variable payments systems and collective bargaining; and the organisational roots of productivity in medium-sized enterprises.

IRRU publishes textbooks on industrial relations and human resource management. The most recent are Gill Kirton and Anne-Marie Greene, eds. The Dynamics of Managing Diversity: a Critical Approach 2nd Edn (London, Butterworth Heinemann), published in 2004, and Paul Edwards, ed., Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice 2nd Edn (Oxford, Blackwell), published in 2003. Industrial Relations provides a comprehensive treatment of the subject which blends description and analysis.

IRRU is the UK National Centre for the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO) and for the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO). EIRO collects, analyses and disseminates high-quality and up-to-date information on industrial relations developments in Europe. IRRU provides a range of inputs including regular features which analyse current developments in policy and practice, in briefs which report key UK developments and contributions to comparative studies which provide a cross-country perspective of a particular topic. EIRO's database, including IRRU's input, is publicly accessible on-line at: http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int. EWCO's activities are summarised under the 'Research Update' in this issue. Its database, including IRRU's input, can be accessed on-line at http://www.eurofound.eu.int/ewco.

Further Information: Information on our current research programme and projects, and on recent papers and publications, is available from IRRU's website: http://users.wbs.warwick.ac.uk/group/IRRU

Alternatively, please contact Val Jephcott, IRRU Research Coordinator, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL; email irruvj@wbs.warwick.ac.uk; phone +44 (0)24 7652 4268