**Theme 2: Equality, inequality and diversity at work**

**Youth unemployment and skill development initiatives**

A project by Melanie Simms and Sophie Gamwell, with Ben Hopkins of Aberystwyth University, looked at issues of young people’s skills and experiences of (un)employment against the background of a very difficult labour market. Funded by Unionlearn, it involved interviews with employers, trade unionists, young people, and career advisers about the challenges facing young people in finding work and training opportunities. Although there were good examples of innovation from companies, unions and NGOs, the story was, overall, a bleak one. Young people and the mechanisms to support them into work have suffered especially badly in the current recession. Structured careers advice is, at best, patchy and poorly funded. Large numbers of employers lack information about funding for skills training and even where they do engage with these systems (e.g. through providing apprenticeships) they find it hugely difficult, frustrating and time consuming. Young people reported numerous ‘scams’ where work advertised was not what was offered. In the absence of clear support mechanisms, successful transition into work (let alone good work) was largely a matter of luck. The Executive Summary of the report can be found on the Unionlearn website (http://www.unionlearn.org.uk).

**Careers and Working Lives**

Dimitrinka Stoyanova, with colleagues at St. Andrews University, looked at the realities of working in comedy in the UK for a project funded by the British Academy. Drawing on over 70 semi-structured biographical interviews with professional stand-up comedians and other key respondents such as television and radio producers, she examined how careers are pursued in the industry. Existing academic literature on the creative industries tells us that artistic labour markets are characterized by informal relations and social networks. As career progression is largely unstructured, individuals navigate their working path by building relationships and making a name for themselves in the industry. The preliminary findings suggest that this is also the case in the world of comedy. Comedy is found to be a rather extreme case of individualisation and fragmentation and this employment environment presents a number of challenges to those working in it. This also raises a series of questions about the working lives of comedy performers: the meaning of being a 'professional' comedian, the negotiations of careers, the role of gatekeepers and social networks.

Manuela Galetto has co-edited an Italian book on today’s diverse modes of relationships and their implications on public spheres of life such as work, consumption practices and access to welfare.

**Employer Disability Practice**

Drawing on data from a survey of trade union Disability Champions, Kim Hoque, with a colleague at Cass Business School, assessed the impact of Disability Champions on employer disability policy in Britain. While the majority of Disability Champions report having had a positive impact, they report greater influence on employer willingness to conduct disability audits and to amend and improve employer equal opportunities practices with regard to disability than employer willingness to make reasonable adjustments. The analysis also suggests that Disability Champion effectiveness might be improved by: increasing the time they are able to spend on their duties; encouraging the establishment of workplace disability committees; ensuring they have the confidence and skills to provide guidance and support to members suffering discrimination; encouraging the spread of joint regulation of disability decision-making; and ensuring Disability Champion retention.

**Procurement professional involvement**
Kim Hoque, with colleagues at Leeds and Birmingham Business Schools, has studied the implications of the increase in procurement professional involvement in the professional services engagement process. The research investigated: the stages of the engagement process at which procurement professionals have become more involved and the form this involvement has taken; second, whether greater procurement involvement has resulted in a movement towards a ‘procurement model’ or an ‘adversarial approach’; and third, whether greater formalisation has led to the curtailment of relational activity. The evidence from interviews with procurement professionals, suppliers and client line managers, suggested personal engagement is in some cases being disrupted and often being replaced with an aggressive, ‘adversarial’ form of procurement management. In explaining why this is the case, respondents pointed to the overly cost-focused approach of many procurement professionals, and insufficient skills and experience to facilitate effective involvement with providers.

**Agency work**

Kim Hoque, with colleagues at Leeds and Birmingham Business Schools, has conducted a study on the employment relation issues of agency work in nursing and qualified social worker roles. Using data on agency working in nursing and qualified social worker roles across six study organisations to assess the extent to which there is a ‘special attention’ approach towards the management of professional agency workers. The analysis found that there is indeed a prima facie case for a ‘special attention’ approach, but its adoption is piecemeal at best. In understanding why this might be the case, some line managers remain unconvinced by the appropriateness of such an approach, viewing agency workers as a variable cost. Also, the perceived benefits of a special attention approach are frequently outweighed by competing cost control priorities. Related to this, the legal context in which the agency rather than the client organisation is designated as the agency worker’s employer encourages the outsourcing of employer responsibilities to agencies, and also discourages the adoption of a special attention approach in order for the agency’s status as the legally-defined employer to be maintained, and to prevent agency workers gaining de facto employment rights.

**Agencies and international recruitment**

Sophie Gamwell has undertaken work with colleagues in India, the Philippines and Viet Nam, funded by the International Labour Organisation, on good and promising practices in the international recruitment of health workers into the UK. The research outlines the context of an increasingly internationally mobile health care workforce, within which exploitation by unscrupulous recruitment agencies is widespread. Even in the context of the UK, where charging fees for recruitment is unlawful, 50% of internationally recruited nurses report having paid fees. This research focuses on organisations that implement ethical recruitment, and their reasons for doing so. It reports on the practices they undertake, such as quality checks, support for relocation, partnership working with NHS trusts and monitoring of partner organisations in source countries.