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The irresistible rise of the ‘mini-job’ – economic recovery unlikely to reverse trend toward shorter working hours in UK

In its latest **Jobs Audit** report, published today, The Jobs Economist concludes that the shift to shorter hours of work in recent years, commonly seen as a consequence of the recession, reflects a deeper process of structural change and is set to remain a significant and growing feature of the UK’s employment landscape.

- At present just over half of people in employment (52.1% or 15.7 million) are in ‘midi-jobs’ usually working 31-45 hours a week, 19.9% (5.99 million) are in ‘mini-jobs’ working 16-30 hours a week, 19.6% (5.91 million) are in ‘maxi-jobs’ working more than 45 hours a week and 8.4% (2.5 million) are in ‘micro-jobs’ working 15 hours or less a week.
- During the past two decades the proportion of people in employment working mini-hours has increased from 1 in 7 to 1 in 5 while the proportion working maxi-hours has fallen from 1 in 4 to 1 in 5, with the share of midi-jobs and micro-jobs broadly unchanged.
- Although in the years following the recession the number of people working in mini-jobs has for the first time exceeded the number in maxi-jobs, the trend towards mini-jobs and away from maxi-jobs was evident well before the recession and is best viewed as a long-run structural rather than cyclical phenomenon. Moreover, the broad structural trend is seen for men, women, employees and the self-employed.

- The trend toward people working in mini-jobs has not been accompanied by an offsetting rise in the number of people with second jobs. The number and proportion of workers with second jobs (currently 1.1 million, or 3.9%) is little changed over time as are average hours worked in second jobs (currently 9.1 hours per week).
- The key structural change affecting working hours has been the further shift in employment from manufacturing to services, partly because people employed in manufacturing on average work more hours per week (around 42 hours in 2013) than workers in services (around 35 hours), and partly because average hours worked in services have tended to fall by more than those in manufacturing as service sector employers have adopted flexible working practices to tap into increased supplies both of female labour and of older people wishing to work later in life.

Dr John Philpott, Director of The Jobs Economist, comments:

“A sustained economic recovery is likely to see a much faster rate of full-time job creation and help reduce underemployment. But it would be wrong to assume that this will reverse the long-run trend toward shorter working hours in the UK, which reflects a combination of structural changes in the labour market and changing workplace practices.

“Although the UK continues to be characterized as having an ingrained long hours work culture the reality has been an ongoing structural shift toward a shorter hours work culture which is likely to continue even in better economic times. Insofar as the trend toward mini-jobs indicates that more people are able to strike a better work-life balance it may be viewed as a positive development, although those for whom a mini-job also means a mini weekly income might take a less rosy view of our emerging employment landscape.”

Notes to Editors:

John Philpott is available for interview

A copy of ***Working hours in the UK – the irresistible rise of the ‘mini-job’*** is available on request

The Jobs Economist is an independent consultancy specializing in analysis of employment and pay trends and related public policy issues

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