



## AUTUMN NEWS CONFERENCE EDITION 2005

# Ensuring a Life-Work Balance

## Sixth Annual Stress Conference

Saturday November 19<sup>th</sup> 2005 sees the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual UK National Stress Network Conference with the kind support of NASUWT in the peaceful countryside of Hillscourt Conference centre, near Birmingham.

We are pleased to welcome over 50 delegates, who will spend the day exploring aspects of Life-Work Balance.

Conference is chaired by Hilda Palmer of [Greater Manchester Hazards Centre](#) and the [Hazards Campaign](#). We are grateful for the support of the Hazards Campaign in our work.

Keynote Speakers are **Patrick Nash**, Chief Executive of Teacher Support Network; **Naomi Brent** of [Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service](#); **Paul Sellars**, TUC Policy Officer; and **Ian Draper**, [Stress Network](#) Convener.

Question and answer sessions will follow speaker presentations and the afternoon will be devoted to workshop sessions facilitated by speakers and supported by Network Steering Group members.

**Patrick Nash** will examine the work-life balance services provided by [Teacher Support Network](#) for schools and local authorities.

Patrick's presentation follows hot on the trail of a very successful 1-day conference run jointly by IOSH and TSN which examined the many barriers to dealing with workplace stress, specifically in education. These problems can be found in all workplaces and environments.

**Naomi Brent** will bring her wide experience of Occupational Health advice and her knowledge of many different working practices to explore how working hours can be modified to ensure a good balance of work and rest.

**Paul Sellars** will cover the latest developments in the Working Time Directive, and issues which many unions have fought over the opt out clause that enables employers to treat employees without due respect to their own personal, family and caring needs.

**Ian Draper** will focus on family friendly policies designed to ensure that parents of young children can devote time to both work and family needs. Ian will also examine the impact of Flexible Working Directive.

Workshop Sessions will link with speaker topics and we hope that delegates will find the day beneficial and interesting.

We are grateful to those unions and other organisation who have provided handouts and information for delegates to take away.

### ***Information pack revision***

The Network is pleased to announce that following a long and detailed revision of our Information Pack, a draft version will be available for delegates and we look forward to the launch both of a newly published printed version and web-based and downloadable electronic versions in the new year.

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## Convenor's Report

Life-work balance has a very specific meaning for me just now. I recently attended a useful discussion with IOSH and

Teacher Support Network recently, and found that the age-old stories of inadequate care for the workforce in recognising life-needs.

It is time that Government and Employers took note of the damage that is done to workers, and understood that it is beneficial to stop and pause every once in a while and think about the inner person.

I have been asked if we support Life-work balance, why meet at weekends and not during the working week! A good question and would that we could, but we in the Stress Network balance this campaigning work in addition to an already crowded working life. We all recognise that time for ourselves is essential.

I recently attended the European Hazards Network meeting organising the next European Conference. We are working with colleagues in Holland, Denmark, Austria, Norway, Germany and Latvia on an exciting project. Another working weekend, but at least there was a day or more to enjoy some tourism in Amsterdam!

By January, I shall have much more of a life-work balance – by becoming retired, for the second time! I wasn't ready for the first, and I'm not sure I'm ready for this one!

I face this new life with fear and trepidation when I look at the things that need doing at home, as well as the urgent need to take my lack of exercise and overweight condition seriously in hand!

I also wonder about how the change of lifestyle will affect my own stress levels. Preparation for the 'good life' outside the workplace is an essential ingredient, and yet many of us hurtle towards the imminent date with little time to prepare and then find that we've arrived and have a huge gap to fill. This can be even more stressful than having too much to do – however they do say you wonder how you had time to go to work!

I'll assess this and let you know!

*Ian Draper (Network Convenor)*

## Stress Snippets

### **STRESS HELP FOR BRADFORD TEACHERS**

Bradford teachers were given practical advice and help to deal with stress in schools at an event organised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on Thursday 3 November.

More than 80 people from 40 schools were expected to attend the event which at Bradford City Football ground. This was the first in a series of seminars aimed at head teachers, teaching staff and governors. In 2003-04 there was an estimated 985,000 days lost due to work-related stress in the education sector nationally, more than half a day per worker.

The event was a joint partnership between HSE, Bradford City Council and Education Bradford, targeting the management of stress in education, giving legal and practical advice on how to do so.

HSE Inspector Paul Yeadon organised the event said: "Coping with violence in schools is a big contributor to stress for teachers and this is one of many subjects to be covered. It is hoped that the scheme will be extended and the event will be repeated in the future to allow all 210 schools in Bradford to benefit from the advice and support that the HSE has to offer".

### **Sickies create more work**

#### **Scots workers say sick days leave them with more work to do**

Nine out of 10 workers in Scotland resent colleagues taking "sickies" as it increases their workload, according to a BBC survey.

The survey revealed 71% of workers think alcohol was a contributing factor which had a negative effect on staff. 67% said a company pension scheme was the most important work benefit.

BBC recently carried out the UK-wide poll to promote its Big Challenge **Health Works Awards**, which recognise employers who promote health in the workplace.

The survey, conducted by GFK/NOP, revealed that 20% of workers in Scotland opted for a private healthcare plan as a job

perk while 8% said they would choose a car above all. Some 68% of men admitted they were concerned about the effects of alcohol in the workplace, compared to 64% of women.

On an age breakdown, 56% of respondents between the ages of 25-34 said they were concerned about drink compared to 76% of over 55s.

The survey confirmed that people who were obese suffered discrimination at work. Asked if they thought an employer would hire a normal weight person or an obese person where two candidates in an interview were otherwise equally matched, almost no-one said they would employ the obese candidate. About 83% opted for the normal weight candidate and 16% said weight would not matter.

The survey covered the views of 1,127 people.

## 'Work Your Proper Hours Day'

The TUC's award-winning '*Work Your Proper Hours Day*' takes place on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February next year. This is when the TUC estimates that people who do unpaid overtime will stop working for free in 2006 and start to get paid. On that day the TUC is urging people who do unpaid overtime to take a proper lunch break arrive at and leave work on time.

This should remind Britain's employers just how much they depend on the goodwill and voluntary extra work of their staff. Indeed the TUC is urging Britain's bosses to take their staff out for lunch, coffee or cocktails on 'Work Your Proper Hours Day' to say thank you for their hard work and commitment.

The leisure, arts, and hospitality industries are being urged by the TUC to make the most of people's spare time on 'Work Your Proper Hours Day' by offering special lunchtime and evening promotions.

## Painful truth of the call centre cyber coolies

Graduates burnt out by dreary work, unsocial hours and Big Brother-style observation - all at the end of your telephone. Before becoming a call centre agent, working late

into the night to answer insurance claims queries from Norwich Union customers, Vinita Rawat was a post-graduate student in English literature. She believes her fondness for Robert Browning and Jane Austen has given her an invaluable insight into British society, helping her penetrate the minds of the customers she speaks to 4,000 miles away. 'I understand how things work in Britain; I know how the culture has developed. This helps me empathise with the people I'm talking to,' she said, taking a break from her night shift at the EXL call centre, in the new IT outpost of Noida, north of Delhi. Rawat, 26, sees herself as a professional, and has a managerial position as a 'team fraud coordinator'.

According to a study into conditions inside call centres conducted by a government-funded research institute, she is a prime example of an Indian 'cyber coolie' - an expensively educated, highly intelligent graduate, who is wasting her talents performing exhausting, mindlessly repetitive tasks for the call centre industry, a sector which it claims offers no career prospects for the majority of its workers.

The report has triggered an explosive response within the industry, opening an angry debate over conditions within the country's flagship service industry.

The controversy adds spice to the already fraught debate in the United Kingdom and the United States on the ethics of the 'off shoring industry'.

Thought to be the first piece of independent research on labour practices in Indian call centres, the study claims that the emerging industry has developed a system for hiring 'productively docile workers', bereft of labour rights and without job security.

These agents are employed under constant surveillance, in an atmosphere similar to that in '19th-century prisons or Roman slave ships'. Despite the relatively high salaries, and modern working environments, the study concludes that 'most of these youngsters are in fact burning out their formative years as "cyber coolies",' doing low-end jobs.

The true monotony of the work is disguised by 'camouflaging work as fun' - introducing cafes, popcorn booths and ping-pong tables into the offices. Meanwhile, quotas for calls

or emails successfully attended to are often fixed at such a high level 'that the agent has to burn out to fulfil it', the report claims.

With employees working through the night to cater for clients in different time zones, the work requires staff 'to live as Indian by day and Westerner after sundown' and takes a 'heavy toll' on agents' physical and mental health. But more importantly, call centre work 'leads to a de-skilling of workers' which will have a high impact on Indian industry in the long-term'.

Pramod Bhasin, president of the leading off shoring company, Genpact, dismissed the 2004 research as 'hogwash'.

He stressed that working conditions in call centres were far superior to those in other areas of Indian industry, pointing to the pristine offices where some of the company's 15,000 workers are based. Staff are provided with free meals, free transport, regular staff entertainment, a concierge service that will book cinema tickets for them, and an ambulance waiting at the bottom of the building if they ever be taken ill.

Raman Roy, the businessman credited with creating the industry when he opened an offshore service for American Express 12 years ago, dismissed the report as unscientific, based on a limited sample and politically motivated.

'These jobs are being done in America and the United Kingdom and no one describes the workers there as cyber coolies. The reality is that these companies have offered fantastic opportunities,' he said.

Determined to counter the report's allegations, EXL gave rare access to one of its call centres recently. Security is tight - workers have to fish out a ball from a small wooden box at the entrance checkpoint. If the ball is coloured they are frisked, if it is white they can pass through - but only after they have deposited their camera-phones and any kind of recording device. Data theft is a concern after employees at another company were recently accused of stealing \$500,000 from Citibank customers.

In a windowless room in the basement of the building, half a dozen new employees are being tested on insurance claim scenarios. They give rote answers swiftly in clear

English which has been 'neutralised' from any strong accent during a three-week voice-training programme. It is 10.45pm, and in the dark streets outside preparations are being made for Diwali, the Hindu festival of light, but EXL works to English rhythms and even training sessions are conducted according to London time.

Upstairs on the call centre floor, a telephonist apologises patiently to a customer, Maureen, calling to find out why details of a crash she had on Wednesday have not been properly logged. A team leader observes the progress of the call from the side of the room.

'Our performance is monitored,' Rawat said. 'I like working here. I was planning to go on to do a postgraduate degree in English literature, but it's amazingly interesting work. You think you know everything there is to know about motor insurance, and then you find out something new.'

It is not hard to find employees who are disaffected. Yamini age 20, works for HCL, a call centre elsewhere in Noida, providing services for BT.

'The pressure is tough. There's such a volume of calls that we don't have a second to pause, and the customers are often irate because they've been waiting so long,' she said. 'The hours are regimented. If you need to go to the loo, you have to wait until your allotted break period. My parents want me to leave because they can see how my health has suffered.'

Union activists have welcomed the study. 'Employers are looking for two kinds of people. People who are completely brain dead, who accept commands and carry them out. And then they want a smaller number of believers in who will become managers and trainers,' Gautam Mody, a labour activist working to introduce call centre unions, said. Industry leaders have rejected the need for unions, although they are working on minimum standards for working conditions. Nasscom President Kiran Karnik claimed there was no demand for worker representation. 'In this industry every youngster wants to be the CEO after a year or two,' he said. 'I don't know, with that kind of mindset, they would want to join unions.'

## Timed in the Bathroom?

You know things are tense at work when management starts timing rest room breaks. But the beleaguered Ford Motor Co. is doing just that.

In a memo that was distributed to workers at Ford's Michigan Truck plant, managers said too many of the factory's 3,500 hourly paid workers are spending more than the 48 minutes allotted per shift to use the bathroom. The extra-long breaks are slowing production of sport utility.

"In today's competitive environment, it is important that Michigan Truck plant immediately address this concern to avoid the risks associated with safety, quality, delivery, cost and morale," the memo said.

The length of bathroom breaks may seem minor, but Ford's attention to it reflects the intense pressure on U.S. automakers and parts suppliers to improve factory performance and cut costs amid fierce competition from more-efficient foreign rivals.

Ford supervisors will begin collecting weekly data on the amount of time workers spend on bathroom breaks and "respond appropriately,".

When times get tough, some managers at Michigan Truck get "petty," said Jody Caruana, a Michigan Truck hourly worker and a committee member for United Auto

## Diary Dates

### Hazards Campaign Meeting

December 8th 2005, Manchester  
Hazards Centre

### Stress Network Steering Group

#### Meetings 2006

Sat, February 11<sup>th</sup> 10.00 a.m., Hillscourt,  
Rednal

Sat, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 10.00 a.m., Hillscourt,  
Rednal

Sat, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 10.00 a.m., Hillscourt  
Rednal

Sat, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> **Annual Stress  
Conference**, Hillscourt, Rednal

### UK Hazards Conference

UMIST, Manchester, July 14th to 16th  
2006

### European Hazards Conference

Latvia, September 30<sup>th</sup> weekend 2006

Workers which represents workers at the plant, said, "It's an excuse by upper management to gloss over some of the real problems we have out here,".

## Bullying 'costs UK £1.3m a year'

Bullying in the workplace is a growing drain on the economy, according to the AMICUS union. The problem costs up to £1.3m a year in sick leave, lost productivity, people leaving their job and the cost of replacing them, the union said.

In an bid to tackle the problem, which affects two million people a year, AMICUS and the government have launched Europe's biggest anti-bullying drive.

The Dignity at Work scheme is also backed by big name firms including BT. The DTI has invested £1m in the project, which is also supported by firms such as the Royal Mail, British Airways and Legal & General, as well as the anti-bullying charity, Andrea Adams Trust.

## Tough problem

"Bullying is a widespread and serious problem and one which none of us can afford to ignore," said Mandy Telford, AMICUS anti-bullying spokeswoman.

"We will be working with some of the UK's foremost employers to eradicate bullying and its root causes to create a culture of respect across workplaces in the UK."

AMICUS added that besides obvious forms such as verbal abuse, less direct types of intimidation - such as a boss setting impossible targets - were part of the problem.

The union said a new website would be launched under the scheme which would offer advice and support - as well as encourage the development of a "culture of respect" in the workplace.

## 'Stress at railway' court claim fails

A retired foreman who claimed working for a Yorkshire steam railway reduced him to a jobless nervous wreck had been complaining

of stress – on and off – for decades, a court heard yesterday. Peter Brookes, 63, sued North Yorkshire Moors Railway for damages, claiming stress caused by overwork and demands to cut costs led to his early retirement on health grounds.

Mr Brookes, joined the preserved railway company in 1988 as a foreman fitter and was promoted to acting manager of the carriages and wagon depot. He claims he began suffering dizzy spells, painful headaches, and depression as more paperwork and responsibilities were heaped upon him – and he could not even enjoy his weekends without being bothered about problems which were not his concern.

It has been claimed that Mr Brookes had mental health problems from 1998 due to work stress and they only cleared up after leaving the railway in 2002.

But York County Court was told that Mr Brookes was first given anti-depressants for anxiety in 1979 – when he was still working as a fitter for British Rail in York.

Psychiatrist Dr Peter Wood, an expert witness for the NYMR, claimed there were six further references in the GP notes to visits which could be associated with stress, starting in 1975 when he complained of non-specific aches and pains.

In 1978 he had a prolonged absence from work at British Rail. "For a comparatively young person he was having quite a long sickness absence for just not feeling right," added Dr Wood.

In 1995 he was prescribed anti-depressants for "buzzing" headaches and advised to listen a relaxation tape. In 1997 he complained of feeling tired all the time and low. He was given a combined tranquilliser-anti-depressant and his GP suggested "he get a relaxation tape advised two ago."

Dr Wood argued that taken on their own the entries would mean little, but together they could suggest that Mr Brookes might be pre-disposed towards stress whether real or in his head.

He also maintained that the common triggers of high blood pressure were smoking, obesity, age, and family history, although the court heard Mr Brookes gave up smoking in 1983.

Mr Brookes, who worked as a British Rail fitter in York from 1957 to 1988 when he joined NYMR, sued the steam railway for damages over "foreseeable injurious stress" which forced his departure in 2002. He was unable to attend yesterday's hearing after having to return to Spain, but his brother, Clive Brookes, was in court when judgment was delivered. Peter Brookes became a well-known figure to passengers on the railway after regularly playing Santa on the Christmas Special services.

Barrister Richard Swain, for NYMR, suggested in court the firm could not have been more accommodating. Mr Brookes was ordered to pay costs

### **30% of staff blame working environment for stress**

More than one in three staff think their workplace environment makes them more stressed. Research by RPCushing Recruitment found that a further third have considered leaving or have resigned from a job because they do not like their office.

The survey found that 82% considered how the office looked when choosing an employer and 87% said they formed an impression of the company from just looking at its reception.

Paul Cushing, of RPCushing Recruitment, said changing an office environment could make big impact on a company's ability to recruit, retain and motivate staff.

"In an ideal world you would be able to redesign the office environment around your working practices and culture," he said.

"However if this is not practical, subtle changes to the layout of desks can make a huge difference.

"This may include lowering the physical barriers between teams so people still feel as if they have their own personal space, but are able to communicate easily with their colleagues."

He also recommended introducing plants into the office.

The Department of Trade & Industry hit the headlines in 2003 after it released its pamphlet "*New Ways of Working*", detailing across six pages how plants should be distributed in the workplace.