

The only constant at work is change

Work has changed hugely in the past decade and looks set to change even more in the future. But how can something as fundamentally important as working for a living evolve in such a manner?

Social change in the 20th century was brought about largely on the back of the working environment – from the Russian Revolution of 1917 through the post-War period that saw many women no longer willing to give up the jobs they'd held while the men were off fighting. Today we have the digital revolution and the impact that computerisation has had on many traditional jobs – jobs which simply no longer exist.

Gail Pacheco, who is a Director of the New Zealand Work Research Institute (NZWRI) at AUT, says Europe has seen a concerted effort to loosen the ties on employment protection legislation over the last two decades and the repercussions of those changes are starting to be examined.

"Research recently has debated whether encouraging greater flexibility has contributed to the development of a strata of workers locked into precarious or insecure employment."

The Employment Protection Legislation (EPL) index figures from the OECD show that New Zealand ranks last in terms of strictness of employment protection for individual dismissals for temporary contracts.

Erling Rasmussen, an AUT Professor of Work and Employment, says zero hour contracts along with relatively low health and safety requirements means younger workers in particular are at risk.



Gail Pacheco

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ERLING RASMUSSEN

"Current New Zealand employment relations are in a state of flux and the lack of a fundamental consensus over key public policy positions is well-established. This is particularly the case when it comes to changes to employment legislation."

Rasmussen says a number of concerns have been raised about the current state of policy in the area of employment.

"Disappointing productivity levels, substantial income differences, prevalence of low paid and low skill work, 'brain-drain', regulatory failures in

health and safety (especially the Pike River mining disaster), as well as the labour market implications of the Christchurch earthquakes."

The future of work is the cornerstone of the research conducted by the NZWRI, and plays a major role in how we should educate our youth in NZ. The changes to vocational training mean we have a shortfall in terms of practical skills so we import labourers where we need them and the number of Y-NEET (youth who are considered "not in education, employment or training") is high. ●