

It's all about the talent

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[The day the Immigrants left](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on February 25, 2010

How many of you watched *The day the Immigrants left* on BBC One last night? It was a poignant experiment, of interest to job seekers everywhere. Regardless of where you are from, and what language your mother tongue is in, immigration is rather a taboo subject on both sides of the coin: for those who have come to Britain in search of a better standard of living and for those already residing here. Competition for jobs is fierce: everyone needs to earn a living to survive.

In a televised response to complaints of some British natives, where some believe that immigrants are 'stealing' so-called 'low-level' British jobs, *The day the Immigrants left* asked: if these jobs were vacant, would the native Brits actually take them?

The Experiment

Located in Wisbech in Cambridgeshire where 2,000 of the market town's local residents are currently unemployed, many of the residents blame their unemployment on the growing immigrant population.

Twelve unemployed British residents from Wisbech were given the opportunity to work for two days in place of migrant workers in a potato packing factory, an Indian restaurant, an asparagus farm and a building site.

Those working at the Indian restaurant would receive on-the-job training whilst those working in the potato packing factory would be required to fill 85 bags per minute during their twelve-hour shift. According to the BBC, factory work is the most common occupation for EU workers, employing approximately 270,180 of registered EU workers between 2004 and 2006.

The outcome

Of the twelve volunteers, one assigned work at the factory texted in sick the night before, three due to work at the Indian Restaurant called in sick and the fourth (and only) volunteer left at the restaurant was found to be sampling the food whilst the permanent staff worked around him.

In summary, nearly half of the volunteers were unable to commit to just two days work. This begs the question, why are some Brits so work shy? Professor of Sociology, Richard Sennett believes this is due to the British work culture (breadth of career opportunity, financial incentives, promises of promotion etc) rather than just individual attitudes. Yet it's made Britain into a nation of picky job-seekers. Almost.

In this era of job shortages, more people are willing to take what they can get and work longer hours than ever before. What this documentary taught us apart from highlighting some culture differences in work ethic, is the importance of questioning our *own* work ethic. Are we putting enough into our jobs once we gain employment? Do we believe ourselves to be hard working, or do we just like to think we are? We all have

different experiences in the world of work, but a job is as much as what you put in to it as what you get out of it.

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[Public sector outsourcing: a private issue](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on February 23, 2010

It's fast becoming the latest public sector trend. A quick fix way to maximise on efficiency, save money and free up time to concentrate on more pressing tasks. But is private sector outsourcing really the way forward?

On the surface, it's the ideal solution for any local government organisation. Staff workloads can be drastically reduced by delegating various administrative functions to private companies for competitive fees. More and more private companies are setting up shop, aware of the growing demand for their services. It's an easy formula after all: tired, overworked public sector staff drawn in by the confident sales pitch of a new start-up outsourcing company. Fixed fees, competitive prices, delegated workloads, the responsibility handed over to someone else. In this results-driven era, the lure for outside help is all too tempting. And perhaps this set up is no bad thing if confined to back-office systems and behind-the-scenes administration. Why not invest in small-scale outsourcing if it means that low-key administrative tasks can be done without utilising an already overworked public sector work force?

But the real danger of private sector outsourcing is when outsourcing moves to the front line, dealing with highly confidential and personal data about vulnerable people.

Only last week, *The Guardian* ran a story following a tip off from a social worker about a well-known outsourcing company which was contracted to run a young people's service in the public sector. According to the newspaper, the company mislaid highly sensitive information, employed staff to work directly with young people without up-to-date CRB checks and failed to recruit key positions in order to boost profits. At a time when many children's services up and down the country have been steeped in scandal in recent years (Doncaster, Haringey, Calderdale, to name but a few) this is deeply worrying. It is possible that with the growing popularity in outsourcing, instances of incompetence and blatant private sector profiteering will only worsen.

But in the short term at least, the pressing argument against regular outsourcing is the radically different ways in which the private and public sectors operate. It would be a mammoth task – if not impossible – for a private company to properly grasp and understand the inner workings of a public sector client before starting the outsourcing contract. To do so in a relatively short space of time would be to leave a lot of gaps in the public sector jigsaw.

Paradoxically, this difference of culture can also serve as a means of boosting efficiency too. Consider a public sector employee who sends out a late NHS appointment letter to a patient, or a letter from the council sent to the wrong address. This is seen as 'typical', and as such, no one complains. Yet any private sector employee would be hauled over the coals for doing much the same. So in this way, outsourcing to private sector companies could also mean a change in attitude (albeit slight) and a clearer accountability line for all employees.

Clearly, it's swings and roundabouts. But in a climate where virgin outsourcing companies are as common as the bus you weren't waiting for (and then three come at once) how will public sector organisations know

which companies to work with? There isn't yet a *Which?* guide to private sector outsourcing companies. It's a risky business.

Yet, outsourcing to the private sector can work, if time is on your side, if the right questions are asked and if the correct research is conducted. But it's a minefield out there, and the reality is that few people will even have the time to carry out such necessary checks. One thing is certain: we are going to hear a lot more about the outsourcing debate in years to come – it's only just picking up speed.

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[Public sector devolution – the revolutionary way](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on February 10, 2010

Public sector budget deficit. Cutbacks. Pay freezes. Public sector debt. These are all terms that are set to sum up 2010 and beyond. Rather a depressing forecast for the next few years you might think, and you'd be right. And to top it all, no one seems to know when the public sector recession will recover, if at all. Votes are cast, predictions are in, but we are rather lacking in definitive answers. We may as well give up now and move in our thousands to the private sector. Sell our public service souls and transcend to the Other Side.

Perhaps this won't be necessary (unless you really, really want to, of course). We at Jobsgopublic believe there is another way. London Councils have just launched a ground-breaking manifesto which should (if it lands on the right desk and in the right e-mail boxes) move mountains.

Devolution, devolution, devolution

Forget the devolution of the late 90s. This time, it means business. Public sector business, at that.

In *The Manifesto for Londoners*, London Councils propose a new system of power centred round local government which collaborates with local public bodies and organisations in order to deliver efficient services which directly meet the needs of local residents. The proposals put forward in the *Manifesto* are designed to simplify processes and bring clearer accountability within London boroughs. It is not intended solely for London. In the future, if these proposals are adopted by Whitehall (and therefore, handed over to local councils), London will be the flagship of a successful system of devolution. Other boroughs throughout England will follow suit.

Depending on this potential power shift, residents throughout England will see vast improvements in local services. It will give local residents a voice in shaping decisions affecting their local area and solution-based services will be better tailored specific to an individual's needs (for example, health care, specialist education, etc.) In short, devolution will work because it will allow greater collaboration and an increased use of joined-up services.

Why London?

According to the *Manifesto for Londoners*, London was an obvious choice for this proposal because of its economy, diversity and willingness to change. The *Manifesto* states that London "is vital to the success of the UK." It reports that London's economy brings in £251 billion and consists of 400,000 businesses, 1 in 5 of which has a turnover of £5 million. 300 languages are spoken in the capital, and it is home to over 40 per cent of British Ethnic Minorities. As a result, "London local government is ideally placed to bring all public services

together... integrating...secure services designed to fit public expectations.”

The *Manifesto* proposes:

- To increase accountability of PCT non-acute care budgets within their borough
- To bring together back-to-work schemes through a joint London board
- To promote good practice in reducing crime and re-offending
- To promote the London Safeguarding Children Board as the flagship body
- To transfer overground rail responsibility to Transport for London
- To bring together specialist disability transport services (dial-a-ride, Taxicard etc.)
- To invest more efficiently in housing and infrastructure improvements
- To allow all boroughs to keep council tax increases
- To dissolve the Government Office for London (the role of Elected London Mayor duplicates many of the roles of the GOL) and transfer the remaining functions between the Mayor of London and London Boroughs.

As London Councils acknowledge, public finance is in a precarious situation that will only worsen in the coming years. But by implementing this necessary power shift from central to local government, it is believed that savings of £1.2 billion will be delivered within five years. And if this process of devolution is to be accepted, it is London that must embrace it first. The *Manifesto* concludes:

“By delivering the first wave of devolution we can chart a path for better public service and more value for money in England as a whole.”

Viva La devolution revolution!

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[January 2010 – How did the public sector fare?](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on February 02, 2010

[As we ease](#) ourselves into the second month of 2010, let's take a look at the main issues that have dominated the public sector headlines so far.

Imminent cuts in public service

This is not going away anytime soon. While the three main political parties argue about how deep the cuts are going to infiltrate (currently, the Conservatives favour cutting public expenditure, Labour favour cutting pay and slashing bonuses and the Liberal Democrats favour long term pay freezes and cutting back on future pension schemes), public sector workers all over the UK are bracing themselves for a difficult year.

Speaking on BBC One's *Politics Show* recently, David Cameron, Leader of the Conservatives is alleged to have hinted that his party would make huge cuts in public spending if they form the next government. He has since denied these claims but insists that 2010 is the year to start reducing public spending in order to reduce the UK's budget deficit which is believed to be the worst in the developed world. Meanwhile, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, has warned that public sector staff will have to accept pay cuts if they want to keep their jobs. And if Darling's grim predictions of a possible repeat recession later in the year are proved correct, the next government will have to make some tough decisions.

Social worker shortage

Partly due to the recession and the inter-related increase in domestic problems, social worker workloads are at an all time high. In light of childcare tragedies that have hit the profession in the last few years (Baby P, the Doncaster brothers scandal, to name but a few) less people are willing to enter a career so fraught with scapegoat culture and high-stress levels and many already in it are looking to leave. However, subsequent blogs on Jobsgopublic.com will address why this doesn't necessarily have to be the case.

'Welllderly': increasing the retirement age

If the recent plans unveiled by Harriet Harman, Government Minister for Women and Equality, are met with approval, senior citizens over 65 (the so-called 'welllderly') could continue to work well into their 70s or 80s. The plans went public during London's Age UK event in early January. While some criticise the plans as attempts to deal with the skills gap left by retired generations and to disguise the fact that pension coffers are rapidly emptying (therefore the plans would keep pension costs down), the government insists it is purely to tackle ageism and utilise the skills workforce rather than lose it. Those of you who are regular viewers of *BBC's The Thick of It* (think Nicola Murray and her 'fourth sector' plans) will perhaps see the funny side.

University places shortage

Despite government accusations of 'scaremongering', the HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) has warned that budget cuts in the higher education sectors would leave thousands of prospective students without a university place. According to the HEFCE, 160,000 students who applied last year missed out on university places which will increase competition for university places this year as last year's rejected and this year's potential students fight for fewer places.

All in all, it's been a trying month for the public sector with all political parties desperately trying to unveil seemingly recession-ending policies whilst criticising their opponents' plans. This will only intensify in the next few months in the lead up to the general election and it remains to be seen who will ascend to the government throne. But until then, don't take the budget cuts too seriously just yet. Nothing is certain until the fat lady sings. And at the moment, she's nowhere to be seen, let alone heard.

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