

It's all about the talent

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[Public Sector Budget 2010](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on March 30, 2010

It has been deemed a phoney budget, the most 'un-political' of all Darling's budgets to date – and a safe bet for the imminent general election.

As such, there were no big surprises, even though the financial movers and shakers in the City banks breathed a collective sigh of relief when there was no mention of bank bonus cuts. Perhaps payback time for the banks will be left for another year, another budget. And clearly, the *really* big cuts – the public sector cuts – are not going to be addressed until after the general election. It would have been too much of a risk – a political suicide? – to attempt to tackle the public sector deficit until the next government (whoever it may be) is home safe in a newly formed Parliament.

Although Darling's 2010 budget does err rather cynically on the side of caution, in his defence, anyone would be hard pressed to disagree with the majority of the budget: many of the proposals are 'safe seats,' as it were. So here follows the main budget issues that has specific relevance to public sector services:

Tax

- Older workers will receive an extension on their tax credits
- From April, pensioners will no longer pay tax on the first £10k of their pension
- Income tax will be increased to 50 per cent for those earning more than £150k
- Parents of children under two will receive an additional £4 a week in child tax credit.

Education

- £270m will be spent on a modernisation fund for universities, which in turn, will help to create an extra 20,000 university places

The cost of this modernisation fund will ultimately be met by the large economic gains of a better educated workforce and therefore a narrower skills gap.

Services

- £100m will be provided for local road repairs
- £2bn will fund green transport and energy initiatives
- Winter fuel payments for pensioners will be paid for another year.

Employment

- The Youth Employment Guarantee will be extended until March 2012

This initiative enables those under 24 the means to work or undergo work-related training if they have been unemployed for six months or more.

- Redeployment of one third of civil servants

The Ministry of Justice for example is moving 1,000 staff out of London to cut costs. Whether this is a good thing (especially in light of all the recent strikes) is debateable.

- The length of time the over 65s have to work before they can receive work credits will be reduced.

In addition to Darling's 2010 Budget, Government departments later announced their specific spending cuts. These included:

- **Ministry of Justice** to cut the cost of civil servants by 20 per cent
- **Department of Health** to cut procurement costs (estimated savings: £1.5bn) and to significantly reduce sickness absence (estimated savings: £555m)
- **Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** to cut spending on finance and HR (estimated saving: £100m)
- **Department of Communities and Local Government** to cut spending in procurement, back office and marketing (estimated savings: £130m).

These proposals, while sensible in theory, are somewhat lacking in solid approaches towards implementing these savings. Being vague won't get us places. Take for example the Department of Work and Pensions which aims to make savings by 'getting better value out of major contracts'. Surely getting the best value out of an outsourced service should be the priority anyway? And how exactly, does the Department of Health plan to 'reduce sickness absence'? It's a mystery, clearly.

For many, the gaping hole left in the budget which failed to address the public sector deficit will prolong the agony of many public sector workers. Yet it is likely that government 'solutions' for the deficit will become apparent over time: cuts and 'efficiency savings initiatives' will be introduced gradually in an effort to minimise media coverage. So for now it's about keeping eyes and ears peeled for any changes within the sector because, as I've said all along, they will happen – it's just a question of when.

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[Could you be a social worker?](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on March 23, 2010

There has never been a more pressing need for dedicated and passionate social workers as there is now. In Britain, we are currently facing a dire social worker shortage, leaving the vulnerable members of our society (the elderly, the disabled, young people and children) particularly at risk.

Social workers play a vital role in keeping our society together. While around half* of social workers support struggling families and work with children and young people, many also provide extra support for the disabled and the elderly and those in mental health crises.

Not all social workers are employed within a local council, although many are. Some work within a NHS trust, or within the third sector (NSPCC or Barnado's for example).

What is the difference between social work and social care?

Some social workers start their career in social care although social care is also a career in itself. Typically, there are no formal qualifications needed to get into social care and on-the-job training is provided. Social care usually involves providing personal care and assistance to the elderly or disabled. Currently, the Department of Health in conjunction with [Jobsgopublic](#) are running a [Social Care Campaign](#) during March which focuses this year on Dementia awareness.

Those in social work are formally trained to handle their clients social, emotional and physical problems and are able to make high-level recommendations as to the care needs of their client. Formal qualifications (such as an honours degree) are essential in this field.

Why consider a career in social work?

It's true that social work has received a lot of bad press over the years. But the reality is that no career is fool-proof: all jobs come with their own stresses (and social work will always carry high levels of responsibility, and stress levels go hand-in-hand with this). So whilst social work is tinged with controversy at the moment (especially in Children's Services, see a previous [blog entry](#) on the issue) there still remains many good reasons why social work is a good career to get involved in:

- People-orientated: more so than any other career
- Empowering: supporting clients to take control of their lives
- Job satisfaction: when you see the positive changes you've helped create
- Greater responsibility: in changing people's lives for the better
- Supportive team work: you'll never work in isolation as a social worker
- Challenging: room to grow and develop
- Local incentives: Many local authorities are offering financial incentives to recruit more people into social work, such as Surrey county council who are offering £2,000 start up payment for children's social workers who are new to the area, plus a one-off market supplement of £1,500 per annum.

Jobsgopublic.com social work and social care vacancies:

Jobsgopublic: <http://www.jobsgopublic.com/searches/dx8osd72gpcbo>

Department of Health social care careers: <http://tiny.cc/socialcarecareers>

Gloucestershire County Council: <http://tiny.cc/GloucestershireCC>

Volunteering opportunities: <http://www.socialworkcareers.co.uk/>

Surrey County Council social worker vacancies: <http://tiny.cc/SurreyCSocialWorker>

*statistic from *Careers in Social Work* Booklet p.5 produced by the Department of Health Feb 2010.

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[Public sector – The good news or the bad news?](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on March 10, 2010

For every depressing bit of news relating to the public sector (and anywhere of course, but the public sector

is what we're interested in here) there is always – by the Law of Mindless Optimism – an encouraging news story close by. Yes, this would also work the other way around, but why would you actively look for bad news? Being politically aware doesn't have to be doom and gloom. Nor does it mean ignoring the bad stuff and living in a finger-in-ear vacuum of positivity. It's about seeing the bigger picture, rather than focusing in on just the bad bits and feeling apathetic as a result.

Take this week for instance. The civil servants strike is big in the news at the moment. A 48-hour mass walk out is currently underway over proposed cuts in redundancy pay, which would see civil service workers lose 'tens of thousands' in redundancy money, according to *The Guardian*.

Whilst Government ministers insist that at least 85% of civil servants have not taken part in the strike, the Public and Commercial Services Union, PCS put the figure at more than 200,000 who are currently striking. Services within the Courts have been reduced, job centres up and down the country are struggling with minimal staff, and *The Guardian* says that 2,000 driving tests have been postponed. Even museums are affected, as are Revenue and Customs, some aspects of the Metropolitan Police and even House of Commons security.

Yet, at the same time, Housing Minister, John Healey has released £83 million in funding to build thousands of affordable homes, creating 1,700 jobs. Crucially, these jobs will be available in the form of apprenticeships and will provide opportunities to local workers. Whitehallpages.net say the funding will mean that 99 young people will be given the chance to work in the building trade.

As reported on Whitehallpages.net, John Healey said: "I'm allocating £83 million to get 87 stalled developments across the country up and running again, creating 1,700 jobs and giving more than 2,200 first-time buyers the chance to take an affordable step onto the property ladder. In this recession, the Government has not stepped back and left the homes and jobs we need to the market. We're using public funding to keep Britain building through the downturn."

And so there you have it: the bad news and then the good news. The Law of Mindless Optimism.

To further illustrate this, all future blogs will be divided into The Bad News and The Good News sections, where possible. So, if you're feeling particularly brave one day, you can keep yourself up-to-date with the bad news hitting the public sector, or, if you need a lift and want some positivity, you can just focus on the good news. Alternatively, you read the whole lot.

In the meantime, keep job hunting. Our society needs *you*.

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[**Save a job by saving money**](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on March 02, 2010

And so the job-cutting speculation has officially started. Will they? Won't they? Will it be thousands? or, as some economists warn, could figures reach hundreds of thousands? Tension is growing in the lead up to the General Election (which may even be called earlier than May if the polls continue to show close party leads).

The Guardian warns that 170,000 jobs are likely to be cut in the next few years. Birmingham Council is set to axe 2,000 jobs and Nottinghamshire Council plans to cut 1,500 jobs. Job cuts are deemed 'necessary' if

councils are to adapt to significant budget decreases in the coming years. For some councils, job losses have almost become a knee-jerk reaction to maximising on savings. Such blinkered attitudes are clearly not helpful and simply making thousands redundant could be a false economy: redundancy is expensive, and rightfully so.

Yet there is another way. It may not be the knight in shining armour that saves the public sector from its debt deficit, but it could save local councils millions, if not more. And if adopted across the board, jobs could actually be preserved rather than lost.

Total Place

Thought up by London Councils, the organisation that produced *The Manifesto for Londoners*, Total Place emphasises the importance of sharing within local authorities. By sharing a wide range of services, process and back-office systems, duplication within local government is radically reduced. The Total Place approach looks at the bigger picture, encompassing all aspects of local government including PCTs and housing authorities rather than looking at different aspects in isolation. Local authorities, notorious for their duplicated and bureaucratic processes, resulting in huge wastes in time and resources, will be therefore much improved.

Total Place is a necessary step in public sector reform and a huge leap towards the London Councils own proposal as set out in their *Manifesto for Londoners*. In terms of widespread approval, the scheme championed by Whitehall is embraced by all political parties. Currently, it is being piloted in thirteen London areas, where it assesses the needs of local people, how public money is spent in these areas and which services can be shared and integrated to maximise on efficiency.

Scaremongering

And whilst some claim that the recent job cut speculation is just meaningless 'scaremongering' fuelled by the Conservatives, job losses are going to take place, and unless schemes like Total Place are implemented and soon, redundancy figures are going to rocket to unprecedented heights. Alternative cost-saving initiatives are definitely the way forward: job losses are not.

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