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BRITISH WORKERS SPEND MORE TIME AT WORK THAN THEIR GERMAN COUNTERPARTS

Executive Summary:

The research has been carried out on behalf of the Anglo-German Foundation to look at differences in the organisation of overtime working in Germany and the UK. In particular, it concentrates on 'unpaid' overtime - extra work that is provided by workers beyond their contractual hours and for which they do not receive any direct additional payment. The work of two of the authors has already shown that this is an important phenomenon in the UK, making a contribution to total working time that is broadly equivalent to paid overtime. Though the EU maintains an active policy interest in the length of working hours through measures such as the European Working Time Directive, the subject of unpaid overtime has been generally overlooked. We believe that it is a vital but unrecognised aspect of the general debate on working time.

This comparative study has revealed the following:

- Both paid and unpaid overtime are much more prevalent in the UK than in Germany.
- The variability of total hours worked is greater in the UK than in Germany, reflecting the greater diversity of working time arrangements in the UK
- Unpaid overtime averages around 36 minutes per week for German males and 12 minutes for German females. This contrasts with the UK, where females claim to work on average 1 hour 20 minutes and males almost 2 hours of unpaid overtime per week.
- Unpaid overtime is concentrated among managerial and professional workers in both the UK and Germany. This may be because the growing complexity of work makes it easier for employers to monitor workers' output rather than their on-the-job effort. If employers are not concerned about additional hours that employees may work either in the office or at home, then employees may work 'unpaid' hours in order to complete the tasks that they have been allocated.
- Overtime, paid and unpaid, narrows the gap between the hourly pay of professional and managerial workers, on the one hand, and manual workers, on the other. This is because manual workers, who generally have lower hourly wage rates, are paid at premium rates for overtime hours, while professionals and managers have effectively a zero rate for overtime hours. In Germany, the gap between the hourly rates of male professionals and craft, plant and machine operatives is reduced from 77 per cent to 71 per cent as a result of taking account of overtime. In the UK, the reduction is much more dramatic, from 76 per cent to 59 per cent.
- Adjusting wage rates for unpaid hours reduces the returns to education in both Germany and particularly the UK for both males and females.
- Unionised workers are less likely to work unpaid overtime hours. This finding accords with the view that unpaid overtime is less likely to be associated with organised workplaces, where the monitoring of workers' output is fairly straightforward.

- After controlling for other factors, workers who are paid higher wages work more unpaid overtime hours, as do those that have a leadership role.
- In the UK, there was a general upward trend in unpaid overtime between 1985 and 1997. While the levels of both paid and unpaid overtime are higher for men, unpaid overtime has been growing most rapidly among female employees. In 1997, the average male working unpaid overtime was providing 8.2 hours per week, while the equivalent figure for female employees was 7 hours.
- One of the factors causing the more rapid rise in unpaid overtime working among females in the UK was the rapid growth in the numbers of females employed in professional or management occupations - those most likely to involve unpaid overtime.
- There is some evidence that in the UK unpaid overtime is associated with future promotion prospects. This does not appear to be the case in Germany.
- In the UK, there is evidence to suggest that workers would prefer to work fewer unpaid hours - they would prefer to take more leisure.
- In Germany, working unpaid hours is associated with computer use at home and in the office.

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notes to the editor

'Unpaid Work in the Workplace: A Comparison of Germany and the UK' by David N.F. Bell, Alessandro Gaj, Robert A. Hart, Olaf Hübler and Wolfgang Schwerdt is published by the Anglo-German Foundation (ISBN 1-900834-22-7). Copies are available from YPS, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZQ, telephone 01904 431 213, price £12.

notes to editors

1. The Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society was established in 1973. The Foundation is an independent bilateral body which funds comparative research and sponsors British-German events in the economic, industrial and social policy field in both countries.
2. Review and reference copies of the report are available from the Anglo-German Foundation, 17 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NH, telephone Nina Frentrop on 020 7404 3137 or e-mail nf@agf.org.uk