

**Research Project: Work, Wellbeing and Welfare: Work and Wellbeing.****Researchers:** Prof Paul Blyton, Dr Juanita Elias.

**Background:** When business stakeholders are discussed in relation to CSR and business sustainability it usually refers to those outside a particular firm, but the workers within a firm also represent an important stakeholder group. The treatment of workers within companies and throughout their supply chains represents an important CSR issue that has achieved a high profile within certain industries such as garment manufacture and electronics. Responsibilities towards employees cover a wide range of issues including health and safety at work, discrimination, levels of pay and treatment during reorganisations and when making redundancies. From a sustainability perspective, the provision of work is an important positive contribution that companies make towards the economic and social sustainability of communities.

**Aims & objectives:**

- To better understand the role that the provision of work contributes to the wellbeing of individuals and the creation of sustainable communities, and the impact of the loss of work to individuals and communities in the wake of corporate decisions to close facilities;
- To extend the body of knowledge about ‘work-life integration’ (also referred to as work-life balance) through research and the development of a research community;
- To explore the responsibilities that companies have in the treatment of workers within their companies and supply chains with a particular emphasis on issues of human capital and the management of diversity.

**About the research:** This research project covers several aspects of access to work, work-life integration (also referred to as work-life balance) and the treatment of workers:

- **Work-life integration:** In recent years, an increasingly prominent issue has been the responsibilities of organisations for facilitating employees’ work-life integration (with a particular focus on women with dependent children). BRASS research has contributed to this field by providing a much needed cross-national perspective on work-life issues, as well as a more theoretical and critical approach to the issue of work-life integration. BRASS explored the work-life balance issues facing older workers, and the organisational and public policy issues stemming from these, such as obstacles facing the development of phased or gradual retirement schemes. Other elements of the work included a comparative assessment of work-life integration provisions within EU member countries, the sources of persistent inequality in access to work-life integration provision, and the issues raised for low-paid workers in seeking to achieve a better work-life balance. Prof Paul Blyton has also played a key role in establishing and leading a research network on work-life integration, which now has over twenty five members in Europe, Asia, N America and Australia.
- **Workless-ness.** BRASS researchers have been examining the impacts of redundancy and workless-ness within a community following a specific case study of the aftermath of the closure of the Burberry factory in Treorchy in 2007. This work was also supported by funding from the Bevan Foundation.
- **Human capital, workplace equality and diversity.** BRASS researchers were involved in a project investigating how firms evaluate their human capital by studying practices in 11 major in UK firms, and contributed to a project on ‘*Culture and Diversity in the European Union*’ investigating the potential impact of national social attitudes and cultural values on decisions by companies to invest in workplace diversity policies. The research sought to establish how social attitudes towards ethnic minorities, women, older people, the disabled, and gay and lesbian citizens are reflected within certain cultural and institutional frameworks across the EU and whether they influence the treatment of workers.

**Results and outputs:**

A key output was the book ‘*Ways of Living: Work, Community and Lifestyle Choice*’ with Prof Paul Blyton as Lead Editor and contributor of two chapters which resulted from an international Work-Life Integration colloquium held in Melbourne and co-sponsored by BRASS. This work represents a breakthrough in research by taking the thinking on work life integration into two key, but hitherto neglected, areas - the importance of locating work-life discussions within a much wider range of influencing variables than have typically been acknowledged in the past, and the importance of paying greater attention to previously overlooked groups in society, including low paid workers in insecure economic and social environments.

The research on workless-ness highlighted the effects of seasonal, part-time, and unpredictable working patterns on levels of income, and the integration of work and non-work life. The findings suggest that it is not just workless-ness that contributes to poverty, but also unpredictable and insecure work at low levels of income, which achieves flexibility for the employer but transfers risk, inconvenience and inflexibility to the individual worker, and does nothing to alleviate financial hardship. Rather, it may trap workers in low skill employment with little prospect of change.

The work on human capital evaluation revealed a great deal of diversity in the relevant management systems amongst UK firms and that human capital management approaches may provide opportunities to re-frame perceptions of the relationship between the contribution of employees and the competitive performance of a business.

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#### **Impacts achieved/potential for impact:**

Academically BRASS work in the work-life integration field has had considerable impact through Prof Paul Blyton’s leadership of the dedicated international network focusing on the topic, the colloquia organised through the network (one of which BRASS co-sponsored), and the two edited collections and one journal special issue that were generated. The work-life integration research has also enjoyed considerable media interest, especially in Australia, with a number of radio interviews completed and press coverage at both national (*The Australian*) and regional (*The Melbourne Age*) levels. The research on workless-ness was sponsored by the Bevan Foundation and has therefore fed very directly into the policy arena.