

VAT Rise Hits Consumer Confidence

According to the Nationwide's latest consumer spending index, consumer confidence slumped by 20 points in January. This is the lowest point registered by the index since November 2008 and the steepest decline since the index started polling in 2004.

Robert Gardner, Nationwide's chief economist, said, "Household confidence remained in the doldrums in January with the main index falling towards the all-time lows during the recession." He went on, "Consumer perceptions are likely to have been dented by the rise in VAT and the upward pressures of inflation more generally, with rising prices for petrol and other essentials likely to have been recorded during the month. This will have put further pressure on household budgets in January."



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If you have a home email address where we can contact you, please email the details to either Dick Hegerty or Peter Everitt. Updated information is also posted on the UKAPE website at: www.ukape.org.uk

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The President's View



Syd Croft

Whenever I hear the call going out for volunteers to work for this organisation or that, the hackles begin to stand up on the back of my neck, the reason being that in many cases it is simply a means of getting labour for free, and in my book, that is very wrong. Whilst many of the people who do volunteer act out of the noblest of motives, it is a fact that they can only afford to do it if they already have enough money to provide themselves with a standard of living which they consider to be acceptable. The downside is that it prevents other people from finding work who, out of sheer financial necessity, are desperate for paid employment.

Incidentally, on the jobs front, whenever politicians announce the latest figure for the rate of unemployment, they begin with the number of people who are out of work and claiming benefit. This figure magically becomes the rate of unemployment when, in the next sentence, the people who are not claiming benefit are conveniently forgotten. The problem with this analysis is that contribution-based Job Seekers' Allowance is only paid for 182 days. After that, you can be as unemployed as you like but, since you no longer receive benefit, as far as I can see, and I speak from personal experience, you apparently no longer exist. How many people come into this category, which must include the long-term unemployed? Whatever it is, it must significantly increase the rate of unemployment above that quoted by the politicians.

In addition to this, whichever way the cards are dealt, there can only ever be a finite number of jobs available. As a result, by virtue of the fact that the Government is encouraging older people to work longer to meet their pension requirements, the youngsters cannot get a job, whether they have been to university or not. An MP with whom I discussed the subject on a radio programme denied that this was true. I rapidly came to the conclusion that he either didn't understand the meaning of the word finite and/or could not do simple mathematics.

In my opinion, some MPs also do not understand the basic reason why people are employed. It is definitely not, as they appear to think, a social function to give the masses something to occupy their minds (the devil makes work for idle hands) and provide the means of paying taxes to the state. The truth is that in this capitalist society, companies will only employ the minimum number of people required to fulfil their commercial commitments. If, in times of greater demand, no other way can be found to increase output then they will employ more people. This is intended purely and simply to increase shareholders' dividends and has absolutely nothing to do with any moral case for helping the unemployed to pay their bills.

To return to the subject of volunteers, there is another type. They are the committee members who represent their company or group within an associated organisation and have nothing more than their out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed by the people they represent. I am as guilty as anyone of belonging to this second group. I have done so for more years that I care to remember, and very rewarding it has been, although not in a financial sense. Through the various committees of which I have been a member, I have been to places and met people I would never have done, in the normal course of events. For this I am extremely grateful; there is no doubt that it has enriched my life considerably and I would recommend this type of worthwhile activity to anyone.

Editorial

Sometime ago the Institution of Mechanical Engineers made a great play about the appointment of its first female Chief Executive Officer. This was a somewhat short-lived appointment as the lady in question went off to become CEO at another body. At the time I asked myself and others, "What does a CEO do?" and I have not yet found a sensible answer.

My own simple view is that the CEO is obviously the figurehead and therefore provides leadership and, dare I say it, inspiration. I would also expect a CEO to have something of a knowledge of the business concerned. This, however, has proved to be a rather naïve view.

Last December I managed, by pure luck, to get away from Heathrow almost minutes before disaster struck. A snowfall of unprecedented proportions (3½ inches) closed the airport for four days. What was the response of BAA's CEO following this state of affairs? Unbelievably, it was to appoint "an external international panel of experts to establish the lessons which can be learned from recent events at Heathrow." The same man, Colin Matthews, reported to the House of Commons Transport Committee on 8 March that the airport had planned for 6cm (2.4 inches) of snow, "but got far more than that:" in fact the amount in question was 9cm (3.5 inches). He went on to say, "in retrospect we should have had a plan for more snow." This is, of course, ridiculous, but was no doubt accepted by the committee, undoubtedly made up of the same sort of dilettantes as Colin Matthews.

CEOs, it seems, are continually "learning lessons" and the public and the media nod their collective head and solemnly agree. Is it reasonable to pay someone hundreds of thousands of pounds to "learn lessons"? In this case the lesson appears to be nothing more than how to run an airport in winter.

The reason for this, of course, is that Management has become a discipline in its own right. It is now perfectly acceptable for a manager to run a jam factory this week and then move on to an airport or waterworks next week. A case in point is the new CEO of easyJet, Ms Carolyn McCall who, you may think, has extensive air line experience. But you would be wrong: Ms McCall was previously the CEO at the Guardian Media Group. Colin Matthews, the CEO of BAA, was previously employed by Severn Trent Water. It seems that all that is required to become a CEO is a huge ego and an enormous salary (after all, if you want the best you have to pay top rates). The fact appears to be that the details of the business are not at all important; you have the "techies" to deal with that.

So as an association of "techies", are we comfortable with this attitude? Whatever happened to the Henry Fords and the Lord Nuffields, who knew their businesses from top to bottom? Unfortunately they are not often found in the Board Rooms with all the others who seem content to go to work to "learn lessons."

It seems that the new UK CEO (David Cameron to you and me) has decided in his zeal to save the country money to do away with one of the most wasteful and expensive quangos; I refer of course to WISE (Women into Science and Engineering). Surely in these days of austerity, when we should be considering our economic recovery, the more people who can be trained in areas which will materially benefit that recovery, the better for all of us.

Finally, President Syd Croft gives his view on the value of volunteers. I am sure his views may be considered by some to be controversial, but it brought to mind something of which I was made aware many years ago. When I was a student I found myself working for the Metropolitan Police Catering Division. What stands out in my memory was the almost universal condemnation of the specials by the regular police men and women. The reasons for this were simple enough; they felt their jobs were undermined by a well-intentioned group. Putting ourselves in a similar position, how would we feel if our company were to employ volunteer designers or project managers? I think the answer is obvious, and while there is clearly a place for volunteer working, it is not appropriate in any area where it might adversely affect the employment - or the employment opportunities - of our members, or anyone else in paid employment.

Bob Simpson
Editor

A History of UKAPE 1969 to 1988 Part 3:

In the previous Engineer Today we left UKAPE after its first major industrial success, the so-called Parsons Case. This began in 1970 and the decision was stayed until 1971 pending the introduction of the Industrial Relations Act. We take up the story from this point.

UKAPE officers spent long hours in the formation of the 1971 Industrial Relations Act urging Government to make some provision for professional employees and they had only limited success. The Act did however introduce the concept of the agency shop and it was the combination of this and the "cause celebre" of Jack Hill which persuaded many engineers to join UKAPE. UKAPE did its best to use the machinery of the Act to achieve recognition from reluctant and fearful employers.

UKAPE took a number of recognition claims to the National Industrial Relations Court where we were seeking references to the investigating body, the Commission on Industrial Relations. These included Rolls Royce and Associates, Parsons, Allens of Bedford and Brush of Loughborough. ASTMS successfully resisted our Rolls Royce claim at the NIRC, the others achieved references which were investigated by the CIR. The Parsons result was a draw and the other two were uncompleted when the whole machinery was abolished by the 1974 Trade Union and Labour Relations Act. This was the result of the defeat of the Heath Government and the arrival of the Wilson Labour Government. Four years of total frustration and a waste of everyone's time, money and effort. Why then did UKAPE do it? Because its members were law-abiding citizens who did not believe in taking industrial action and when they saw a legal way to make progress they took it.

The recurring theme in all the rejections by employers in the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) of UKAPE's claims for recognition was that UKAPE could only represent "its members and they must be members of a CEI Institution", and in manufacturing generally less than 25% of those employed as professional engineers and technical managers are Chartered Engineers. Thus representation would be limited to less than 25% of the natural common interest group in terms of company structure. The employers certainly did not care and often did not even know whether their engineers were Chartered Engineers or not. In order to be able to represent a satisfactory group of employees, UKAPE took two actions.

Firstly UKAPE teamed up with two other non-TUC unions, the Association of Supervisory and Executive Engineers (ASEE) which covered all non-Chartered Engineers and the newly formed Association of Professional Scientists and Technologists (later to become AMPS). These three unions agreed to represent all staff in any particular professional bargaining unit, the negotiating lead being taken by the most members. A claim was submitted for national recognition to the EEF who in 1972 granted the three unions the privilege of a National Conference at which they presented their case. The EEF considered the case for some nine months before giving their final answer: No. Since the first argument no longer held water, the employers now claimed there would be a proliferation of competing unions in spite of the fact that the claim was in a non-unionised area. One good thing came out of this. Collaboration with APST was accepted by ICI where APST became the sole recognised union at two staff levels and represented a considerable number of UKAPE members.

UKAPE's second action was to start what turned out to be four years of discussions with CEI, the purpose of which was to settle with the profession a logical basis for forming effective bargaining units. To support these discussions, open meetings of two of the leading institutions were called by UKAPE members. At these meetings the relevance to professional engineers of an appropriate union (UKAPE) and support for it by the Institutions were discussed. In spite of these meetings being attended by a very large number of members and the proposals being overwhelmingly supported, the Institutions did not act. By 1976 CEI were persuaded to publish their booklet "Trade Unions for Professional Engineers" which defined an appropriate trade union. UKAPE adjusted its membership rules in line with the CEI booklet to include all professional engineers whether or not they were Institution members provided that they were working at an appropriate level of responsibility.

It was also in 1972 that UKAPE saw the benefits of "pendulum arbitration" and organised a seminar, the purpose of which was to introduce the new system. The market was not ready for such advanced thinking and the guests, many of them arbitrators, turned down this novel idea.

We leave the history at this point, to return to it in the next edition. If any member still has a copy of the CEI booklet to which we refer above, we would greatly appreciate a copy by any practical means. We will obviously reimburse any costs arising.

The Government Acts to Change Unfair Dismissal Tribunal System

Staff who believe they have been unfairly dismissed could, in future, face extra barriers when taking their employers to an employment tribunal.

The Government has said that it wants to see the qualifying time for bringing a claim raised from one to two years of employment. In addition, any employee making a claim may also be obliged to lodge a fee before the case can proceed. The Government argued that the current system leads to a large number of unmerited or vexatious claims.

A government spokesman commented: "We've heard loud and clear the concerns from businesses up and down the country that the system has become too costly, takes too much time, and that it is too easy to make vexatious claims. We're particularly concerned that it places unnecessary strains on small businesses."

The plans, however, only extend to claims for unfair dismissal and not to other issues, such as discrimination, for which employers can also be taken to a tribunal. The number of tribunal claims climbed to 236,000 last year, a rise of 56 per cent. It is estimated that the average cost to employers of defending a claim is in the region of £4,000.

The announcement is the first in a planned series of reforms to employment law. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, indicated that the announcements on reforms to employment law are among the first conclusions of the government-wide growth review, and highlight this government's determination to ensure that employment law is no longer seen as a barrier to growth, while making sure that employees and employers are treated fairly. It is hoped that, by doubling the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims, the number of cases going to tribunal will shrink.

Other proposals include a first-stage compulsory mediation stage for workplace disputes through the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas). The Government also wants to see the tribunal process speeded up via a number of measures, such as widening the scope for cases where judges can sit alone.

John Cridland, the CBI's director-general designate, said, "For far too long the tribunals system has put the interests of lawyers above those of employers and employees. Given that 2010 saw a 56 per cent rise in tribunal claims, the Government must look at ways of strengthening the process. It is in everyone's interests that disputes are resolved swiftly and fairly. Introducing an element of charging would help weed out weak and vexatious claims, clearing the way for more deserving cases to be heard. Extending the qualifying period for unfair dismissal is a positive move that will give employers, especially smaller ones, the flexibility and confidence they need to hire."

David Frost, director general of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), agreed: "Employment tribunals are one of the top business issues and we strongly welcome the government's move to reform the system. The current system wastes business time and money, and distracts employers from growing their businesses and creating much-needed jobs. In particular, the introduction of a fee for claimants will help to discourage spurious and baseless claims."

Mr Frost also applauded the proposal requiring all claims to be lodged with ACAS to allow conciliation before they reached a tribunal: "This is a very positive step but must be accompanied with enough resource for Acas to deal with new claims."

The measures are to be put out to consultation and the Government said that it wants views on achieving earlier resolutions of workplace disputes in a way that is fair and equitable for both sides, without having to go to an employment tribunal, and ensuring that, where parties do need to come to an employment tribunal, the process is as swift, user-friendly and effective as possible.

Thompsons, a leading firm of solicitors specialising in trade union matters, takes a somewhat different view:

Victoria Phillips, Thompsons' head of employment rights said, "The consultation principles are based on largely anecdotal claims that a high proportion of Tribunal claims are unmeritorious and should not have been brought in the first place."

"Our own statistics show that most claims lodged with employment tribunals are for employees with two or more years' service, so the proposal to change the qualifying period is being driven by anecdote not evidence. It is fundamentally about access to justice. While a fee may well stop people bringing claims, it doesn't mean they have not been badly treated or, for example, that they weren't due unpaid wages. There are a lot of employers who simply won't pay up until they've received a claim form. Fees will penalise the most vulnerable workers and deny them access to justice."

The consultation closes on 20 April.

To download the consultation document, go to: <http://www.bis.gov.uk>

At the same time, the government published what it calls "The Employer's Charter", which sets out what employers are entitled to do when managing their staff.

For instance, it tells employers they can:

- **make an employee redundant if their business takes a downward turn**
- **ask an employee to take a pay cut**
- **withhold pay from an employee when they are on strike**

For more details, go to: <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>

Readers' comments on this or any other issues raised would be most welcome.

Marching Against the Cuts

It should be emphasised that UKAPE is staunchly apolitical and makes strenuous efforts to ensure that this fact is known to all its members and potential members.

That, however, does not stop individual members taking a different view.

Executive Committee member for South West, Roger Sabido, was not only seen on a recent mass rally and lobby of Parliament in defence of public services but was also interviewed for a UNITE publication. Roger, seen opposite at the march, was quoted: "We need to defend the public sector jobs – they play such an important role in our world, education, adult care, the care of the communities. We rely on these services, they must be defended."



Roger Sabido

Roger has clearly nailed his colours to the mast. What do our readers think? Is Roger right or should we accept the austerity measures the Government is imposing? Your views as ever would be most welcome.

Calling Notice for the 2011 Annual Members Meeting

The UKAPE Annual Members Meeting (AMM) for 2011 will take place in the Tudor Room of the Imperial Hotel, Russell Square, London, on Saturday 18 June from 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm.

The meeting will include Executive Committee Members and Officers, who may participate but neither group may vote. Each Centre may submit motions to amend the Bye-Laws and send one full member as representative who will have a vote. If a full member is not available an ex full member who is a retired member may attend as a Centre representative with a vote. Any other full member may attend the AMM with a vote and submit motions in advance for the Order Paper other than Bye-Law amendments.

Centre representatives and independent members intending to attend must provide notice of their intention, together with any motions for submission, to reach Head Office by 18 May 2011 at the latest. Centre representatives must include a note of which Centre they represent. The notice must be sent to Kevin O’Gallagher, National Officer UKAPE, Hayes Court, West Common Road, Bromley, Kent, BR2 7AU. Centre representatives and independent members attending may claim travelling expenses at standard public transport fares plus a £16.00 allowance for incidental expenses. In cases where travel difficulties exist overnight accommodation may be claimed with prior agreement.

2011 ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING TIMETABLE

- 18 April** Last date for sending out the Calling Notice of the AMM to all members.
- 18 May** Last date for receipt at Head Office of motions and intention to attend from independent members and Centre Representatives.
- 4 June** Last date for sending out Order Paper, reports and other papers to participants.
- 17 June** Last date for receipt of Emergency Motions at Head Office for matters which could not have been known before 18 May.
- 18 June** Annual Members Meeting.

Unite-Amicus UNITED KINGDOM ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS				
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31st.DECEMBER 2010				
		2010		2009
		£	£	£
INCOME				
Retained Funds Subs Payback	[1]		9,195	
Administration Allowance	[1]		5,305	
RRMPSA Subscriptions Received			72	
Branch Subscriptions	[2]		50	
Misc Income	[3]		79	
Total Income			14,701	
EXPENDITURE				
Recruitment		1,158		1,621
Newsletter		-		3,514
E.C. & Officers		4,152		5,381
Working Parties		200		253
Centre Expenses		435		383
Federation Expenses		50		349
Book-keeping & consumables		260		258
Sundry Expenses	[4]	232		330
Bank Charges (RRMPSA)		-		11
Branch Contributions	[5]	78		540
Life Members		780		864
Depreciation		50		67
Sub-total - Operational Costs			(7,395)	
Operational Surplus/(Deficit)			7,306	
Special Costs	AMM		(708)	SDC
Surplus / (Deficit) for year			6,598	

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 DECEMBER			2010	2009
FIXED ASSETS				
Initial value (Laptop & Printer)			201	268
Additions			-	-
Depreciation [25% p.a.]			(50)	(67)
Value at year end			151	
CURRENT ASSETS				
Current a/c		29,536		24,253
Reserve a/c		-		-
RRMPSA a/c		547		609
Total		30,083		24,862
Debtors	[6]	3,401		3,164
Total			33,484	
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Uncleared cheques	[7]	(415)		(1,890)
Other creditors		-		-
Total		(415)		-
NETT ASSETS			33,220	

REVENUE BALANCE	
ACCUMULATED FUNDS B / F	26,622
SURPLUS / (DEFICIT) FOR YEAR	6,598
ACCUMULATED FUNDS C / F	33,220

Notes.	[1] DDs & cheques are banked by Unite/Amicus.	Branch 1922	
	[2] Members payments to Treasurer.		
	[4] UKAPE & RRMPSA sundries.	£	
	[6] Retained Funds due for 2010Q4	9,397	201
		5,422	
UKAPE claims payback on agreed sum per payer.		360	28,026
	[3] Retired members gifts to UKAF	100	
	[5] RRMPSA plus Members subs.	97	(1,890)
	[7] Current a/c and RRMPSA.	15,376	26,337
		(13,571)	
		1,805	26,316
		(1,499)	306
		306	26,622

PE & RRMA