

Jobless could find work through online auctions

Henry Palmer

The creation of a series of state-sponsored online auction websites could lead to huge opportunities for micro-businesses and bring disadvantaged people back into the labour market. The proposals were due to be announced this week by the Institute for Public Policy Research, based on a report formulated by former TV presenter Wingham Rowan. They are already attracting attention from regeneration organisations. Discussions have taken place with regeneration organisations in east London which could help to pilot the scheme, offering flexible job opportunities to people. Those seeking work in the construction industry, for example, could use the auction sites to market their services and availability to prospective employers.

Workers would advertise their availability and charges, while employers could select staff based on their rating by previous customers.

IPPR said the auction sites, similar to those offered by eBay, offered a new form of technology that could be used to spread the benefits of the internet age across the population.

'We advocate a system of "national e-marketplaces" (Nems) designed, funded and run by the private sector that have been granted benefits by the state,' it argued.

'They could enable uniquely efficient micro-businesses in sectors as diverse as services for tourists, security, storage, home services... financial services, transport and tuition.'

But without government intervention there was a risk that such technology would become the preserve of big business.

'Over the last 20 years, the IT industry has built an extraordinary new world for its corporate customer,' the report said.

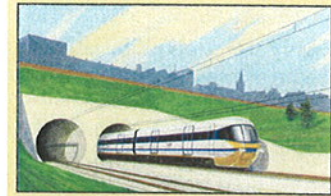
Economic inclusion, the think tank said, 'comes from the capacity to earn money, not new ways of spending it.'

Aaron Barbour, director of the social enterprise zone at Community Links, who has been in talks about the project, said: 'This report presents a challenging approach, which has serious and significant implications of a fundamental change to the dynamics of the labour market.'

'The technology now exists to give individuals flexibility and choice in deciding how to lead their working lives – one of the ladders needed to help people out of poverty.'

Details of the report will be available at: www.ippr.org.uk

news in brief



All change on the rails

A bill paving the way for the delayed Crossrail link (above) across London has been announced in the Queen's speech. A railways bill was also launched which will abolish the Strategic Rail Authority and transfer more powers to the Department of Transport, while the transport (Wales) bill will give Welsh Assembly ministers new powers.

Lottery rules to change

The public will be able to influence the way lottery funds are allocated to good causes under plans to be unveiled as part of a national lotteries bill. The Big Lottery Fund, which was created in June 2004, will have simpler rules to make it easier for applicants to access grants.

South east water worry

South east England will be plagued by a lack of resources by 2015 if steps are not taken to promote efficiency and cut waste, a think tank warned this week. The Institute for Public Policy Research suggested that if current growth rates continue household water consumption could rise by 16%, air pollution by 7% and traffic levels by 23%. *The problems of success: reconciling economic growth and quality of life in the south east.* www.ippr.org.uk

Welsh heads together

A new £12m regeneration partnership for the Heads of the Valleys in Wales has been launched. The five local authorities that cover the area have been asked by ministers to work on a strategic framework before the end of the year.

Splashdown in Sheffield

Urban Splash has been chosen to lead the redevelopment of Sheffield's 1960s grade II* listed Park Hill flats. The project, funded by Sheffield Council and English Partnerships, has already selected Manchester Methodist Housing Group as landlord.

Housing chief urges ODPM to revisit Gateway homes target

The government must revise its housing targets for the Thames Gateway if it wants to create truly mixed communities, Housing Corporation chief executive Jon Rouse claimed this week.

In a debate at the Thames Gateway Forum in east London, Mr Rouse confirmed that he is in talks with the government about reviewing the targets to put a greater emphasis on the number of people housed.

Mr Rouse said the targets, which

focus on the number of homes provided, meant that fewer homes would be provided for larger families.

'By itself, the incentive is just to build small units,' he said. 'We need something more sophisticated. Our main concern is large families, particularly in black and minority ethnic communities.'

Mr Rouse said the issue was being discussed as part of the corporation's next corporate strategy, adding that the ODPM had recognised the agency's concerns.

Treasury to boost enterprise base

Treasury economic secretary John Healy has signalled that next week's pre-budget report will contain new moves to encourage small businesses.

Launching the European Learning Network this week, he said: 'Central to that report is developing a stronger enterprise base in Britain as part of essential reforms that need to take place in a modern economy.'

Mr Healy admitted there was 'still too little' being done to promote enterprise to marginalised groups. Better links were needed between regeneration projects and jobs and enterprise training programmes.

In particular, he said, more could be done to tackle the disadvantages of groups such as women and ethnic minorities. 'It is important to have help directed to the types of business as well as geographically,' he said. 'There's more that could be done in that direction.'

The network is a European Union project bringing together five cities – London, Hamburg, Milan, Amsterdam and Prague – to work on ways of kick-starting enterprise in deprived urban communities.

Details: www.thelearningnetwork.net



education student Tracey Little, pictured, is looking forward to the opening of Hull's first purpose-built adult education centre on the city's Preston Road. Lifelong learning is being given a £1.5m boost in east Hull, with work starting next month on the three-storey building at the Preston Village Centre. The unit will cost £3.5m and is already under construction. It will offer a wide variety of courses including IT, arts & crafts, catering, yoga and aromatherapy.