

Flexible working and decent working terms and conditions

I do not think a company should be able to make employees declare they are self employed whilst they work more or less full time for a single employer. Such a device is just a way of avoiding some National Insurance, and cutting out sickness and holiday pay, pensions and other employee benefits. Nor do I like zero hours contracts which require someone to be always available when the employer chooses but not to have flexibility about when they choose to work. I do not like cheap skate employers nor employers who are only flexible for themselves when it comes to hours.

It is important, however, to recognise that there are plenty of flexible employment relationships that work well for both employer and employee. It is important as governments seek to regulate to prevent poor treatment of genuine employees they do not stifle innovation and flexibility in employment models that are fine for both sides. I have recent cases and recent encounters with people working in flexible ways that reminds me some of these models are good in many ways. I have several complaints about the Inland Revenue trying to make people into employees when they are sure they are independent contractors.

Let's take a couple of examples. A taxi driver told me he had recently qualified in digital technology whilst driving limited hours to pay his bills whilst studying. He wants to continue driving when it suits him, as he is now setting up his own tech business. He wants to be free to meet potential clients when they wish, and to develop the business when he needs to, whilst relying on the driving for a bit longer to pay the domestic bills. He is happy to be a self employed contractor, even if he often gets his taxi passengers from the same source. He does not want to be an employee for fear that then he would have to work when the employer told him to which could conflict with his new business needs.

A delivery rider for a pizza firm or food delivery business also wants to be self employed. He may usually get jobs from the same source, but wants to be free to ride for someone else if they have more to offer when he is available or if the rates change. He is paid by the deliveries effected, and does not have to turn up on days or at times when he has something better to do. This is another way people can study, set up a business, undertake training or develop some new interest whilst being able to pay the bills. No-one makes them do this, and they have the choice to become full time employees of a firm in a similar line of business.

Many of these models are success stories. Those running them have to negotiate with the Revenue over how far they can go in supporting and backing the drivers or riders before they are said to be their employer. The individuals concerned have to be careful to take work from more than one, or to keep flexing the hours to show they are not in effect employees. What do you think the rules should say? How can we keep the flexibility this type of

work allows, without it becoming exploitative of relatively low paid people? Where it is a voluntary choice and other options are available, why should the government try and stop it?