



Public affairs with a difference...

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Welfare, Work, Economy, jobs

### Firms 'deny jobs to TA soldiers

[Daily Telegraph](#), [The Times](#)

The Duke of Westminster, who as a two-star major general and former head of the Territorial Army, has said that army reservists are suffering "outrageous" discrimination from "despicable" British employers who are refusing to hire them because of their service in the Armed Forces.

The Army is facing its biggest overhaul for decades, with 20,000 regular servicemen losing their jobs by 2020 and the loss being in part made up by a rise in the number of TA battle-ready soldiers.

Attempts to recruit are being hampered by employers which are discriminating against new recruits because of concerns about time off to train or to be deployed in Afghanistan for months at a time.

### Extra nursery places for the poorest families

[Daily Telegraph](#),

The Deputy Prime Minister has said that town halls are to be given £100million to spend on new nursery places in an attempt to ensure that poor families can take advantage of a government guarantee of free child care.

From September next year 130,000 of the most disadvantaged two year-olds will qualify for 15 hours a week, with the number to double the following year at a cost of £760million a year. It will mean that about 100,000 extra places will be required.

Local authorities will be expected to use the cash, found from underspends in the Department for Education budget, to encourage existing providers to expand their operations and help others enter the market.

### Plans to claw back compensation from disabled children abandoned

[Daily Telegraph](#),

Plans to claw back almost £10million a year from compensation awarded to disabled children and their families have been abandoned.

The Ministry of Justice had proposed reducing by a quarter the "general damages" paid out for pain and suffering in publicly-funded clinical negligence cases. Because of new restrictions on the civil cases where legal aid can be claimed, those most affected would have been brain-damaged children and their carers. It was hoped that the plan would help recoup some of the £2billion spent on legal aid in England and Wales each year,

most of which is spent on lawyers for defendants facing criminal charges.

### Illusion of improving maths skills

[Daily Telegraph](#),

Experts from King's College London have found that the proportion of 14 year-olds with an exceptionally good understanding of maths has decreased over three decades, while the number at the lowest level of attainment has grown in the same period.

MORE teenagers are struggling to achieve even a basic grasp of maths than 30 years ago despite exam results rising sharply since the 1970s. In the mid-1980s just 22 per cent of pupils gained a C or above in their maths O-level at the age of 16, but by this year's GCSE exams the figure had risen to 58 per cent.

### Regional pay is unpopular

[Daily Telegraph](#)

Only a quarter of Britons support government plans for regional pay, a Trades Union Council survey disclosed. About two thirds of the 1,000 people surveyed said the plan should be dropped.

### ATOS assess forced to judge disabled fit for work

[The Independent](#)

A former nurse who was employed by Atos has claimed she was forced to manipulate tests so that disabled people were deemed fit for work.

Joyce Drummond alleged she was warned by the French-owned firm she was being "too nice" to claimants. She said candidates were considered more able to work if they arrived for their interview with brushed hair, had a toddler with them, or wore make-up.

Ms Drummond, a former staff nurse at Glasgow's Southern General Hospital, said bosses ignored her 20 years of medical experience. She told the Daily Record: "People trusted me and they confided in me. I felt I was having to stab them in the back."

A recent investigation by The Independent revealed that more than 40 doctors and nurses working for Atos have been reported to medical regulators for professional misconduct.

### Up to 4,000 workers face possible unemployment after JJB Sports calls in the administrators

[The Independent](#)

JJB Sports, once one of Britain's biggest sports retailers, today announced it is calling in the administrators, leaving up to 4,000 workers facing possible unemployment.

The retailer's shares, which had in the past been worth £10 a piece, were today suspended and the company's remaining investors will see their holdings wiped out.

Shares in the company have slumped 93% this year alone after shareholders refused to put up any further cash to save the company.

The retailer is set to appoint KPMG as administrators in the next few days, prompting further questions over the running of the company in recent years.

In just five years the business has gone from being one of the biggest sellers of sportswear on the high street to accruing mounting losses and high debt levels.

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### **A4e prison contracts delayed by anti-fraud checks**

Guardian

The start of multimillion-pound contracts for the controversial welfare-to-work provider A4E to take over education services in 25 prisons has been delayed because of the need to carry out anti-fraud checks.

The extra audit was ordered earlier this year by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), which is responsible for prison education in England and Wales, after police began a fraud investigation into A4E and the Department for Work and Pensions terminated the firm's contract for mandatory work activity for the unemployed in the south-east.

The prison education contracts for jails in England and Wales that went to further education colleges began on 1 August. But the start of the A4E contracts for 25 prisons in London and the east of England were delayed until 1 November while the special audit of its past work in prison education was carried out.

The delay has caused uncertainty among affected prison education staff who were told they were to transfer to the new provider from their existing contracts with Kensington and Chelsea college and Manchester college, but not the final details of what was going to happen.

An A4E spokesman emphasised the audit had given the company a clean bill of health and resulted in a 0% error rate.