



latest news

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Charity advice teams could spread gospel of formal working

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Specialist advice teams could be set up throughout the English regions to help people make the transition from informal to formal work.

'Informal economy transition and support teams' would offer advice and support specifically to those working illegally while claiming unemployment benefits. Their aim would be to encourage people to make what many see as the risky and unrewarding step into the world of formal work.

The idea is among a number of pilots being considered by east London charity Community Link which is spearheading a campaign to persuade the government to change its attitude towards people working informally.

Other potential initiatives include a school curriculum module on the world of work, including the benefits of formal working and the tax and benefit system, and a project equivalent to the pathways to work scheme, which helps people off incapacity benefit.

In a report published this week by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Community Links says ministers must support rather than demonise people who work on the side in order to make ends meet.

Based on interviews with 100 informal workers in the London borough of Newham, it found the existence of the informal economy is, in part, symptomatic of the failure of the current system to provide the kind of help people need.

For those with health and childcare responsibilities, for example, the flexibility of informal work may be attractive. Others fear declaring their work will leave them without adequate support when their benefits are being sorted out, or they may have skills that are unrecognised in the UK.

The report concludes that while the threat of debt or going without essential items is worse than the threat of being caught, punitive measures are unlikely to succeed.

Author Aaron Barbour, research and policy development manager at Community Links, said, 'The government needs to understand and include the informal economy in all its strategies if it to reach its employment, anti-poverty and regeneration targets.'

People in low paid informal work: Need not greed, www.jrf.org.uk