2 The Restructuring of Business

In this unit you will...
• meet words and expressions about losing your job.
• read an article about redundancy rules.
• learn to write and practise writing organised paragraphs.

A Have you (or somebody you know well) changed jobs? Why did you/he/she do it? If you did, was it easy to do?

B What does to be made redundant mean? Who of the following are more likely to be made redundant? Why?
• a policeman
• a teacher
• a factory worker

C Have you ever been made redundant, or do you know anyone who has been? How do people feel when they have been made redundant?

D What do the words and phrases in the vocabulary box mean?

collective redundancy, a civil servant, a fixed term contract, to dismiss a worker, a plant, to consult, to notify, a threshold, an obligation, an unfair dismissal claim, collective bargaining, a shop steward, a representative, an establishment, a statute, to mitigate,

E For all the verbs in the vocabulary box, write the derived nouns, e.g. to consult / consultation.

F Find the word or expression in the box above which fits these definitions:
• a factory
• to reduce the negative effect of something
• a person who speaks for somebody else
• when a group of workers negotiate together
• to tell somebody else some new information

G Look at the article written by Professor Otto Slovo. Where might you find this article? How do you know?

H There are twelve paragraphs in the article. Half the class should write headings for or briefly describe the purposes of paragraphs 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11; the other half should do the same for the remaining paragraphs. Discuss the headings in class.

I You have a friend, Sara, who is about to be made redundant. Write her a letter, informing her of her rights. Use the information in the article to help you. (100 – 150 words)

Formal notification – real-life phrases
I hereby give notice that…
I am writing on behalf of…
I regret to inform you that…

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What are your rights if you are made redundant?

Professor Otto Slovo provides some guidelines

(1) Generally speaking, people can be made redundant in two situations. One is when some of the workers are no longer needed; the other is when a business is closing down, so all the workers have to go. In both cases the law is pretty much the same. The only difference in law is whether or not there is a collective redundancy.

(2) Redundancy law covers most people except the military, the police and some civil servants. The only class of workers who have no rights under redundancy law are people on fixed-term contracts of less than three months.

(3) A collective redundancy situation arises where an employer proposes to make twenty or more workers redundant within a ninety-day period. This means dismissal for a reason unrelated to the individual workers concerned. This might occur, for example, when a business or plant closes down, or when an employer no longer needs as many workers to carry out a particular task.

(4) There are a number of requirements which fall on employers in all cases. An employer is required to inform and consult trade unions or other representatives of workers who are being collectively made redundant. The employer is also required to notify the Ministry for Industry of the proposed dismissals.

(5) Employers are under no specific legal obligation to inform and consult workers’ representatives in cases falling below the twenty-redundancy threshold. They may, however, be at risk from successful unfair dismissal claims if they fail to inform and consult individual workers who are to be dismissed.

(6) When workers who may be affected by the proposed redundancy action are represented by a trade union recognised for collective bargaining purposes, the employer must inform and consult an authorised official of that union. This may be a shop steward or a district union official or a national or regional official. The employer is not required to inform and consult any other worker representatives in such circumstances, but may do so voluntarily if desired. A trade union may be recognised for one group of workers, but not for another.

(7) Where there are workers who may be affected by the proposed redundancies, the employer must inform and consult other appropriate representatives of those workers. These may be either existing representatives, or new ones specially elected for the purpose. It is the employer’s responsibility to ensure that consultation is offered to appropriate representatives.

(8) In non-union cases, where affected workers fail to elect representatives – having had a genuine opportunity to do so – the employer concerned may fulfil their obligations by providing relevant information to those workers directly.

(9) The employer must begin the process of consultation in good time (and in any event at least thirty days before the first of the dismissals takes effect) in a case where between twenty and ninety-nine redundancy dismissals are proposed at one establishment within a ninety-day period. A ninety-day period must be allowed for before the first of the dismissals takes effect in a case where one hundred or more redundancy dismissals are proposed at one establishment within a ninety day period.

(10) Before the consultation, the employer must provide the following information in writing:

- the reasons for the proposals;
- the numbers and descriptions of workers it is proposed to dismiss as redundant;
- the total number of workers of any such description employed by the employer at the establishment in question;
- the proposed method of selecting the workers who may be dismissed;
- the proposed method of carrying out the dismissals, taking account of any agreed procedure, including the period over which the dismissals are to take effect;
- the proposed method of calculating any redundancy payments –, other than those required by statute – that the employer proposes to make.

(11) The consultation is to include ways of avoiding the redundancy situation or dismissals, or of reducing the number of dismissals involved and mitigating the effects of the dismissals. The legislation does not require agreement to be reached, but the employer must consult in good faith with a view to reaching agreement.

(12) I hope this brief set of guidelines will make the situation clearer for workers.
Working with gist – paragraph building

A Look at the paragraph below. Give the paragraph a title. Can you find the topic easily? Where is it in the text? What is the structure of the paragraph?

Redundancy can be the result of several causes. First, a whole factory may be unprofitable and the bosses decide to close it, so everybody loses his or her job. A second cause of redundancy is when a business ‘downsizes’ and decides it needs fewer workers. Thirdly, new investment in machinery can lead to a reduction in the workforce.

Exam tip: The topic of a paragraph can often be in the first sentence. Sometimes the paragraph title is only a re-wording and/or summary of that first sentence.

B Look at the paragraph below and give it a title. Can you find the topic easily? What is the structure of the paragraph?

One hundred years ago there were no laws protecting workers in the event of redundancy. Most manual workers had only a daily contract and could be dismissed with only a few hours notice. Redundancy rights didn’t come easily; trade unions had to struggle hard for the law to be changed. Today, under the pressure of globalisation, workers rights are again being threatened.

Exam tip: some paragraphs are organised chronologically. The gist is a summary of the history.

C. Look at the information below. Work out the topic of the paragraph and then write and organise it into a coherent paragraph.

- More than 20 workers = collective redundancy (in 90 days)
- Inform the trade union (if there is one) if collective redundancy situation.
- If only one person made redundant, then possibility of unfair dismissal.
- If no trade union, then inform workers individually.
- Redundancy applies to everybody with more than 3-month contract.

Exam Tip: in the exam, you won’t find the sentences of a paragraph ‘thrown down’ in a disorganised manner, so let the structure of the paragraph help you.

All the highlighted words in the paragraph below make sense by joining the sentences and sentence parts to make meaning. Explain to what each highlighted word is connected. What is the connection doing?

DISCOURSE – connectors / reference

Danny Noble only spent one day, Monday 3rd February, working in the shoe factory. He went in at nine that morning, one hour late, and was given a job putting the shoes into boxes. That afternoon the closure of the factory was announced. Consequently, he was told that that he had no job from the following day. In addition, as he had only worked one day, he was not entitled to any redundancy benefits.
Exam Task: Ice Cream Factory Goes to the Wall

A Why do factories close down? What are the main reasons?
- production is too expensive
- we buy things from China these days
- wages are too high
- factories pollute the environment

B What are the social effects of factory closures?

C What do the following mean?
proletariat, monopoly, to plummet, to exploit, diversification, streamlining, a depressed area, to fall on deaf ears

D Read the article. Why did Kenning’s ice cream factory close.

E Find a title in the box for the paragraphs below.

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Saul Denman reports on the closure of a historic icon of English ice cream.

0 The Industrial Revolution created a proletariat, and the proletariat liked to eat ice cream. Capitalising on that trend, and to service the urbanised and industrial Midlands, Isaac Coupland opened an ice-cream factory in Meckham in the 19th century, which was sold on to the Kenning family at the turn of the century. (Title I)

1 From the 1930s onwards Kennings operated a fleet of yellow ice-cream vans which played a catchy ragtime tune to attract customers. In the 1950s Jack Kenning himself appeared on cinema advertisements eating an ice cream the size of a football. In the area the Kenning family had a virtual monopoly, and cleverly exploited it.

2 The 1950s were the heyday for Kennings, but sales have declined or plummeted on a yearly basis since then (depending on the year). In a 1985 interview Jack Kenning said, ‘It’s all that foreign ice cream. The government ought to ban it to help people like me. We’ve never thought of selling our ice cream in Italy, so why should they sell theirs here?’

3 Hector Jenner, a leading management consultant who worked with the company in the 1980s, thinks otherwise. ‘As I always told them, if you have a product that isn’t selling, you’ve got some important questions to answer. In their case, diversification and streamlining was the answer. You can’t go on only making just two flavours of poor quality ice cream. Yet that’s exactly what they did.’

4 In the mid-nineties Consumer Review produced a damning report. Of all the ice creams on the market, Kennings came bottom, and a majority of respondents actually said that the ice cream had a horrible chemical taste. All of this came on top of a Health and Safety Inspectors’ report which stated that the standard of hygiene in the factory fell below legal requirements.

5 So next month the factory will close, and Kennings ice-cream will be licked no more. John Pizzy, one of forty employees, will be joining an ever-growing dole queue in the area. Employment prospects are grim. ‘I’ve spent twenty-two years packing ice cream in that darn factory. What is there for me? It’s OK for Kenning, who’ll retire on a big pension. But what about us, the workers?’

6 The area around Meckham has been officially described in a government report as ‘depressed’. The industrial base in the area has taken several blows recently, with a string of factory closures adversely affecting consumer purchasing power and house prices.

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Unit 2: The Restructuring of Business

(p. 1) E to dismiss / a dismissal, to consult / a consultation, to notify / a notification, to mitigate / a mitigation

(p. 1) F a factory / a plant; to reduce the negative effects of something/ to mitigate; someone who speaks for somebody else / a representative; when a group of workers negotiate together / collective bargaining; to tell somebody else new information / to notify

(p. 1) G It is from a trade union magazine or a workers’ advice centre. We know this because the article is addressed to employees.

(p. 1) H 1. the situations in which redundancy arises, 2. who is covered by redundancy law, 3. collective redundancy, 4. employer requirements in cases of collective redundancy, 5. as ‘4’ but for making fewer than twenty workers redundant, 6. consultation with workers’ representatives, 7. wider consultation, 8. what happens when there are no workers’ representatives, 9. when consultation must start, 10. information to provide before consultation, 11. the aim of the consultation, 12. purpose of the text.

(p. 3) A Suggested title: The causes of redundancy. The topic sentence is the first. The paragraph then goes on to give instances of the topic.

(p. 3) B Suggested title: The history of workers’ redundancy rights. The paragraph is organised chronologically.

(p. 3) C Suggested title: Employers’ duties in the event of redundancy

(p. 3) DISCOURSE: ‘in’ refers to ‘into the shoe factory’ in the previous sentence; ‘the’ in ‘the shoes’ refers to the shoes the factory produces implied in the previous sentence; ‘that’ in ‘That afternoon’ refers to the afternoon of Monday 3rd February in the first sentence; ‘the’ in ‘the factory’ refers to the shoe factory; ‘Consequently’ means that the whole previous sentence is the reason for the sentence; ‘In addition’ establishes that the current sentence is additional information to the previous sentence(s).

(p. 4) B unemployment, poverty, low spending power, the knock-on effect on other companies (e.g. suppliers go out of business, workers can’t buy products for themselves), social breakdown

(p. 4) D They produced a single low quality product and faced competition from elsewhere.

(p. 4) E 1G, 2E, 3C, 4A, 5H, 6B