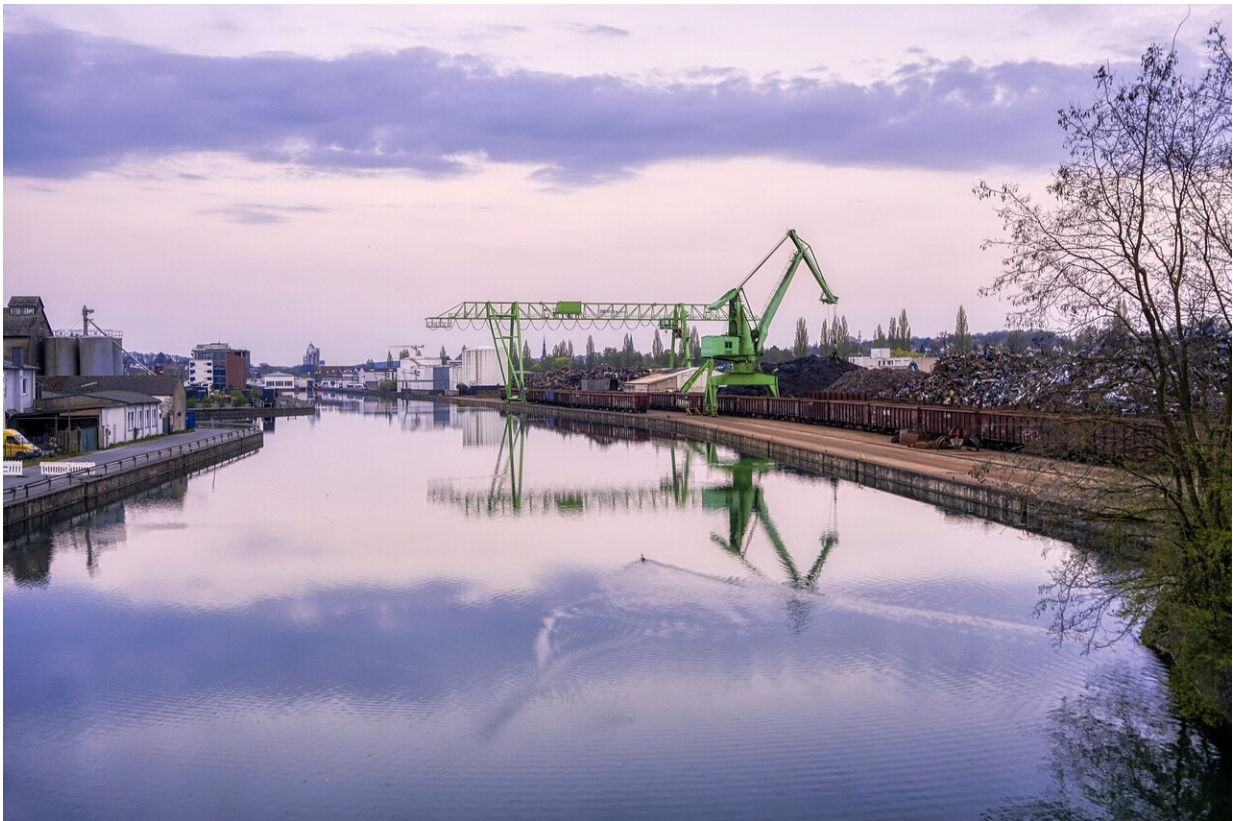


Report calls for government to 'level up' Stoke-on-Trent economy

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Stoke-on-Trent faces an increased threat of poverty and destitution due to the COVID-19 crisis, a new report reveals.

The research has been carried out by Staffordshire University Business School for the Stoke-on-Trent Hardship Commission and highlights the considerable work to be still done by central government to 'level-up' the Stoke-on-Trent economy.

Following the raft of measures introduced by the Chancellor in last week's mini budget, lead author Professor David Etherington believes that much more is needed to 'kickstart' opportunities for the residents of the city.

He said: "Government Rescue packages are insufficient to guarantee a safety net for those who will have to rely on benefits and other forms of social protection. As well as raising the level of benefits, canceling out benefit delays and stopping the implementation of benefit sanctions is also important."

Key findings from the report reveal that:

- Stoke's economy and labor market is vulnerable to the coronavirus crisis—it is estimated that around 27,000 jobs could be lost.
- There has been a substantial increase in claims for Universal Credit—over 13,000 in May with a monthly increase of 24.1%.
- The basic rate of Universal Credit is worth around a sixth of average weekly pay (17 per cent). On top of years of benefit cuts and delays this will force thousands into destitution.
- Foodbanks are now a key source of welfare support and there has been a dramatic increase in use by over 23% in Stoke-on-Trent

Steve Wyn Williams, Chair of the Hardship Commission commented: "This report is a vital addition and update to the Hardship Commission Report we produced last year (2019) and, in particular, underlines the threats of the current COVID crisis on poverty and destitution in the

city. We welcome the proposals in the report for more proactive and comprehensive policies to tackle unemployment."

Professor Etherington suggests that a more pro-active and inclusive approach to employment policy is urgently needed. This should include social dialog and enhanced role of partnerships which involve [trade unions](#) and community organizations; job and training guarantees for all long term [unemployed people](#) and a job rotation and skills investment model for workers to promote growth and productivity.

More information: Full report: eprints.staffs.ac.uk/6403/

Provided by Staffordshire University

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