

Name: _____

Class: _____

EXAM SKILLS

13

Read the passage and answer questions 1–7.

Questions 1–7

Look at the following statements and the list of studies below. Match each statement with the correct study, A–C.

- 1 Unlike in previous years, a willingness to experiment with a wide range of possible roles is visible in all groups of job-seekers.
- 2 Younger people are being denied the chance to develop the social skills necessary for the modern office environment.
- 3 Many modern positions can be more easily terminated than ever before.
- 4 Claims of economic expansion are demonstrably incorrect.
- 5 An unforeseen problem has led to an increase in the number of people available to work.
- 6 Much of today's workforce do not feel constrained by a lack of familiarity with a new position.
- 7 Refusal to conform to traditional behaviour models at work is a positive step.

List of studies

- A *Employment as a Myth*
- B *Unfair Returns*
- C *How the Market Adjusts to Opportunity*

Question 8

What is the best title for this passage?

- A The Conflict between Young and Old in the Workplace
- B Modern Employment: the Need for Adaptability
- C The Changing Face of Working Life
- D What Today's Workforce Really Wants

The accepted concept of a career path followed a similar pattern for decades. After completing their education, people would enter the adult world of work, settling down to a job in which they would likely remain from that point onward. Not only would this occupation provide their income for their entire working life, it would also allow them a healthy pension when they retired and moved into old age. Over the past twenty years, however, the relationship between a wage earner and their chosen profession has changed enormously. Today, the idea of a 'job-for-life' has all but disappeared, to be replaced by an unforgiving world of unstable employment. Some observers even argue that current society appears to pit old against young in a constant battle to find work of some description, all against a backdrop of increasing debt and economic difficulties.

At the same time, the government regularly releases figures that suggest that the economy is prospering, evidencing this claim with the fact that the unemployment rate continues to fall annually. Given this claim, logic would seem to dictate that, since there are fewer people out of work, an increasing number of people are enjoying a regular income. To dispute this, Frank Thomas's 2016 study on the nature of work, *Employment as a Myth*, revealed an interesting and contradictory interpretation. There are indeed more jobs available. However, a huge number of these are casual, temporary or short-term positions, all of which are low-paid and create little in the way of tax income for the government. This has a number of debilitating long-term effects, not least because this assurance of a growing economy is based more in myth than fact. Thomas explains, 'Without tax income, the economy cannot grow; if the economy stays weak, new jobs will not be created.'

He also illustrates how, around the world, increases in life expectancy have created a problem for a huge number of retired workers, who are starting to find that the sum of money they have saved for their retirement does not stretch far enough to provide the financial security that they had expected. As a result, there has been a widespread return of these workers to the job market, very often in search of the type of casual employment that was once the preserve of people in their late teens and early 20s. Lois Lawrence expands on this view in *Unfair Returns*: 'Older people are taking opportunities away from their grandchildren. Post-education, those new to the world of work are not able to earn any sort of living wage, nor are they getting the opportunity to develop the 'soft skills', e.g. social intelligence, that will enable them to flourish in the job market.'

For Lawrence, the days of the salaried worker – comfortable, assured, financially secure – are coming to an end, and are being replaced by a new model: the exploited worker. Instead, these are

the days of the 'zero-hours' contract, where an employee is told by an employer to be *available* for work, but is not necessarily given any, and so earns nothing for their time simply spent waiting. She argues that this is causing even more inequality in the employment market, as business leaders realise that they have no obligation to provide their staff with a full- or part-time contract, and can therefore avoid additional expenditure. The 'zero-hours' worker receives no holiday or sick pay, and is considered to be self-employed, so has to pay their own taxes. They also have no hope of stability, and can be instantly dismissed without any hope of recourse. Employment laws, written decades ago at a time when the vast majority of the country's workforce benefitted from permanent positions, do not protect the new breed of worker from being unfairly dismissed at a moment's notice by their manager.

Less pessimistic interpretations of today's employment market do exist elsewhere. A 2015 study by William Haroldson, *How the Market Adjusts to Opportunity*, advocated a definition of a new type of multi-skilled worker: the model employee who not only refuses to age, but also does not want to work in the same office every day, or even to be an employee in the first place. In such a progressive, forward-looking environment, young and old are supposed to collaborate extensively, sharing the benefits of each other's talents and prior knowledge. Furthermore, although younger people are traditionally thought to be more willing to try any number of routes into work before deciding on an industry in which they want to develop, such an approach to employment no longer excludes workers of a more advanced age. Thomas agrees: 'Most of today's self-starters believe that the job market offers a vast array of potential opportunities from which they can learn and gain experience. Whether they have a wide range of existing experience, or none at all, is irrelevant to them.'

Moving from job to job is no longer seen in a negative way, he goes on to argue. In the past, anyone with a series of short-term positions on their CV was seen as unreliable or disloyal. Most of today's self-starters, however, approach the job market as a vast source of possibilities, while employers themselves are more likely to be entrepreneurs who are willing to accept job mobility without question, and less likely to punish potential staff for doing so. One positive result of this development is that 'soft skills' such as social intelligence can therefore be learnt in a new way, and through a greater number of person-to-person encounters than used to be available. This has been made possible through the fact that so much of human contact today now takes place in one enormous meeting room – the internet. Even if it means that the people in contact are not actually present together in the same room, the encounter still happens.

