

Robots to replace 1 in 3 UK jobs over next 20 years, warns IPPR

A leading thinktank has urged the government to spend billions of pounds helping poorly skilled workers in the less prosperous parts of the UK cope with the threat of the looming robot revolution.



- 3 The left-leaning Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) said in a new report that those most at risk from automation were concentrated in low-skill sectors of the economy and were least able to adapt to change.

0 More than 10m jobs in the UK – a third of the total – are thought to be at risk from automation within the next two decades and the IPPR said the scale of the challenge required urgent action.

There was also evidence to suggest that the impact of automation would be geographically concentrated and so widen the north-south divide.

5 The IPPR research said that in four sectors alone – retail, hospitality, transport and manufacturing – 5m jobs were at risk, adding that a particular concern to ministers should be industries ripe for automation with a high proportion of workers least able to adapt.

“In wholesale and retail for example, there are over two and a half million jobs with a high potential to be automated, and three in four workers do not have a degree-level qualification and may lack adaptability,” the report said.

10 The IPPR called on the government to introduce a retraining allowance of up to £2,000 for those replaced by machines, and for the newly created apprenticeship levy to be turned into a £5bn-a-year skills levy offering special help to the regions furthest away from London.

“Britain can’t afford to ignore the huge changes that will transform our labour market in the coming years,” said Joe Dromey, senior research fellow at the IPPR.

15 “If we don’t retrain Britain’s workforce with the skills they need for the future we are likely to end up with a society where a small number prosper while many are left behind.

“This doesn’t mean everyone going to university, far from it, but it does mean a much greater focus on supporting adults to retrain and up-skill, rather than focusing only on young people.”

20 The thinktank noted that adults who had left full-time education without GCSE-level qualifications were almost twice as likely as graduates to be unemployed a year after being made redundant – making them especially in need of help to retrain.

The IPPR said its analysis showed that jobs in London and the south-east were more resilient to automation than those in the rest of the country. “Whereas 39% of jobs have a high potential for automation in London, 47% are at high risk in Yorkshire and the Humber and the West Midlands, and 48% are at high risk in the north-east and Northern Ireland.”

25 Clare McNeil, associate director of work and families, said two-thirds of the workforce of 2030 – when the impact of automation is expected to be fully felt – had already left full-time education, and this made it vital for the government to ensure the workforce could keep pace with technological change.