

# Nobel winner Sir Christopher Pissarides's advice: retrain for rise of robots

Tommy Stubbington

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Jobs warning: economist Sir Christopher Pissarides  
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Fears that the rise of the robots will leave millions of people unemployed are overblown – but the government must plough millions of pounds into retraining schemes to help workers cope with disruptions from new technology, according to Nobel prize-winning economist Sir Christopher Pissarides.

growing threat from artificial intelligence (AI). The government should subsidise training for these individuals in industries such as social care or hospitality.

“We should not look at AI and robotics as competitors; they should help us become more productive,” Pissarides said. “But there are challenges to be faced that will require a change in government policy.” Along with training schemes, governments may also need to increase minimum wages to tempt workers into growing sectors, he added.

The professor, a labour market expert, is part of a group planning to set up a new institute for the future of work, to help shape government policy. Pissarides will co-chair the organisation, which will be launched this week, along with Naomi Climer, an engineer who was the first female president of the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

“One of the main reasons for wanting to set this up is to do a proper study on the impact of automation on the British economy,” Pissarides said. “A lot of the evidence we have comes from the US or from Germany.”

The rise of driverless cars and increasingly sophisticated AI has fuelled concerns about mass unemployment. A growing coalition embracing left-wing politicians and Silicon Valley billionaires argues that governments around the world will have to pay citizens a guaranteed income.

Pissarides, however, maintains that the economy has faced much larger disruptions in the past without huge swathes of the workforce being left without jobs. He said: “What’s different this time is the type of jobs being affected. Many of the jobs under threat today are done by people with degrees sitting in

There will be sectors of the economy where you need the social and emotional skills that can't be replicated by machines.”

Pissarides argues that people on average will work less and have more free time in the future, in turn helping to fuel growing demand for jobs in the leisure sector.

Healthcare, too, will account for a growing proportion of the workforce.

In Norway and Sweden, roughly 20% of workers are in the health and care sector. In Britain, the figure is 12%, but Pissarides thinks our economy is set to become increasingly Scandinavian.



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