*Read this newspaper article and find the answers to the following questions in the text:*

1. What were the TWO reasons why Virgin Atlantic was considering redundancies?

2. What were the TWO things Richard Branson invited his staff to do?

3. How many people volunteered to take unpaid leave?

4. How did the long break affect the staff’s attitude to their work?

5. Why is the scheme attractive to new recruits?

6. Is the scheme going to become permanent?

**Branson’s new route to more jobs**

***by Celia Weston***

For many young people lucky enough to get a job after leaving school or college, the biggest shock of the transition to work is how few holidays they get.

Having spent their academic years working an eight or nine-month year, it can be depressing to realize that for the rest of their working lives they will be able to take only four weeks off a year.

Many would jump at the chance to take three months off - and that’s exactly what happened at Virgin Atlantic, the airline run by Richard Branson. He believes the new initiative could help *to reduce unemployment*.

Faced last autumn with the *recession* and with its failure to acquire more flight slots out of Heathrow airport, the company was having to consider *redundancies*. Mr. Branson wrote to staff saying that *cutting back* on jobs was “something I have never wanted to do”.

Instead he invited employees to take up to six months *unpaid leave* and to participate in a job-sharing scheme. The immediate crisis passed but the idea of a shorter working year took off. When the company later asked for 300 volunteers to take three months unpaid leave, 450 put their names forward.

Mr. Branson said: “To be fair and share it around, in some cases we said that people could only take six weeks.” Most of the volunteers were cabin crew but other staff, including secretaries and pilots, *took advantage* *of* the offer as well. “And when they came back from their break ... they definitely seemed to enjoy work more,” he said.

The company tends to recruit and train its own staff *from scratch*. As Mr. Branson said: “If you’ve been at college or *on the dole*, working for only nine months still makes you a lot better off financially than you were before.” He believes there is a broader social benefit to be achieved. “If you are only taking on people for nine months, that will enable others who would otherwise have no work or be living on the dole to have a chance too.” And he goes further. “I think this should be the basis of a pattern across the whole European Community for the first few years of working life.” Nor was a shorter working year only applicable to young people. “If older women and men with children can afford it because one partner’s working 12 months and the other nine, I think a lot of people would like to earn slightly less and be able to spend more time with their children,” Mr. Branson said.

This year the scheme is *on offer* again, although not over the busy summer period. “All the people who took time off last year would like to do so again,” Mr. Branson said. But its realization depended on whether the company could recruit enough people to allow 400-500 existing staff to take three months off.

The company was considering whether the arrangement should become a permanent feature, Mr. Branson said. “For new people being taken on in most departments, we’re thinking about making nine-month working a standard contract.

*Exercise 5. Work in groups. Discuss these questions:*

1. What are your views on Richard Branson’s scheme? Would you like to participate in such a scheme?

2. Would such a scheme succeed in firms here? Why not?

3. Why do you think so many of Virgin’s cabin crew took advantage of the scheme?

4. Could this kind of scheme only succeed with a youthful staff who have few family responsibilities?

5. How could you persuade people who have considerable working experience and are used to earning a certain wage that they should take a pay cut?